9-26-2025

Women Clergy Members' Perceptions of Mentorship Strategies for Leader Development

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

According to recent studies, women were underrepresented in senior leadership in the global Christian church, and leadership pathways for the development of women were often lacking. The local problem within the International Christian Church (ICC) was a lack of understanding of holistic mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy members, which could help fill the current leadership gap. Guided by Dahlvig and Longman's model of women's leadership development, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of women clergy regarding holistic mentoring strategies that might increase the number of women in leadership within the ICC. A basic qualitative study design was used to purposefully recruit and interview 19 women clergy from the most eastern district of the ICC. Thematic analysis employing open, axial, and selective coding resulted in seven emergent themes: (a) the importance of calling as a motivator; (b) the presence of inhibitors to leader development; (c) varied mentoring opportunities; (d) the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents; (e) self-reported growth of the protégé; (f) the importance of holistic mentoring; and, (g) the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. The results indicated that the participants viewed holistic mentoring and a leadership development pathway as essential for future generations of women clergy. A position paper and policy recommendation for the continuing education of women clergy were created to provide the ICC with a deeper understanding of how women engage in leadership and to establish a gender-specific pathway. The potential for positive social change was the engagement, development, and deployment of more women and a significant move toward gender parity in senior leadership within the ICC.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to the incredible women of God who participated in this study and to the emerging women leaders who will answer the call to serve God as ministers of the Gospel. You are strong, passionate women who have and will continue to overcome barriers and challenges in life and ministry. Know that I am cheering you on and praying that you fulfill your calling as God designed it.

Most importantly, I dedicate this work to the Lord Most High, who saved me, called me to leadership, and shaped my destiny. Without Him, there is no life, no ministry, no hope, no future.

Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the support and encouragement I received from so many individuals throughout this endeavor. Moreover, now that I am officially finished, I look forward to being more fully present in your lives once again.

I am forever grateful to my husband, Jack, and my sons, Matthew and Patrick, who have supported and encouraged me beyond measure. You have helped me become and do all that God has for me. I love and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I am forever grateful to my Chair, Dr. Caroline Crawford, who endured this long process with me. You have inspired and encouraged me to become a more thoughtful, skilled writer, researcher, and educator. To my committee, Dr. Sydney Parent and Dr. Mary Howe, thank you for dedicating your time and providing your expertise to my project study. A special thanks to Dr. Karen Longman, who initiated the work of studying mentoring among women in Christian higher education. Thank you for your encouraging support and for providing me with insights from other researchers who used your model.

To my friends and former colleagues, thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement throughout this lengthy process. Thanks to Rev. Tammy Dunahoo, Rev. Dr. Thomas Johnston, Rev. Chanda Crutcher, Rev. Peter Bonanno, Rev. Lisa Scott, and Rev. Durant Kreider for your support and championing of women. Moreover, to the amazing women who participated in this study, thank you for your vulnerability, honesty, and thoughtfulness. I am encouraged that the next generation of emerging women ministers will be in good hands if you are mentoring them.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy members, which might help fill the current leadership gap. Each organization, including religious organizations such as the Christian Church and its numerous Protestant denominations, needs robust and effective leadership. Although leadership within the Christian Church by women was not new for many denominations, the minimal amount of leadership training and support for women from within different denominations reflected a problem that has been highlighted by many Christian entities (Bumgardner, 2015; Chaves & Eagle, 2015). The ICC, a Pentecostal denomination, claimed that women could minister at any level of leadership for which they were called and qualified; however, the ICC's senior clergy leadership positions were held primarily by men (Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017). The underrepresentation of women in ICC senior leadership highlights a gap in practice: a limited understanding on the part of the ICC regarding how current women clergy members advance in leadership, which could aid other women in advancing as well.

Background of the Study

At the 2002 ICC National Convention, a resolution was passed by the convention body to develop a position paper about the ICC's view of women in ministry and a report that would indicate the degree to which the denomination affirmed its position with

verifiable outcomes (Schell, 2007). By 2007, the ICC had published a biblical position on women in leadership, which was distributed to all pastors within the denomination and discussed at leadership gatherings (Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017). The authors of this position paper stated that the future of the denomination would require its leaders to take "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes, and the means to ensure ongoing accountability" (Schell, 2007, p. 72). Although the ICC was supportive of women in ministry leadership in its position paper, the ICC's beliefs about women in ministry, including its understanding of the processes and pathways that women had taken or could take toward leadership advancement, remained unclear.

Prior to 2012, information about women in leadership roles within the ICC was anecdotal, and the ICC had not gathered any data regarding gender and leadership (Dunahoo, 2011). In 2012, the ICC began collecting data and reporting on the gender and roles of licensed clergy members in the denomination's annual National Church Office Reports (NCOR), as proposed in 2002 (Dunahoo, 2012; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017). The NCO reports from 2012 to 2017 suggested that little had changed since 2005, as more than half of all clergy members were women; however, senior clergy leadership remained disproportionately male (see Table 1). In 2018, the ICC revised its reporting of licensed ministers, no longer including the number of senior clergy, regardless of gender; no rationale for the change was found in ICC documents (see Table 1). Although statistics regarding the gender of senior leadership were not reported from 2018 to 2019, the underrepresentation of women in senior roles continued to be a concern for ICC

organizational leadership, and the development and deployment of women in senior roles remained a goal for the organization's future (Remington, 2021).

Table 1

International Church's Licensed and Senior Clergy by Gender From 2012 to 2019

# Clergy	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019
Licensed clergy	6,779	6,615	6,594	6,581	6,611	6,637	6,762	6,673
Licensed men	4,285	4,188	4,135	4,142	4,143	4,154	4,075	4,137
Licensed women	2,494	2,427	2,459	2,439	2,468	2,483	2,687	2,536
Senior clergy	1,712	1,601	1,574	1,556	1,532	1,502	--	--
Senior men	1.599	1,504	1,479	1,454	1,427	1,394	--	--
Senior women	113	97	95	102	105	108	--	--

Note. All of the statistical data were drawn from ICC's *National Church Office Reports* (NCOR) from 2012 through 2019 (Dunahoo, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). * Data collection about senior clergy composition from 2018 through 2020 was not reported as in previous years due to ICC reorganization efforts.

Underrepresentation of Women Leaders in the Christian Church

The lack of significant representation of women clergy members in senior and denominational leadership roles was not unique to the ICC. According to the third wave of the *National Congregations Survey* (NCS), "American solo or senior pastoral leaders are more ethnically diverse and older, but no more female than they were in 1998" (Chaves & Eagle, 2015, p.2). The reasons for the lack of development among the ICC's women clergy members were speculative, anecdotal, and unclear.

Chaves and Eagle (2015) sited several factors that might impede women from senior roles within an organization, including a drop in seminary enrollment among women, the fact that women were less likely to pursue the senior role, and most

importantly that several major religious groups did not allow women to serve in senior roles even in denominations where women were allowed to be ordained. While researchers have suggested that, though women's roles in society seem to be improving, the roles of women in ministry have not advanced at the same rate, particularly among Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations, where women historically held leadership positions (Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Kgatle, 2019; Miller, 2016; Tunheim & Du Chene, 2016). Although the ICC and some denominations of the Christian Church purported a theology and doctrine that supported the advancement of women to all levels of leadership, the dissonance between doctrine and practice remained.

Rationale

In Acts 2:17-18 of *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (2011), the apostle Paul quoted the ancient Hebrew prophet Joel, who foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit in power upon all the people,

> "And in the last days it shall be," God declares, "that I will pour my Spirit out on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."

This "pouring out" of the Spirit would give rise to prophetic giftings to all the people of God, including prophecy, dreams, and visions. The ICC believed that this passage of scripture, among others, clearly removed the issue of gender from heaven's perspective,

preempting both culture and tradition, and provided biblical support for its position of equality for men and women in ministry and leadership (Schell, 2007). As such, the ICC supported the idea of women holding leadership positions at all levels within the denomination (Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017).

Although the ICC professed an egalitarian stance on clergy roles, men significantly outnumbered women, especially in senior clergy positions. According to the ICC's *2017 NCOR*, approximately one third of all licensed clergy were women; yet only 105 of the 1,532 senior clergy were women (Dunahoo, 2017). This continued underrepresentation of women in senior leadership had not gone unnoticed by the clergy members of the ICC and was often addressed in ICC leadership conferences or newsletters. Walker (2018), a male clergy member of the ICC, suggested that the survival of the denomination was dependent on the equipping and deployment of more women into senior leadership positions. One woman clergy member of the ICC exhorted all clergy members of the ICC to seriously consider empowering women for ministry for the health of the ICC and its local churches (Schulze, 2019). In January 2021, the newly elected male president acknowledged that the inequity in senior leadership remained and needed to be addressed for the health of the denomination (Remington, 2021). The ICC's executive leadership continued to express a desire to increase senior clergy leadership among women; however, the senior leadership remained disproportionately male, and the leadership gap was widening (Dunahoo, 2011, 2017).

Some researchers have noted that women from various denominations emphasized the importance of preparation for their new roles as clergy members, the lack of opportunities for leadership development, and the challenges of advancement without mentoring (Kgatle, 2019; Miller, 2016; Tunheim & Du Chene, 2016). To date, the ICC's executive organizational leadership has not outlined any specific formal developmental strategies beyond short-term coaching of clergy candidates at the onset of the licensing process (Dunahoo, 2015). The current leadership gap exposed the need for understanding how women may advance in leadership. Therefore, the local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member leaders, which might help fill the current leadership gap. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding the holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC.

Definitions of Terms

To ensure clarity on the subject of this project study, operational definitions are provided.

Assisting clergy: One who is licensed by the ICC and appointed by the senior clergy to serve a particular local church ministry. The assisting minister's position is a secondary one, and they must submit to the senior clergy leadership, giving them complete loyalty and cooperation. Synonyms include assistant pastor and assisting minister (The Foursquare Church, 2020).

Call/calling/called: A stable and irrevocable conviction that one is to serve God and the Church as a vocation, employing the gifts and talents that have been imparted to the recipient. (*The Holy* Bible-ESV, 2011; Whelchel, 2012).

Christian Church: All those denominations that profess a belief in Christ as the Messiah who was born of a virgin birth, died by crucifixion, was resurrected from death to life, and will return to reign over his eternal kingdom (Diaz-Pabón, 2019).

Denomination: A general term for those federally recognized sectors of the Church that are distinguished from one another by their governance, statements of faith, and operations (Rhodes, 2015).

Mentor: An experienced individual who imparts knowledge, wisdom, and skills to a mentee for personal and professional growth (Arnesson & Albinson, 2017; Dajani et al., 2021; Daloz, 2012; The American Psychological Association, 2012)

Pentecostal: A denomination or person who believes that the spiritual gifts of God are still present today and can be accessed by every person who has been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Gifts of the Spirit are found in 1 Corinthians 12 and include speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, supernatural wisdom, and words of knowledge (Duffield & Van Cleave, 1987).

Senior clergy: A clergy member who is licensed by the denomination and appointed by the district and executive council of the denomination to serve as the spiritual leader and the chief executive of the local church. They shall subscribe to and adhere to the Declaration of Faith, the Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws, the

Minister's Code of Ethics, and the procedures outlined in the denominational *Handbook of Operations* (The Foursquare Church, 2020a). Synonyms include senior pastor and lead pastor.

Significance of the Study

The ICC is a Pentecostal denomination that professes that all biblical spiritual gifts are present today and can be accessed by every believer; and that God empowers leaders, both men and women, for the equipping of the church (Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017). The doctrinal and biblical beliefs that women are called to lead at all levels distinguished the ICC from other Pentecostal and Evangelical denominations (Rockwell, 2017). Though Rockwell (2017) found congruency with the ICC beliefs and those of its senior clergy, Tremper (2017) observed that "the organization has often struggled to have its orthopraxy (conduct) line up with its orthodoxy (beliefs)" (p. 80). Despite the ICC's desire to advance more women to senior pastor roles to fill the current leadership gap, the number of women senior clergy has varied little since 2012. According to ICC's NCO reports from 2012 through 2017, though half of the licensed clergy members were women, the senior clergy leadership remained predominantly male (Dunahoo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

For oversight, the ICC divided the United States into six districts; five districts were designated by geographical location, and one district was designated based on ethnicity. This qualitative study was conducted in the most eastern district of the ICC in the United States and addressed the local problem by exploring the perceptions of

existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic formal and informal mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women within the religious organization. This study could be significant to district leaders seeking to design and implement pathways for leader development. This project was unique because little scholarship existed in the ICC regarding women in leadership, and fewer studies had explored the mentor-protégé mentorship strategies employed by women leaders in the denomination (Dunahoo, 2015).

Research Questions

Because the local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member which might help fill the current leadership gap, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding the holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC. The following research questions (RQs) informed the research design:

RQ1: How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceive to be productive toward leader development?

RQ2: How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceive to be unproductive toward leader development?

Review of the Literature

The literature review includes a discussion of the issues facing women in leadership development and career advancement, particularly among women in the clergy. I begin the review with a discussion of Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of women's leadership development, which was employed as the conceptual framework for this study. I continue with a discussion of the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership and the barriers women face when pursuing leadership advancement, both inside and outside the Christian church. I conclude this section with a review of both formal and informal mentoring as potential strategies for leader development. I obtained information by conducting an online search of primary sources using Walden University research databases, including ERIC, ProQuest, and Education Research. My search began with the keywords: mentoring, women leaders, clergy, and leader development.

Conceptual Framework

Due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, researchers base their research designs on theoretical or conceptual frameworks to provide structure to the overall study design (Creswell, 2012). This basic qualitative study was viewed through Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of women's leadership development (WLD). Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of WLD was developed through the authors' longitudinal grounded theory research on emerging women leaders within Christian higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). This model was selected as the framework for this

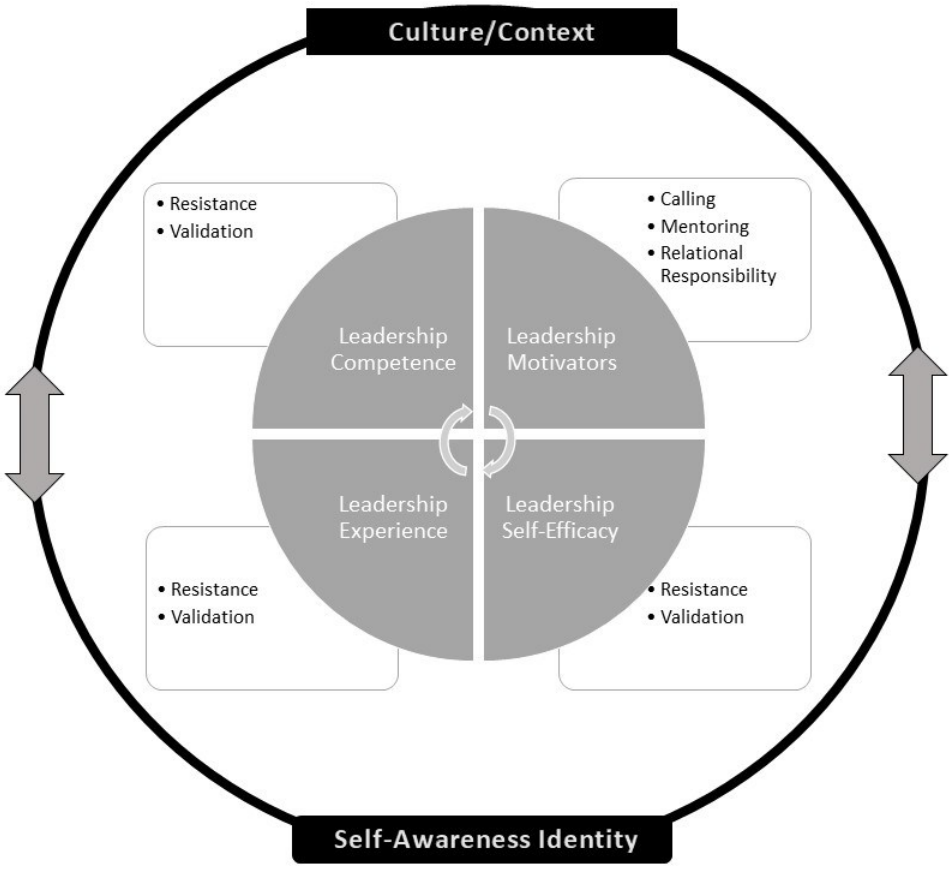
qualitative study because both contexts, Christian higher education and the ICC, shared similarities, particularly in terms of women's underrepresentation in senior leadership.

Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) Women's Leadership Development Model

Recognizing that women might engage leadership opportunities differently than their male counterparts, Dahlvig and Longman (2014) proposed the WLD model as a staged process of leadership development for women that considered the "factors [that] affect women's decisions about higher levels of positional leadership in Christian higher education" (p. 9). This model addressed how women engage a leadership pathway based on their calling, motivation, and desire for mentoring as a strategy for leadership development and advancement.

Figure 1

Contributors to Women's Leadership Development in Christian Higher Education



Note. Contributors to women's leadership development in Christian higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Adapted with permission from Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

Context Matters. As illustrated in Figure 1, this model demonstrates that a woman's leader development is shaped, influenced, and framed by the intertwined factors of organizational culture/context, as well as the leader's self-awareness (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). In the evangelical Christian worldview, the organizational

culture/context of leadership is often gendered and "organized by the principles of hierarchy and subordination" (Gallagher, 2004, p. 218). Longman et al., (2018) suggested that the assumptions of an evangelical worldview might hinder a woman's foray into leadership engagement and advancement Women whose leadership style or values diverged from the dominant culture might face challenges; however, the level of a leader's self-awareness and her "ability to act out of a genuine self are entwined with the surrounding environment" (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014, p. 14).

Staged Progress. Central to their model, Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested that women progress toward leader competency by engaging in various leadership tasks, circumstances, or stages, including leadership motivators, leadership self-efficacy, leadership experiences, and leadership competence (p. 14) (see Figure 1). *Leadership motivation* was the first challenge faced by women in leadership positions. Emerging leaders needed to identify what motivated them to seek leadership positions in the first place. The upper right quadrant of Figure 1 identified three key motivators for women: calling, relational responsibility, and mentoring. A leader's sense of calling was a factor that could be either productive or unproductive in terms of their leadership development. The second stage or task involved self-efficacy. Maddux (2002) purported that *self-efficacy* is an individual's perception of their ability to perform a task given their skills in each circumstance (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). If a woman completed this task/stage, she moved toward developing *leadership experience* where she could draw upon what she had learned about herself, leadership, and the organization to continue in her growth.

Finally, a woman may reach the stage of *leadership competence,* which the authors define as "consistently demonstrating effective leadership" (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014, p. 20). Although presented as a two-dimensional model, the authors suggested that the process of women's leadership development was often circuitous in nature due to the interactions between the leader's self-awareness and the cultural context (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Three Key Motivators. Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) early research on women's leader development identified three key motivators for women to engage in significant leadership roles: relational responsibility, awareness of calling/giftedness, and mentoring/external encouragement (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014) (see Figure 1). *Relational responsibility* was described as "dedication to personal connections with individuals above, alongside, or beneath—in support of the institutional mission" (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014, p. 12). In other words, women might enter leadership to care for others or right a wrong. Many leaders could point to a call to vocation or fulfilling a purpose as a strong motivator for initially engaging in leadership. *Calling* is defined as "a clear sense of purpose, of making a difference in the world and contributing to society in a worthwhile manner" (Longman et al., 2011, p. 258); and is often described in relation to a task, a career field, or an approach to life that benefits others (Longman et al., 2011; Longman & Bray, 2017). For those of faith, this sense of purpose is often linked to a sense of gifting, talent, and relational responsibility to God (Longman et al., 2011; Longman & Bray, 2017). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) also considered mentoring or

external encouragement to be a strong motivator for women. Mentors, whether men or women, played a positive role in the training and encouragement of new leaders. Although the body of research indicated that women desired and benefited from the encouragement of mentors, not all the encouragement came from within an organization, but often came from spouses, family members, and friends (Chang et al., 2014; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Longman et al., 2019).

Validation or Resistance. In each stage of the WLD, the leader's willingness to engage in the following developmental task can depend on the amount of validation or resistance they receive from others, which impacts the emerging leader's progression toward leadership competence (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Validation from superiors and peers could inspire women to pursue more challenging tasks and roles; conversely, excessive resistance could cause a woman to retreat or withdraw altogether from leadership, only to reengage if compelled to do so (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) studied women leaders in Christian higher education to better understand how women engaged in leadership opportunities differently than their male counterparts. This model seemed well-suited to support the research questions posed in this basic qualitative study because the framework accounts for the importance of three motivational factors that impact a woman's engagement and advancement toward leadership development: a sense of calling, relational responsibility, and mentoring, as well as the stages that each leader moves through toward leader competence (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The stages of this model, along with the three motivational factors,

informed the development of the interview protocol used to collect data on mentoring strategies that might be productive or unproductive for leader development.

Review of the Broader Problem

A literature review of the broader problem was conducted using key terms such as women in leadership, women in Christian leadership, mentoring, mentoring women, and barriers to leadership development. I employed search engines available to me through Walden. I also used reference lists found in articles I had already procured. I also gathered information about churches and women in ministry from some governmental research sites, as well as denominational ICC statistical reports. The majority of my literature review information was gathered from peer-reviewed articles, either seminal or published within the last five years. The topics covered in detail included the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership both inside and outside the church, the barriers to advancement experienced by women, and mentoring as a strategy for women's leadership development.

Underrepresentation of Women in Senior Leadership

Women represented nearly half (47%) of the United States workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Since the mid-1980s, women have earned more bachelor's and advanced degrees (Buchman et al., 2025; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019); however, women holding senior leadership roles often receive less compensation and a greater workload than their male counterparts (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Longman & Bray, 2017). Researchers have proposed

several reasons for the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles, including a masculine organizational culture, discrimination, gendered stereotyping, and the challenges of balancing work and family (Barna Group, 2017; Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020). Women were also underrepresented in the senior leadership of the ICC (Dunahoo, 2011). This basic qualitative study revealed the reasons for this underrepresentation at senior levels as perceived by the study's participants.

Disparity of Women Clergy Members in Senior Leadership of the Church

The National Congregations Study (NCS) has been studying trends in American congregations since 1988. Since that time, three waves of data have been collected, providing information about congregational life, leadership, and trends and changes over time (Chaves & Eagle, 2015). *The NCS Wave III* report indicated that despite the widespread congregational acceptance of leadership by women (79%), the large number of women seminarians, and the increased number of women clergy members in some American denominations, the overall percentage of women leading congregations remained unchanged at 11% of congregations since 1998 (Chaves & Eagle, 2015, p. 16). However, the potential to provide for future senior leadership roles among women still existed as 41% of full-time staff and 53% of all part-time ministerial staff are held by women (Chaves & Eagle, 2015, p. 17).

Other research studies by various denominations of the global Christian church have indicated that most congregants and clergy members were women, yet the majority of senior clergy leadership positions were still held by aging white men (Bumgardner,

2015, 2016; Kgatle, 2019; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020). Although Chaves and Eagle (2015) were hopeful that senior clergy roles for women would increase in the future, they projected that only 30% of senior clergy roles would be held by women (p. 17). The ICC's congregational and senior leadership makeup constituency is not dissimilar from those reported in the *NCS Wave III* or other denominational studies found in the literature review.

Looking Through the Pentecostal Lens. The marginalization of women in senior clergy was also prevalent in Pentecostal denominations that professed an egalitarian posture toward women in leadership (Kgatle, 2019; Langford, 2017; Miller, 2016; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017). Pentecostal denominations are young in comparison to most Protestant denominations. The root of Pentecostalism, or what some call "modern Pentecostalism," began early in the 20th century when a young Kansas farm girl asked to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues as the original disciples of Jesus did in the first century (Kipgen, n.d.; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017; Van Cleave, 2014). A wave of spiritual revival began in many areas of the United States, but the most extensive revival experience originated on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, in 1906 and spread throughout the world (Kipgen, n.d.; Van Cleave, 2014). People came to salvation through Christ, were healed of physical, mental, and emotional maladies, and came to be "baptized or filled" with the Holy Spirit. From this widespread revival, churches and denominations emerged that espoused the belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were accessible to all believers in Christ. Among these new denominations was the

ICC, which was founded by a young woman and evangelist named Aimee Semple McPherson (Friesen, 2018; Rockwell, 2017; Van Cleave, 2014).

A Brief History of the ICC and Its Empowerment of Women Clergy. The ICC was founded in 1920 by Aimee Semple McPherson, a young Christian widow who, upon her deathbed, answered her call to ministry to preach the Gospel (Kipgen, n.d.; Van Cleave, 2014). She traveled across northern America preaching the Gospel, healing people, and providing for their basic needs. In 1923, she built a church, established a Bible college to train men and women to preach the Gospel, and planted churches. During the early years of the ICC, many Bible college graduates, church planters, and senior clergy members were women (Kipgen, n.d.; Van Cleave, 2014). Once the founder died, control of the ICC passed into male leadership and remains so to this day (Remington, 2021; Schell, 2007; Walker, 2018).

A review of the literature revealed that the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions existed in business, education, human resource development (HRD), academia, and the Christian church (Bumgardner, 2015; Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Dunahoo, 2017; Kgatle, 2019; Miler. 2016; Remington, 2021; Tremper, 2017; Tunheim & Du Chene, 2016). The current ICC leadership has communicated its intention to understand how women have become marginalized in an organization that espouses the equality of women clergy members, as it seeks to rectify the problem by identifying, training, and advancing more women in ministry and leadership (Remington, 2021; Schell, 2007). This basic qualitative study may help bring about the desired change

through increased awareness and understanding of the reasons behind the disparity in women's representation in senior leadership roles, as perceived by the current ICC women clergy members.

Leadership Advancement Barriers Experienced by Women

Barriers to the advancement of women in business, higher education, religious organizations, and other vocations included complex societal, professional, and personal challenges. A review of the research literature suggested that these barriers to leader development and advancement included gender inequality, male-oriented organizational structures, the struggle to maintain the work-life balance, the lack of a supportive organizational culture, and the lack of mentors (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Campbell-Reed, 2019; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Grandy & Mavin, 2020). Women clergy experienced the same challenges as their secular peers, but leadership development and advancement could be hindered by the additional barriers of church leadership tradition, biblical interpretation, and denominational doctrine (Bumgardner, 2015, 2016; Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Ferguson, 2018; Grandy & Mavin, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020). Although these barriers were discussed individually, it is essential to understand the intersectional nature of these barriers in relation to the advancement of women to senior leadership roles.

Barriers to Vocational Women's Leader Advancement. Though the role of women in society and the workforce was changing, a significant move toward gender parity in senior leadership in most vocations was still lacking (Barna Group, 2017;

Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Coleman, 2020). Carbajal (2018) stated that though many hypotheses have been proposed to explain gender inequality, "few can account statistically for the phenomenon, that is, inferential statistics lack explanatory power to demonstrate the cause of gender inequality at work" (p. 12). Some researchers suggest that the lack of gender parity may be due to barriers that exist in our world and the workplace (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020). These barriers included gender inequality, masculine organizational structure/culture in the workplace, difficulty juggling multiple roles, and the lack of mentoring or support for women seeking advancement to senior leadership roles.

***Gender Inequality*.** Gender is a powerful, socially shared, stereotypical construct that often determines how we perceive our roles as human beings (Ferguson, 2018). Many would agree that the world system is primarily patriarchal in nature and does not recognize the full humanity of women, often exploiting, dehumanizing, and subordinating women to lesser roles within society (Kgatle, 2019; Kobo, 2018). Ackermann et al. (1991) defined *patriarchy* as "the legal, economic, and social system that validates and reinforces the sovereignty of the male head of the family over its other members" (p. 95). The result is a society where gender inequality can exist in the home, the workplace, and the Church.

A review of the literature indicated that gender inequality is a complex issue, yet it is not due to a lack of women in the workplace. Gender inequality encompasses various issues, including lower employee compensation, a lack of sponsorship, limited

networking opportunities, and underrepresentation in senior leadership roles. The focus of this discussion is on the latter. In 2017, the Barna Group reported that the number of women in the American workforce grew from 27% in 1948 to 47% in 2015; and that 77% of Americans were accepting of more women in the workplace and in leadership (p. 1). Catalyst (n.d.) reported that, according to the 2020 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, women held 29% of the executive-level leadership roles. However, Catalyst (n.d.) observed that white, middle-class men were disproportionately privileged as leaders throughout the world. Even in fields that women dominate, such as higher education, women occupied only about 26% of administrative roles (Gomez, 2020).

Organizational Structure/Culture. A lack of advancement opportunities may be tied to organizational structure and culture, as well as how women respond to these structures and cultures. Women in society and the workplace were stereotypically viewed as communal, passive, caring, nurturing, and supportive, yet men were stereotypically viewed as self-assertive, aggressive, decisive, and agentic (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Coleman, 2020; Ferguson, 2018). Many organizations, especially those in fields dominated by men, tended toward hierarchical organizational structures and cultures that favored the advancement of men over women (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Gomez, 2020). Some markers of the hierarchical structure included the perception of being available 24/7 and advancement based on competition.

Women who transgressed expected societal roles and moved into the workforce may have found that they faced the challenge of how they perceived themselves as

leaders. Some chose to adopt male-oriented patterns of leadership, while others opted for a more feminine style of leadership that emphasized integrity, a culture of support, and collaboration (Coleman, 2020). Some women found that to succeed in a male-oriented organizational structure, they had to work harder than their male counterparts, and still encountered a hostile community, discrimination in recruitment, lower wages, and fewer opportunities for advancement because of role incongruity (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Carbajal, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Ferguson, 2018; Gomez, 2020).

Difficulty Juggling Multiple Roles. A review of the literature revealed that women in various fields of work perceived the challenge of creating a work-life balance as the single most significant barrier to leadership development and advancement (Coleman, 2020; The Barna Group, 2017). Though the antipathy toward mothers in the workplace has decreased, "there is a cultural assumption that the major responsibility for the family is that of the female partner" (Coleman, 2020, p. 244). No typical way of managing the work-family balance existed. Some women chose to delay or forgo childbearing to pursue a career, while others opted to seek career advancement after their children had been raised. Some women did not have the 'caring' responsibilities that were often used as an excuse for the marginalization of women, resulting in a lack of advancement in the workplace (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Coleman, 2020; The Barna Group, 2017). Some women took advantage of flexible work hours (Coleman, 2020). Many fields of employment still adhere to a traditional leadership model, characterized by a hierarchical structure that tends to be masculine, demands long hours and 24/7

availability, and limits opportunities for women to advance to senior leadership roles (Bumgardner, 2015; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020).

***Lack of Mentors*.** Many vocations have long viewed mentors as a potential means to develop individuals into leaders. Research has indicated that women recognize the value of both formal and informal mentoring for advancing to senior leadership positions, but they also note the scarcity of women mentors available to potential leaders (Bumgardner, 2016; Carbajal, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Gomez, 2020). Carbajal (2018) stated that "women need more sponsors and mentors, which would boost their assertiveness in choosing leadership styles based on their preferences, instead of adhering to long-standing masculinity characteristics" (p. 25). Women have reported the lack of formal mentoring by men or women to support career advancement, often seeking out informal mentors for support (Bumgardner, 2015; Carjabal, 2018).

Barriers to Women Leader Advancement in the Church. Women clergy often experienced the same challenges as their secular peers, but leadership development and advancement could be hindered by the additional barriers: church leadership tradition, biblical interpretation, and denominational doctrine (Bumgardner, 2016; Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Ferguson, 2018; Kgatle, 2019; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020). Akpanke Odey and Ajima Onah (2020) noted that "the most dominant and persistent aspect of patriarchal pattern is the belief in male superiority and female inferiority" (p. 76). This dominant belief underpinned some of the barriers that women encounter in their

pursuit of advancement to senior leadership roles within the Church and its denominations.

Church Tradition. Akpanke Odey and Ajima Onah (2020) suggested that religion provides its adherents with a sense of social solidarity, as well as constructs around gender. Most of the Christian church is rooted in a historical patriarchal tradition and restricts the level of participation of its women (Ferguson, 2018). However, many mainline Protestant and Pentecostal organizations had a polity that allowed for the ordination and pursuit of senior clergy roles for women, including the Assemblies of God, the Vineyard, the Apostolic Faith Mission, as well as the ICC (Kgatle, 2019; Langford, 2017; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Van Cleave, 2014). When the Pentecostal movement began in the early 20th century, women clergy members played a significant role in the movement's dynamic growth, as they founded churches, Bible schools, and various Pentecostal denominations (Ferguson, 2018; Kgatle, 2019; Langford, 2017; Van Cleave, 2014). However, in the 1930s, as these denominations grew and moved toward more organizational structure, particularly around ordination and training, much of the leadership became male-dominated at the local, regional, national, and international levels and remained so (Kgatle, 2019; Langford, 2017; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020).

Biblical Interpretation. Much of the patriarchal stance around gender roles and church leadership was rooted in the biblical interpretation of *The Holy Bible* (2011). In the third chapter of the book of Genesis, Eve is portrayed as the root of sin and death

(*The Holy Bible,* 2011*).* As part of her punishment from the Lord, Eve and all women were to become subject to the leadership of men and to bear children. For thousands of years, this had been the lot of women (Kgatle, 2019). When Christ Incarnate came to earth, Pentecostal interpretation held that he would restore all things to God's original intention of equal partnership among men and women (Langford, 2018). Christ himself "superseded moral, social, religious and cultural barriers in his earthly ministry" (Langford, 2018, p. 72). Another interpretation of scripture that had kept women from fully participating in church leadership was the perceived Pauline prohibition of women speaking in the church at all, as found in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (*The Holy Bible*, 2011). Where this prohibition was embraced, women were allowed to lead children and other women, but not men, thus excluding them from senior clergy member roles. *Eisegesis* refers to an interpretation that brings meaning to the text without considering its historical context, whereas exegesis is considered the interpretation of scripture within its historical context (Nelson University, n.d.). In the case of the Pauline prohibition, many Pentecostals believed that the correct exegesis of the 1 Timothy passage referred to a particular church worship service where the women were irreverent and disorderly and was not meant to describe the capacity of women to lead in society and the Church (Kgatle, 2019; Langford, 2017). Most Pentecostals believe that the apostle Paul supported and promoted women's leadership in the church, including women such as Priscilla, who oversaw a local congregation and raised leaders like Apollos (*The Holy Bible: ESV,* 2011).

Denominational Doctrine. Even among Pentecostal denominations, the role of women clergy members varied greatly. This was due in part to the doctrinal stance of each denomination. Although some believed that women could be mobilized at all levels of leadership, the question of their legitimacy to lead persisted (Langford, 2017). Some Pentecostal denominations allowed women to be ordained but assigned them different titles, such as "worker" versus "pastor," and excluded them from eligibility for senior leadership (Kgatle, 2019). However, a review of the literature indicated that even in those Pentecostal denominations whose doctrine supported the full deployment and inclusion of women to all levels of senior leadership, many women were still met with resistance when seeking to engage in leadership development (Bumgardner, 2015; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017).

Women, both within and outside of Christian organizations, often encounter numerous complex societal, professional, and personal challenges that hinder their leadership advancement (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Campbell-Reed, 2019; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Grandy & Mavin, 2020). Women often faced barriers in church leadership traditions, biblical interpretation, and denominational doctrine (Bumgardner, 2016; Chaves & Eagle, 2015; Ferguson, 2018; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020). This current study revealed barriers that existing clergy members encountered in their development pathway and whether mentoring could be utilized to help overcome these barriers.

Mentoring as a Strategy for Women's Leader Development

In this section, a discussion of mentoring as a strategy for women's leader development includes an introduction to mentoring, the mentoring process, and formal and informal mentoring strategies.

Introduction to Mentoring. The term *mentor* was first found in Homer's 8th-century BCE Greek epic poem, The *Odyssey.* Indeed, Mentor was the name of Odysseus's old friend, whom he left in charge of his son Telemachus's education and upbringing while Odysseus went off to war. As such, *mentoring* can be described as a relationship in which one individual transfers knowledge, experience, and skills to another person or persons for career development and psychosocial growth (Arnesson & Albinson, 2017; Dajani et al., 2021; Daloz, 2012). Mentoring has long been viewed as a powerful and effective means for enhancing the wellbeing of individuals both for career advancement and psychosocial development in various contexts, particularly in business, education, research, and academia (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Du & Wang, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020; Revelo & Loui, 2016). A review of the literature on mentoring revealed numerous streams of research, including mentoring as a process and various mentoring strategies, which are further developed in the following sections.

Mentoring as a Process. In Daloz's (2012) seminal work, *Mentor*, the author used the metaphor of a journey to describe the mentoring relationship between a mentor and their protégé. This journey could take various forms and endure for different lengths

of time. In its most traditional form, mentoring refers to a mentor-protégé relationship in which the mentor shares knowledge and understanding with the protégé for early-career development, imparting years of expert knowledge and experience to the next generation of professionals who will continue the profession (List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). In many contexts, including business, education, and human resource development, mentoring is most often utilized in a traditional and hierarchical top-down approach, which reflects expert oversight of a novice for a specific period, typically ranging from one month to one year (List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). Therefore, early research focused on mentoring from the perspective of the mentor or the mentoring model, rather than the perspective of the protégé, providing a one-sided view of the mentoring process (Du & Wang, 2017; Revelo & Loui, 2016).

Although the traditional-hierarchical model may work well for organizational orientation or skill development, it does not lend itself well to leadership enhancement or advancement for those seeking more senior roles within an organization. More holistic strategies should be considered as potentially viable tools for the leader development of women (List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). More recent streams of research about mentoring processes and strategies addressed topics such as the dynamics of mentoring participants, considerations when entering mentoring relationships, and holistic mentoring strategies (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Du & Wang, 2017; Gordon, 2017). Each of these streams of research has contributed to the depth of knowledge in understanding the impact of mentoring on both the mentor and the protégé, as well as the

effectiveness of utilizing mentoring as a strategy for leader development across various fields.

Participant Dynamics of Mentoring. Mentoring was often described as a relationship between the mentor and the protégé, where the mentor facilitated the growth of the protégé for career development, psychosocial development, and induction into organizational culture (Hastings & Kane, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020). Although this traditional form may have worked well in some instances, research studies in various contexts such as higher education and human resource development suggested that newer models of mentoring move beyond the traditional hierarchical form of mentoring to models that involved peers or cohorts (Ghosh et al., 2020; Gordon, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020; Revelo & Loui, 2016). Peer or cohort mentoring relationships have been reported to be fruitful for leadership advancement and can result in increased job satisfaction, job retention, and increased pursuit of career advancement (Ghosh et al., 2020; Gordon, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020; Revelo & Loui, 2016).

Peer mentoring is a non-hierarchical form of mentoring that occurs between individuals who may be at the same level in their lives or organizations, for professional or personal learning (Adkisson et al., 2020; Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Dajani et al., 2021). Peer mentors share knowledge, expertise, and psychological support, which often leads to networking and community-building opportunities among participants (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Byrne et al., 2022; Dajani et al., 2021). The reciprocal nature of the peer

mentoring experience benefits both the mentor and the protégé; both parties often report an increased sense of belonging, increased leadership self-efficacy, and greater self-awareness of their growth potential (Adkisson et al., 2020; Fine, 2021; Stockkamp & Godshalk, 2022). Research has shown that women found this style of mentoring to be more responsive to their needs as it is more relational in nature than hierarchical (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Dajani et al., 2021; Longman & Bray, 2017). Given the reciprocal and relational elements of this form of mentoring, it was worthwhile to study the extent to which participants in this basic qualitative study had engaged in this style of mentoring and what they perceived as beneficial in these relationships.

Cohorts or peer mentoring groups (PMGs) refer to the practice of mentoring within a group or cohort of like-minded individuals, aimed at training, learning, support, and leadership development (Mullen et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2019; Viveiros et al., 2021). As an alternative to traditional mentoring strategies, cohorts or PMGs were found to be more dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive in nature (Mullen et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2019; Viveiros et al., 2021). Although a paucity of research existed on this form of mentoring, current PMG research suggested that PMGs may offer promise in addressing social justice issues through their collaborative nature, “by expressing justice, enacting change, distributing power, and undoing hierarchy” (Mullen et al., 2020, p. 434). Addressing social justice issues may, in turn, help alleviate the barriers to leadership that women face in various contexts, including education, business, and the Church.

Considerations Before Entering a Mentoring Relationship. In their dynamic process of mentoring model, Wanberg et al. (2003) posited that various antecedents impact both the proximal outcomes of mentoring, such as skill and knowledge acquisition, as well as the distal outcomes of formal mentoring relationships, including job satisfaction and career success. *Mentoring antecedents* encompassed the characteristics of the mentor and protege, the nature of the mentoring relationship, and the dynamics of the mentoring interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). Organizations would do well to consider these antecedents when establishing or evaluating mentoring programs, so that they can achieve the desired proximal and distal *outcomes.*

*The nature of the relationship between mentors and proteges, or am*ong PMG members, was yet another consideration for the success of mentoring for leader development. Much of the research on mentoring relationships was rooted in relational cultural theory (RCT). Initially considered a feminist theory of human development, RCT has, over time, "deepened its cultural analysis beyond gender to broader systemic categories of power and social identity" (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007, p. 378). In RCT, the mentoring relationship was viewed as a more bidirectional, or one where all members grow in relationship with one another, and where all parties benefit from the relationship, and the potential for transformative learning can occur (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Miller, 2016). The characteristics of such a relationship included confidentiality, flattened power, and trust (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley,

2016; Gordon, 2017). Benefits included not only the acquisition of skills and knowledge, but relational behaviors and processes such as interdependence, reciprocity, mutuality, and conflict resolution skills (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). Distal outcomes of successful mentoring relationships included increased job satisfaction, employee retention, and organizational commitment (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Miller, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2015). A mentoring process should benefit all of those involved including the mentor, the protégé, and the organization; therefore, organizations should consider investing in personality inventories and creating rapport building opportunities for successful mentor and protégé pairing (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Du & Wang, 2017; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Miller, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2015).

The *nature of mentoring interactions* referred to how the mentors and protégés or PMG members interacted with one another (Du & Wang, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). Wanberg et al. (2003) determined that the most successful mentoring relationships must also encompass the nature of the mentoring interactions, including the frequency, scope, and strength of influence. *Frequency* refers to the number of times that the interactions took place; the more frequent the daily interactions, the stronger the participants perceived the relationship to be (Du & Wang, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). One of the most significant challenges to the frequency of interactions was the mentor's perceived lack of time, as seen by the protégé (Du & Wang, 2017). *Scope* refers to the breadth of

the interactions between mentor and protégé or PMGs. Both mentors and protégés considered the interactions to be positive in nature, particularly when they included organizational matters and life issues (Chang et al., 2014; Du & Wang, 2017; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016). *Strength of influence* refers to "the degree to which protégés are influenced by the mentoring they receive" (Du & Wang, 2017, p. 323). Influence often manifested itself in terms of the mentoring the protégé sought, the amount of feedback received, and the amount of knowledge acquired. Protégés often considered mentoring interactions ineffective if feedback was limited or nonexistent, and they did not gain the knowledge that they anticipated (Du & Wang, 2017). To improve the quality of mentor-protégé interactions, researchers recommend that organizations provide mentors with adequate training, sufficient time to engage with the mentee, and incentives to pursue these mentor-protégé relationships (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Du & Wang, 2017; Gordon, 2017).

Mentoring Strategies: Formal and Informal. Ragins and Cotton (1999) first categorized mentoring strategies into formal and informal strategies in their large-scale study of mentoring relationships among professionals in the fields of engineering, social work, and journalism. Ragins and Cotton (1999) reported their findings in terms of the reported effectiveness, outcomes, and processes of both formal and informal mentoring. Although Ragins and Cotton (1999) concluded that formal and informal mentoring strategies are complementary and compensatory to one another, they did report that informal mentoring interactions provided increased job satisfaction, career development,

and psychosocial benefits. An understanding of the characteristics, benefits, and limitations of both formal and informal mentoring strategies for women's leadership development may increase the understanding of how existing ICC women clergy members perceive the possibilities of leadership development within the ICC.

Formal Mentoring Strategies. In many organizational contexts, formal mentoring strategies are often perceived as a traditional and hierarchical top-down approach that involves expert oversight of a novice for a specific period, aimed at organizational orientation and acclimation (List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). In this form, the mentor imparts knowledge and understanding to the protégé for early-career development, sharing years of expert knowledge and experience (Ghosh et al., 2020; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). This model may be suitable for organizational orientation or skill development, but it does not lend itself well to leadership enhancement or advancement for individuals in advanced careers (List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020; Revelo & Loui, 2016). Brabazon and Schultz (2020) suggested that many formal institutional mentoring strategies have a myopic focus on institutional acclimation and skills yet fail to "recognise the myriad invisible and unaccounted for structural barriers to our success and help us to collectively dismantle them" (p.886). Another stream of mentoring research has begun to examine the role of informal mentoring for career development. For these reasons, informal mentoring may offer an alternative route for transferring knowledge and skills.

Informal Mentoring Strategies. Informal mentoring strategies have been lauded as an effective means of providing guidance and support for mentees across various fields (Dajani et al., 2021; Du & Wang, 2017). However, Du and Wang (2017) purported that research on informal mentoring remained limited, especially "regarding the naturally occurring and spontaneous processes of informal mentoring, particularly in terms of its linkage with broader social and organizational environments" (p. 310). Du and Wang (2017) employed Wanberg et al.'s (2003) dynamic process model of formal mentoring to inform their study of novice foreign language teachers and their more senior mentors, investigating the development of informal mentoring in the workplace and examining the quality of informal mentoring relationships (p. 314). Du and Wang's (2017) findings revealed "that social interaction, time, organizational contexts, and individual characteristics mediate the process of informal mentoring" (p. 309).

Informal mentoring relationships are often initiated by either the mentor or the protégé because they feel drawn to one another and are not the product of organizational assignment (Hastings & Kane, 2018). However, as informal mentoring strategies are more organic and spontaneous in nature, they can be harder to quantify and qualify than formal mentoring strategies (Du & Wang, 2017). Even the limited research on informal mentoring has suggested that informal mentoring strategies are a viable tool for organizational orientation and acclimation, as well as leadership development (Coleman, 2020; Du & Wang, 2017). Additionally, formal and informal strategies are compensatory

and complementary in nature, providing a holistic opportunity for leadership development and support (Desimone et al., 2014).

The role of mentoring in leadership development is widely accepted (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Du & Wang, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020; Revelo & Loui, 2016). Many research studies on mentoring in business, education, human resource development, and higher education suggest that mentoring is particularly helpful to women to help reduce feelings of isolation, build networks of support, and help navigate complicated, often masculine professional environments (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Dajani, et al., 2021; Du & Wang, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Maccombs & Bhat, 2020). This qualitative study examined the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding the mentoring strategies that were beneficial or less than productive for their leadership development and advancement within the ICC.

Implications

As a religious organization, the ICC has advocated for the advancement of its leadership, regardless of gender, age, race, or nationality (Dunahoo, 2011, 2015; Rockwell, 2017). Nevertheless, an incongruity persists between the ICC's doctrinal and theological beliefs and its practice, particularly in the area of increased engagement of women in senior leadership roles (Rockwell, 2017; Tremper, 2017). Reverend Jessica Schulze (2019) said it this way, “How do we move forward to see the entire workforce put into the field? How do we move forward, Lord, to make sure that biases,

misunderstandings, or cultural brokenness does not infect further the cause of Jesus Christ known around the world?" (Schulze, 2019, 11:06). Tremper (2017) suggested that although a pool of potential women leaders exists, advancement is often stifled by the predominantly male environment of the pastorate.

Walden requires its doctoral candidates to produce a deliverable project guided by their research, which may result in positive social change (Walden, n.d.). Walden states that four genres of project deliverables are possible: an evaluation report, a curriculum plan, a professional development/training curriculum with materials, or a position paper with detailed policy recommendations (Walden, n.d.). As the purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that may lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC, this guided the discussion associated with potential and appropriate project outcomes.

Evaluation Report

The evaluation report is specifically supportive of an organizational evaluation study, which is not the focus of this study; as such, an evaluation report would not be an acceptable project option. The remaining three project options are viable project outcomes associated with this study, dependent upon the findings: a curriculum plan, a professional development/training curriculum and materials, and a position paper with detailed policy recommendations.

Curriculum Plan

The curriculum plan could be designed as a 9-week course for students who are planning to enter ministry at the ICC's 4-year college. The purpose of the course is to increase understanding of the role of women in ministry and to equip women for leadership. Scope and sequence would entail the role and release of women in ministry leadership, as understood historically, biblically, theologically, and doctrinally, as well as insights into the challenges unique to women in ministry. Materials, including books, articles, and videos, would be used to provide resources, as well as guest lecturers. Student assignments would include interviewing women, role-playing, and writing positional papers.

Professional Development/Training Curriculum

The professional development/training curriculum and materials option is also a viable potential deliverable. The purpose would be similar to that of the curriculum project; however, the target audience and goal would be slightly different, as the focus would be on existing pastors who want to learn how to support and release more women into ministry within their existing churches. The annual ICC national convention would be an ideal venue for this three-day conference training. An implementation plan, a detailed timeline, trainer notes, a module format, and an evaluation would be included in the creation of this project. Components of this training would include speakers covering various topics related to women in leadership. For example, workshop topics could include ICC history, biblical foundations, theology, mentoring, barriers women face, and

practical deployment to create a leadership pathway that employs mentoring processes to support the development of women clergy members. This approach addresses these issues to facilitate the strategic inclusion of women in filling the leadership gap.

Position Paper With Policy Recommendations

The ICC supports women in senior leadership, as indicated by their bylaws, theology, and doctrine. However, an examination of anecdotal and statistical data suggests that their advancement to senior leadership positions is preferred rather than valued. According to the ICC's *2017 NCOR*, approximately one third of all licensed clergy members were women; however, only 105 of the 1,532 senior clergy members were women (Dunahoo, 2017, p. 3). This continued underrepresentation of women in senior leadership has not gone unnoticed by the ICC leadership and is often addressed in ICC leadership conferences or newsletters.

A position paper would include a clear statement of the problem, supported by a literature review, the findings of this study, a reiteration of the current policy, a draft for a policy change, and provisions for further training. The executive board of the ICC authors policy; this paper could be presented to the ICC executive board via Zoom or in person for discussion and consideration. A plan for implementation, including a draft of the policy, a detailed timeline for rollout, and a method to measure the success of the policy change at the local, district, and national levels, would be included. If the Executive Board deems the policy change as a worthy option, a finalized version of the

policy could be presented to the voting members of the ICC convention body for ratification at the ICC's annual national convention.

This study contributes to positive social change by providing denominational leaders with the much-needed insight into formal and informal mentoring strategies employed by mentor-protégé dyads that may be productive in developing senior clergy members, specifically women, to address the current leadership gap. This qualitative study has the potential to contribute to the existing body of research on mentor-protégé strategies, both within and outside the Church.

Summary

Section 1 presented the local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member leaders, which might help fill the current leadership gap. Section 1 also provided background information for the study, including the rationale, definitions of key terms, the significance of the study, research questions, a review of relevant literature, and the study's implications. The literature review included a discussion of the conceptual framework, Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) WLD model, the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions inside and outside the church, the barriers to women's leadership advancement, and mentoring as a strategy for women's leadership development. This project is unique because there is a lack of scholarship on women in leadership within the ICC, and even fewer studies explore mentor-protégé mentorship strategies among women leaders within the denomination

(Dunahoo, 2015). In the next section, the methodology for this study was discussed, including qualitative research design and approach, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This section describes the methodology employed in this basic qualitative study, which explored the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC. It includes an explanation of how the choice of qualitative design choice aligns with the problem and the research questions; a description of the qualitative tradition; and the rationale for the choice of the basic qualitative design for this study. Additionally, the processes used to gain access to and establish rapport with, as well as protect the rights of the participants, are provided. Section 2 also describes the appropriateness of interviews as the data collection method for the qualitative tradition, as well as the researcher's positionality in relation to the study. The methodology section concludes with a description of the plan for data analysis, ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the data.

Qualitative Research Design Logical Alignment

The choice of research design is informed by the study's purpose and the research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Lim, 2024). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding the holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC. The research questions addressed how women clergy

members within the ICC described the mentoring strategies they perceived as productive and unproductive for leader development.

Qualitative methodology is employed when the researcher seeks to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon particular to a site, group, or individual (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2009, 2012; Lim, 2024). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined *qualitative research* as "an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject's point of view" (p. 274). This type of research allows the researcher to pose broad questions to a small group of participants who are encouraged to describe their experiences, perceptions, or feelings in their own words (Creswell, 2012; Lim, 2024). Additionally, the exploratory nature of the current qualitative study made a basic qualitative study a practical design choice.

Qualitative research enables the formulation of research questions that ask *why* or *how* about a phenomenon, providing participants with the opportunity to provide explanations for their experiences within the context of their lives (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Lim, 2024). This basic qualitative study explored the experiences of existing ICC women clergy members regarding the mentoring strategies they perceived as productive and unproductive for leader development. This resulted in a deep understanding of the lived experiences of these women regarding mentoring as it relates to women's leader development and advancement within the denomination.

Basic Qualitative Study Tradition Employed

Researchers conduct basic qualitative studies to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its historical, cultural, and social context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Lim, 2024; Lodico et al., 2010). A *basic qualitative study* or general inquiry can be differentiated from other research designs because the researcher can capture "not just what participants think, but why they think in certain ways … [and the] complexities and peculiarities of human thought and experience" primarily through in-depth interviews (Lim, 2024, p. 216). A basic qualitative study design was an appropriate choice for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore multiple realities, employ thick and rich descriptions, and present findings in creative ways (Lim, 2024; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Purposeful sampling was employed to select individuals who would most effectively provide answers and contribute to understanding the research problem and questions posed, given their unique knowledge and experiences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009, 2012). Data collection for this basic qualitative study was conducted through one-on-one interviews, employing a semistructured interview protocol that included open-ended questions. Particularly in qualitative research, the researcher creates tools rather than employs existing tools due to the emergent nature of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lim, 2024). Additionally, the researcher is "the primary data collection instrument [which] necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of

the study" (Creswell, 2012, p. 196), as the researcher cannot entirely separate from his or her interpretations, experiences, and understanding of the topic under study.

Qualitative researchers use inductive thinking to analyze their data through a constructivist lens; instead of trying to prove a hypothesis, qualitative researchers analyze data from a variety of sources and look for emerging themes that describe the phenomenon being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009, 2012). When reporting findings, qualitative researchers employ rich and descriptive language that brings meaning and understanding to the phenomenon being studied. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that when qualitative research design is applied correctly, it can become a valuable method to "develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions" (p. 544). For this qualitative study, a basic or general inquiry design was employed, and the justification for this choice is provided below.

Research Design Justification

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that could lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC. Because of the exploratory and explanatory nature of the research questions, quantitative research was not employed. Quantitative research begins with a hypothesis and measures the extent, frequency, or existence of a relationship between variables (Creswell, 2012). Unlike qualitative research, quantitative research employs random sampling, identifies

and controls variables, uses valid and reliable tools for data collection, analyzes data using numbers, provides interpretation that considers the original hypothesis, and is often conducted in isolation from the participant's context (Creswell, 2012). Conversely, and appropriately aligned to this study problem and purpose, a basic qualitative study begins with a *why* or *how* question; employs purposeful sampling; does not identify variables prior to research; employs tools created by the researcher; seeks to identify emerging themes; reports the results with rich language; and are conducted within the social context of the participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Lim, 2024; Merriam, 2009).

The basic qualitative study design was also a more suitable choice than other forms of qualitative research, such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, or narrative research. An *ethnography* focuses on "an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily observational and interview data" (Creswell, 2012, p. 13). Conversely, basic qualitative studies or general inquiry research often involve interviews with participants to gain "contextual understanding that informs decision-making or addresses current issues. (Lim, 2024, p. 214). *Grounded theory* research is a strategy that utilizes constant comparison of data with emerging categories across diverse groups to "maximize the similarities and the differences of information" and derive a theory from the participants' views (Creswell, 2012, p. 13). Basic qualitative study results in emergent themes that can provide a deeper understanding of a situation, but are not necessarily used to derive a theory (Lim, 2025).

Phenomenological research is "a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants in the study" (Creswell, 2012, p. 230). Although the phenomenological design and basic qualitative study both aim to understand an experience and employ interviews as their primary method of data collection, phenomenological analysis and reporting provide a composite understanding or essence of the phenomenon, as a basic study report results from multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2009). Finally, *narrative research design* is a strategy where the researcher retells the chronological story told by the participants through the researcher's lens (Creswell, 2009). A basic qualitative study reports the results in the participants' own words, often using direct quotes around themes that emerge as the research progresses and does not relate results in chronological terms (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2009, 2012; Merriam, 2009). As the local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support women clergy member leader development that might help fill the current leadership gap, I believe a basic qualitative study research design that explored the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members as to the holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC was the most appropriate choice for this study's design.

Participants

In the participants' section, I address the criteria for selecting participants, justify the number of participants as balanced with the depth of inquiry, describe the procedures

for gaining access to participants, explain methods of establishing a researcher-participant working relationship, and present measures taken to protect participants' rights.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

This study implemented purposeful sampling. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to generalize the results of a sample to a population and thus employs random sampling, qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to "develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined *purposeful sampling* as "choosing subjects, places, or other dimensions of a research site to include in your research to enlarge your analysis or to test particular emerging themes and working hypotheses" (p. 274). Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants or sites that can best help us understand the meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009). In other words, purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select participants who can best help them understand the research problem and answer the research questions. The ideal sample for this study consisted of women clergy members who met the following criteria:

- Credentialed women clergy members within the ICC who currently hold positions as assisting ministers, senior pastors, or denominational leaders.
- Previously or currently engaged in formal or informal mentor-protégé relationships within ICC or outside the ICC. For this qualitative study, formal

mentoring included those settings in which the participant has enrolled in a structured program; conversely, informal mentoring included books read, networking relationships, and the observation of others; and,

- Were in the most eastern district of the ICC in the United States.

Additionally, the participant pool was delineated into groups based on the current role of the ICC women clergy members. The goal was to recruit a minimum of twelve participants for this basic qualitative study, with the original participant groups comprising assisting ministers, senior clergy, and denominational leaders. However, women clergy members were enthusiastic about participating in this study, reflecting their proactive engagement. A total of 19 participants were interviewed:

- five participants who currently serve as assisting ministers who have participated in formal or informal mentoring
- seven participants who currently serve as senior clergy, who have participated in formal or informal mentoring
- six participants who currently serve as denominational leaders who have participated in formal or informal mentoring
- one participant who currently serves as a hospital chaplain was interviewed; an unanticipated group

It is worth noting that just over half of the 43 women contacted were excited to participate in this study, reflecting proactive participant engagement.

Justification for Number of Participants

Choosing the number of participants for a research study depends on the type of data to be collected, the type of design employed, and whether the chosen sample will provide sufficient information to reach saturation (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). A qualitative research study focuses on gathering information from complex human beings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Much of the data is collected through interviews, observations, and documents. For this qualitative study, interviews served as the primary source of data collection. The collection and analysis of these data required much time, as did developing a rapport with the participants (Lodico et al., 2010). For this basic qualitative study, I interviewed 19 participants who contacted me as directed in the invitational email distributed to 43 women clergy members of the ICC using contact information provided by a gatekeeper in the most eastern district of the ICC in the United States.

Interviews were to be conducted with a minimum of 12 women, with at least 3-4 women from each of the delineated groups, which included assisting ministers, senior clergy, and denominational leaders. However, women clergy members of the ICC were excited to participate in this study. The response rate to the invitation email was over 50%, resulting in 23 potential participants. Four participants were unable to meet within the time limit designated for data collection. The limited number of participants allowed for an in-depth inquiry into the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members

regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC.

Procedures to Gain Access to Participants

The ICC was divided into six districts within the United States (Dunahoo, 2020). The site of this study was the most eastern district of the ICC in the United States, where participants served as women clergy members in leadership positions of the ICC. To gain access to the participants, I engaged a gatekeeper in this district to obtain contact information, which allowed me to distribute an initial email to recruit potential participants among the women clergy members from the chosen site. The initial email included my contact information and details of the study's purpose, asking them to participate in the research study. The initial email was sent to the potential participant pool every week until the full number of participants was acquired. If potential participants felt that they understood the study and wished to volunteer, they emailed the researcher directly through the email provided and included the words "I consent" in their email; a signature on the consent form was not required.

A second email was sent to those women who agreed to participate in the study within a week. Arrangements were made to schedule an interview time with each participant via email or phone call; 60–to 90-minute interviews were conducted online using Zoom. Each participant was asked to share their name, email address, and phone number so that they could be contacted for interviews and member checks. As more than 15 participants responded to the invitation for a Zoom interview, the researcher selected

participants from among the delineated groups of assisting ministers, senior clergy, and denominational leaders who met the study's criteria. Additional participants do not need to be contacted, as none of the participants voluntarily withdrew from the study.

Establish a Working Researcher-Participant Relationship

In quantitative research, the credibility of the research depends on instrument construction; however, in qualitative research, Patton (2015) notes that the "researcher becomes the instrument for collecting data" (p. 48). As such, it was essential for me to establish a working rapport with the participants while posing the interview questions in an unbiased, non-threatening, and friendly manner (Lim, 2024). Patton (2015) suggested that the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee is one of partnership for information development, where mutual respect is maintained and questions are asked in an authentic, nonjudgmental, and trustworthy manner. I established rapport through an introductory phone call, an in-person meeting, or a Zoom meeting. During this time, I presented my study and its objectives, discussed our roles, and confirmed their willingness to continue participating in the study.

Protection of Participant Rights

As with all research, measures must be taken to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants, ensuring that they do not suffer harm as a result of their involvement in the study and its associated findings. Measures include maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, providing pseudonyms for participants, and storing data in a secure location. Permission to conduct this study was sought and

obtained through Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the IRB reference number was on the consent form, as well as Walden's IRB contact information (Walden IRB approval no. 02-21-23-0545450)..

Confidentiality

One way to establish rapport with study participants is to ensure that their identities are kept confidential. For this study, alphanumeric codes were assigned to each participant, and their contact information was kept securely by the researcher to facilitate member checking for the accuracy of information and the interpretation of data. However, demographic information, such as the location of service and years of current service, was not mentioned in the reporting to protect participant identity. All participants were women clergy currently serving in leadership roles in the ICC. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code that indicated the participant's role. For example, an assisting minister may be identified as AM1, AM2, AM3, and so forth. Patton (2015) stated that "confidentiality means you know but won't tell" (p. 496). However, a researcher must know when confidentiality can be maintained and when it must be abandoned, such as in matters of illegal conduct (Patton, 2015). What would and would not be kept confidential was clearly stated in the informed consent document.

Informed Consent

Participants received a copy of the informed consent form for review in the invitational email distributed to the women clergy of the site by the researcher. When a potential participant emailed the researcher indicating a desire to participate in the study,

that email included the words, “I consent.” Informed consent included the purpose and procedures of the study, a notice of voluntary participation/withdrawal, a list of the risks and benefits of the study, a statement of participants rights to confidentiality, a description of how the results were used, and information about the researcher (Anderson & Corneli, 2018; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012). Participants’ emails of consent have been stored electronically and as a hard copy and will be held for a period of 5 years after the conclusion of this study.

Protection From Harm

Researchers must anticipate the potential harm that participants may experience due to data collection, data analysis, and the reporting of study results (Anderson & Corneli, 2018; Creswell, 2009; Lim, 2024; Patton, 2015). Risk can include psychological stress, legal liabilities, ostracism by peers, and political or organizational repercussions (Patton, 2015). This study had the potential for minimal psychological, relational, and economic/professional risks. To mitigate any concerns of these risks, I provided privacy during interviews, used alphanumeric codes when reporting results, allowed participants the opportunity to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study, and designated a counselor and provided contact information that participants might access at their discretion should any discomfort arise from the research interview.

To minimize the risk of being identified as a participant in this basic qualitative study, alphanumeric codes were used in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the study's results. For example, Assisting Minister 1, 2, or 3, Senior Clergy 1, 2, or 3,

Denominational Leader 1, 2, or 3, or Chaplain 1. The researcher has saved an electronic list and a hard copy list of the actual names and alphanumeric codes of interview respondents throughout the process. The hard copy of the alphanumeric list and copies of informed consent emails have been secured in a safety deposit box to which only the researcher has access. Electronic copies have been kept on a password-protected computer and on a password-protected hard drive. All raw data have been kept confidential, assigned alphanumeric codes, and are accessible only to the researcher and, upon request, to the doctoral capstone committee members.

Additionally, the data collection process was discreet enough to prevent others from learning of the volunteers' participation in the study. To the best of my knowledge, there was no stigma associated with the research topic; therefore, I did not anticipate the need to include stigma within the participants' interviews. Participants who were concerned about any risk could have opted out at any time during the interview or the data analysis study experience.

Data Collection

Researchers need to employ tools that provide access to data, which will enable them to answer their research questions. In this section, I provide justification for the data collection, identify the collection instrument and its source, establish the sufficiency of the data collection instrument to answer the research questions, and outline the process for generating, gathering, and recording the data. Additionally, I describe the systems for

tracking data and emerging understandings, the procedure for gaining access to participants, and present the role of the researcher.

Sixty- to ninety-minute interviews were conducted via Zoom, employing the interview protocol. All interviews were audio recorded for an accurate record of the conversation. The researcher endeavored to ensure the participants' privacy by conducting interviews out of sight and out of hearing from others. The researcher secured a shared office space with a private conference room for conducting interviews. Interview questions were asked one at a time, and probes were used with each question to clarify the response. If needed, questions were repeated for the participant, and participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question. Some questions were skipped if the information was already provided in another prompt.

Justification of the Data for Collection

Researchers employing basic qualitative study designs gather multiple forms of data using self-created interview protocols, surveys, observation protocols, and documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). As the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC, an interview protocol was employed.

Source of Instrument

Creswell (2012) stated that an interview protocol is “a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview, the questions to be

asked, and space to take notes of responses from the interview" (p. 225). I created the interview protocol, informed by Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of WLD and aligned with the research questions of this current study. The research questions examined how women clergy members within the ICC described the formal or informal mentoring strategies they perceived as productive and unproductive for leader development. Additionally, participants were asked to provide background information on their motivation for pursuing leadership. The questions themselves were open-ended, allowing the participants to describe their perspectives on their experiences in their own words.

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instrument

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that could lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC. Semistructured interviews proved sufficient to cull this information from a small number of participants. To ensure that the data collected addressed the local problem, the interview protocol contained interview questions that aligned with each research question. Table 2 presents RQ1 and the aligned interview questions for gathering data on the formal and informal mentoring strategies that participants perceived as productive for leader development, as well as the mentoring strategies participants would recommend to individuals and the ICC that could lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC.

Table 2

*Research Question 1 and Interview Question Alignme*nt

RQ 1	Interview question
How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceive to be productive toward leader development?	Please describe any formal mentoring that you may have experienced as a clergy member, either from within or outside the ICC. What, if any, aspects of your formal mentoring experiences were beneficial toward your leadership development? If you were to design a formal mentoring process toward leader development, what would you include? Please describe any informal mentoring that you may have experienced as a clergy member, either from within or outside the ICC. What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were beneficial toward your leadership development? What, if any, recommendations would you make to emerging clergy members about seeking informal mentoring opportunities?

Likewise, Table 3 indicates the alignment of the interview questions with RQ2 to collect data about the formal or informal mentoring strategies that the participants perceived as less beneficial for women clergy leader development.

Table 3

*Research Question 2 and Interview Question Alignme*nt

RQ2	Interview Question
How do women clergy within the religious organization who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships describe mentoring strategies that they perceive to be less than beneficial toward leader development?	Please describe any formal mentoring you may have experienced as a clergy member, whether from within or outside the ICC. What, if any, aspects of your formal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial for your leader development? Please describe any informal mentoring you may have experienced as a clergy member, whether from within or outside the ICC. What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial for your leader development?

Systems for Tracking Data

Qualitative research can yield extensive data that requires organization. For this basic qualitative study, audio recordings of Zoom interviews, researcher reflections, and a list of emergent themes were employed. I developed a matrix to categorize and locate all data. Copies of this matrix have been stored in a password-protected computer, on a password-protected hard drive, and a hard copy stored in a safe deposit box for five years beyond completion of the study.

I maintained an electronic list and a hard copy list of the actual names and alphanumeric codes of interview respondents throughout the process. To protect the

identity of participants, alphanumeric codes were used in the data collection process to identify the participant's role and the interview number. For example, the assisting ministers were identified as AM1, AM2, AM3, and so forth. The hard copy list of alphanumeric codes and actual participant names, as well as the emails indicating consent, have been secured in a safety deposit box that can only be accessed by the researcher. All raw data have been kept confidential, assigned alphanumeric codes, and are accessible only to me and, upon request, to the doctoral capstone committee members. Hard copies of the collected data have been secured in a locked file cabinet, to which I alone have access.

All paper documents have been stored in a locked file cabinet and will be retained for five years beyond the study's completion. At the end of the five years, all paper documents will be securely shredded, burned, and disposed of. Temporary storage of audio-recorded interviews has been stored on a USB drive and maintained in a locked file cabinet. The recorded interviews were stored on a password-protected hard drive, and the USB data was erased. Electronic data collection, including transcribed audio recordings of interviews, has been maintained on a password-protected computer and hard drive for five years beyond completion of this study. Five years after the completion of this study, all digital data will be securely and systematically disposed of by deleting the data from my computer, hard drive, and portable storage devices. Furthermore, all digital data will be overwritten to ensure that the research data will be irretrievable.

Role of Researcher

As the researcher, I revealed my bias toward the topic of this research. I am an ordained clergy member of the ICC. I have served as a senior leader in a local church; I currently serve as an assisting clergy member of another local church and as a coach for the initial licensing process for potential clergy member candidates. Though my roles may seem to create a conflict of interest, I believe my experiences with clergy membership and mentoring provided a unique and valuable insight into the research project. To guard against potential bias in data collection, the interview protocol items have been aligned with the overarching research question and the conceptual framework; furthermore, I did not interview anyone over whom I have had direct supervision, as I extricated myself from any roles within the organization in which I had direct supervision over any participant.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2012) proposed that there are six steps to data analysis, which include organizing the data, coding the data, recognizing any emergent themes, describing the analysis in narrative terms, interpreting the data for meaning, and constructing strategies for validating the data. In this section, I discuss how and when the data were analyzed, provide evidence to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings, and explain the procedures for handling the discrepant case.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were collected from 19 respondents who had experienced some form of formal or informal mentoring from within or outside the ICC, using a semi-structured protocol with open-ended questions for face-to-face interviews via Zoom. Interview responses were hand-coded with consideration toward emergent themes, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. Each interview was transcribed within a week using a voice recognition transcription software application, and each transcript was checked against the recording for accuracy; corrections were made as needed.

Once the transcripts had been checked for accuracy, I conducted a preliminary inductive exploratory analysis of the data to obtain a general sense of what each participant had said (Creswell, 2012). The first stage of data analysis involved reading the first transcript and manually identifying text segments through open coding, assigning code names. I continued to use an open coding process for each manuscript, adding new codes as additional thoughts emerged. Once all the transcripts had been coded, I created a Word document that included all open codes. For ease of grouping, these codes were also transcribed to index cards. During the second stage of analysis, I grouped open codes by sorting the index cards, looking for similar and redundant codes using axial coding, to reduce the code list to a smaller number. Using this new list of codes, I returned to the data. I identified seven themes that were derived from similar codes that aggregate together under one idea, supporting the central concept of the database. These themes included the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader

development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, the self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.

Evidence of Quality

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that qualitative researchers ensure the quality of their research by providing evidence of credibility, dependability, transferability, and promoting action and collaboration (as cited in Lodico et al., 2010, p. 169). Patton (2015) suggested that the accuracy and credibility of study findings can be ensured if the researcher applies four distinct but related elements of inquiry. These elements include the systematic collection of quality data, the conscientious and systematic analysis of data, the credibility of the researcher based on training, experience, and presentation of self, and the reader's philosophical belief in the value of the qualitative inquiry. Although no formulas exist to ensure the quality of qualitative analysis, adhering to the principles helps readers determine the value of the study (Booth et al., 2013; Patton, 2015).

Procedures to Ensure Accuracy and Credibility of Findings

The procedures employed to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings in this basic qualitative study included a systematic approach to data collection, as mentioned in the previous section. Additionally, a systematic approach to data analysis included manual open coding, axial coding, and identification of emergent themes. The findings of this study were validated through member checking, and the significant

findings were presented in narrative form, incorporating participants' words to provide meaning and demonstrate the interconnectedness of emergent themes.

Member Checks

Member checking is "the process in which a researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). For this basic qualitative study, participants were asked to review the preliminary findings for accuracy of wording and to clarify any points that needed further explanation. This process was completed by sending a summary of the research findings to the participants via email to determine the accuracy of the document. Participants had 10 days to review the findings and respond with corrections or accept them, either via email or by phone. If corrections were needed, the corrections were made in the findings, and another summary was sent to finalize member checks.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

Throughout data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and reporting, I kept notes as to my own propensity for bias regarding my study. As a clergy member of the ICC who has experienced both beneficial and less-than-beneficial mentoring from within and outside the ICC, I was mindful that I accurately report the voice of the participants' responses without coloring their opinions with my own. The use of an interview protocol helped me focus on the participants' responses. During data collection and analysis, I confronted my own opinions and prejudices with the data and reported my bias in the final document.

Procedures to Deal With Discrepant Cases

In qualitative research, a discrepant or disconfirming case refers to a participant who provides contradictory or conflicting information regarding data from other participants (Booth et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). As I interviewed each participant only once, the opportunity for discrepancy lay in two potential situations. First, a discrepancy was possible if a difference existed between the interview transcript and what the participant stated in member checking. Second, a disconfirming case arose when one or more participants provided a narrative that differed from most of the participant responses (Booth et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). Rather than dismissing or ignoring these disconfirming cases, I have been forthcoming about any discrepancies in the reporting of the findings, as they can provide a richer and increasingly in-depth insight into the phenomenon being studied (Booth et al., 2013).

Data Analysis Results

This section is focused upon a review of the process of data collection, the findings as related to the local problem and research questions, a discussion of patterns, relationships and themes that are supported by data and aligned with research questions, an account of salient data and discrepant cases, a discussion of evidence of quality and accuracy of the data, and a logical summary of outcomes in relationship to the problem and the research questions.

Review of Data Collection Process

Qualitative data were collected from 19 ICC women clergy who had experienced some formal or informal mentoring and had voluntarily responded to an invitation to participate in this study. Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom, utilizing a semistructured interview protocol with open-ended questions tailored to align with the local problem, the conceptual framework, and the research questions.

Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed using Read AI, a Zoom software plug-in application. The accuracy of the transcriptions was verified by carefully comparing the audio recordings with the transcription content to ensure that no words were inaccurately transcribed or omitted. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code, and the names and locations mentioned by the participants were either redacted or given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The participants' ages and specific assignments were redacted if mentioned by the participants. After each interview, the transcription was reviewed for accuracy, and I carefully read the interview responses one at a time to capture initial thoughts that might enhance my understanding of the respondent's intended meaning.

I conducted an inductive analysis of the data to gain insight into what each participant said, employing three forms of hand coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Cope, 2020; Creswell, 2012). During the first stage of data analysis, I employed open coding. I read the first transcript line by line and identified the participant's thoughts, assigning an open code to each new thought that emerged. I

continued to use an open coding process for each manuscript, adding new codes as additional thoughts emerged. Once all the transcripts had been open-coded, I created a codebook that included all 218 open codes.

For the second stage of data analysis, I employed axial coding, grouping similar open codes from all transcripts and eliminating redundant codes to reduce the code list to a smaller number (Cope, 2020; Creswell, 2012). I repeated this process until I was confident that the axial codes represented all the participants' responses. Using this new list of codes, I revisited the data and identified seven emergent themes through selective coding, summarizing participants' responses to the interview questions (see Cope, 2020; Creswell, 2012). These themes included the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. The process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded was presented, leading to the presentation of emerging themes and subthemes, as well as developing patterns, relationships, and themes supported by the data and reflecting an alignment with the study's research questions.

Findings Related to the Problem and Research Questions

The local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member leaders, which could help fill the current leadership gap. To address this

problem, I designed a basic qualitative study to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC. To ensure that the data collected addressed the local problem, the interview protocol contained interview questions that aligned with each research question (see Tables 2 and 3).

In addition, each participant was asked two background questions regarding the nature of their call to ministry and how they responded to their calling. These questions provided data on the participants' leadership development pathway, from its impetus to their current role, as viewed through Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of WLD. Table 4 summarized the findings of this study and included the seven emergent themes as they aligned with the background and research questions: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor- protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. The responses to the background questions and the research questions are addressed in detail in the following sections (see Table 4).

Table 4

Background and Research Question Alignment with Resulting Themes

Research question	Theme
Background Questions. What was your call to ministry like, and how did you respond to your call?	1. The importance of calling as a motivator. 2. The presence of inhibitors to leadership development.
RQ1 How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceived to be productive toward leader development?	3. Varied mentoring opportunities. 4. The presence of mentor-protégé antecedents. 5. Self-reported growth of the protege. 6. The importance of holistic mentoring strategies.
RQ2 How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceived to be unproductive toward leader development?	3. Varied mentoring opportunities. 7. The absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.

The responses to the background questions and the research questions were addressed in detail in the following sections. All participants were assigned an alphanumeric code to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality; therefore, all mentions of participants and their responses will be coded as "Assisting Ministers" (AM), "Senior Clergy" (SC), "Denominational Leaders" (DL), or "Chaplains" (CH), followed by

a number. For example, the first assisting minister will be designated as AM1, and so forth, for all participants.

Background Questions

Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) early research on women leaders in Christian higher education (CHE) indicated that one of the key motivators for women entering the leadership development journey was a sense of calling (see Figure 1). Whelchel defined *calling* as **"**the call to God and to His service in the vocational sphere of life [as being based on giftedness, desires, affirmations, and human need. Vocational calling is usually stable and permanent over a lifetime" (2012, para. 1, 2). The participants of this study were asked to describe their calling to ministry leadership and explain their response to their call. If indicated, a probing question was asked about how they were affirmed in their calling. Table 5 shows that participant responses revealed the emergence of two major themes, each with its own subthemes. The two major themes were the importance of calling as a motivator to engage in leadership and the presence of inhibitors to leadership development (see Table 5). The resulting subthemes of the importance of calling included the uniqueness of the call to the individual, the evolutionary nature of the call, the clarification of the call over time, and the link between calling and relational responsibility (see Table 5). In response to their call, the participants described inhibitors to their advancement into leadership development; the subthemes included both internal and external inhibitors (see Table 5).

Table 5

Background Question Alignment With Resulting Subthemes and Themes

Background question	Subtheme	Theme
What was your call to ministry like?	Calling is described as unique to the individual. Calling was evolutionary in nature. Clarification of calling over time. Linked to relational responsibility**.**	1. The importance of calling as a motivator
How did you respond to your call?	Described internal inhibitors to the initial calling. Described external inhibitors to the initial calling.	2. The presence of inhibitors to leadership development.

Theme 1: The Importance of Calling as a Motivator. Dahlvig and Longman (2014) recognized the importance of calling as an impetus for women entering a leadership pathway. Longman et al. (2011) defined calling as "a clear sense of purpose, of making a difference in the world and contributing to society in a worthwhile manner" (p. 258). Because those in ministry often describe their vocational choice as a calling and their response to this calling as a journey, it was essential to understand how these women perceived calling as part of their leadership development process.

Participants expressed that their calling was not only important as the impetus for their leadership development, but that it remained important throughout their vocational careers. Analysis of the data revealed several subthemes related to the idea of calling, including its uniqueness to each individual, the evolutionary nature of calling, the increased clarity of their call, and how their responses to their call were linked to relational responsibility.

Calling Subtheme 1: Unique to the Individual. Calling is linked to an individual's giftedness, talents, heart's desires, sense of purpose, and responsibility to God and others (Longman et al., 2011; Longman & Bray, 2017; Whelchel, 2012). The responses of the participants varied greatly in many ways, as would be expected, as most view a calling to vocational ministry as uniquely personal. For example, differences were reported in the age at which the participant first sensed a calling, how they sensed their calling, how the participant responded to their initial calling, and how they felt affirmed and confident in their calling.

Participants reported "hearing" or "sensing" their calling at various ages in their lives, from childhood to teens, or later in adulthood. Seven of the 19 participants noted that they began to sense their call when they were very young. AM4 stated, "I just found myself in this place where I always felt like I had a higher purpose in calling for my life. I just didn't know what it was. From a very young age I felt that way." Of these seven participants who experienced their call during childhood, five stated that they were brought up in Christian homes where they were exposed to a walk of faith and church

leadership and viewed their calling as normative or a part of life. AM2 stated, "I grew up in a Christian home with parents who are pastors. Being part of church and involved in ministry [was] just the way of life." Though these participants sensed their calling very early in life, their callings were described in very vague terms.

Three participants felt called to ministry and leadership in their teenage years. These participants described their call to ministry and leadership in much more specific terms. For example, they could describe the time and place of their calling in great detail. One assisting minister (AM5) shared her quick journey from salvation to leading a youth ministry, all within her fifteenth year of life. She felt that "God started to develop me and give me a passion for his people" while she served. Another participant shared the story of her calling in concrete and personal terms while attending her first year of Bible college. While sitting on a hill on campus, this now senior clergy member (SC7) sensed the presence of the Lord. She relays her experience this way:

> I felt like the Lord had seen me and like I was the only one on earth that mattered, and I was like, 'Jesus, whatever you ask, I'll do.' I remember picking some flowers that were like wildflowers and I put it in my Bible and I closed and just wrote this little note to the Lord as I knew that God created me, and I knew he had a purpose and a plan, and I was just excited to be a part of what the Lord was doing … I didn't know exactly what my life would look like, I thought it was going to be a

> teacher. And it was. I knew that no matter what I did, I wanted to share the good news about Jesus (SC7).

The third woman, a denominational leader (DL6), recounted her very emotional calling that she received at a youth camp at the age of 14. She described simultaneously receiving an emotional healing from childhood trauma and her calling. DL6 stated, "The Lord really freed me [at] that camp. And I said that, you know, he said the fact that he was going to use my testimony for good, right?" She added that she felt that this experience set the trajectory for the rest of her life.

The other nine participants received their calling as adults, most while serving and some while serving alongside their spouses. Interestingly, these women seemed to respond based on relational responsibility versus an innate sense of calling or a dramatic calling that the teenagers experienced. Most of the participants were serving in capacities to fill a felt need in the ministry, such as serving in children's ministry, on prayer teams, or in women's ministries. One of the district leaders (DL2) described this best when she shared, "I really felt called to just participate and to do what I could at the church…I took a job on staff, but I just started feeling a real desire. I felt a calling to not so much to preach but to pastor, to love people, to care for people, to mentor people" (DL2).

Many of those who were married joined in ministry alongside their spouses without initially sensing a personal calling during the leadership development process. One participant describes this spousal response this way: "I had always said yes to God in service with my husband. So it would it [then], you know, it was shifting from a co-

calling, so to speak, to an individual calling" (DL4). Many of the women who began serving as partners with their husbands described situations where others pointed out their calling to them, or they sensed an individual call to enter a leadership development pathway of their own at a later date.

Calling Subtheme 2: Evolutionary in Nature. Many participants described their call as an evolving process that led them toward further advancement in their leadership development, implying that they viewed their calling not only as the impetus of their leadership development but also as an important motivator throughout their vocational journey. One assisting minister (AM1) described her calling as an "unfolding" and shared that she enjoyed "watching to see, you know, that what he's [God] called me to do is actually what I'm walking in." Another assisting minister described her evolving response to her call as entering "doors that God opened," explaining that "I promised the Lord that if he opened the doors I would walk through them. That is how I got my call, and that's what I've been doing ever since" (AM4). Interestingly, the majority of the leaders who described the evolutionary nature of calling as a motivator for advancement in leadership were three of the seven senior clergy leaders and four of the six denominational leaders. One senior clergy member recounted that she "had a call in my life since I was a little girl and through some life experiences, the Lord brought me to the place of really surrendering my life to the Lord and as time has gone on, it has just evolved" (SC4). It seemed that, over time, the evolutionary nature of their call and their

awareness of these changes compelled these women to advance their leadership development.

Calling Subtheme 3: Increased Clarity Over Time. Perhaps one reason for this continued advancement is that the participants characterized their calling as gaining clarity and focus over time and through varied experiences. Many participants, whether referred to as children or adults, initially described their vocational calling as vague and lacking direction. One participant, credentialed as a co-pastor, recognized that she had been called for a long time and described herself as "becoming more aware, allowing it [her calling and leadership capacity] to become part of my identity" (DL4). Another denominational leader (DL6) explained that she spent the first ten years of her ministry asking herself and the Lord who she was becoming and what she was to become.

Others described the importance of mentors and other significant people helping them to see and consider the next step in their leadership development. Participants said they felt their calls were affirmed by professors, parents, pastors, and other leaders throughout their lifetime. For example, one divisional leader (DL1) described the importance of her father-pastor in answering her pursuit of leadership:

> I said, 'You know, I would be interested in being licensed if that's, that's the thing. If this is applicable to licensing.' and so he's like, 'Absolutely this, this works'. And we went, I went through the process, and I ended up being licensed as a teen…. we had identified that [leadership] in ourselves, and he had confirmed [my call] (DL1).

This leader went on to explain that it had been her father, a pastor, who had been her strongest support in her journey from licensed minister to denominational leader.

Protégés also expressed that mentors helped clarify, solidify, and focus their goals, providing them with encouragement in their pursuit of leadership development. One assisting minister (AM1) shared that to seeing other women in leadership was instrumental to her leadership pathway, saying, "it gave me the confidence to be able to go forward in what God has called me to do, but also to recognize my calling, whereas before, you know, I just couldn't really tell you what my calling was" (AM1). Although participants emphasized the importance of their initial and clarified calling, perhaps the greatest motivation to respond to their calling was a sense of relational responsibility.

Calling Subtheme 4: Linked to Relational Responsibility. Researchers have linked an individual's calling with their giftedness, talents, heart's desires, sense of purpose, and responsibility to God and others (Longman et al., 2011; Longman & Bray, 2017; Whelchel, 2012). However, Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) early research in women's leader development indicated that relational responsibility was one of the strongest motivators for women in leadership. *Relational responsibility* is often described as the personal connections and devotion to others among those who share a common goal rather than the pursuit of leadership for personal gain (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). In other words, women might enter leadership to care for others or in response to a felt need.

It was evident in many of the participants' stories that a sense of responsibility to others and to God was one of the most significant reasons these women answered their calling. For example, one assisting minister (AM5) responded to her call because she realized she had a passion to lead people to Jesus, to care for God's people, and to share God's Word. Another assisting minister (AM3) worked in a secular alcohol and drug treatment facility and was asked to bring her skills and talents for caring for those who have a substance use disorder into the church ministry. She explained that her pastor had "asked us to do something and it just started there and from that you just like catch on fire and you feel, oh, this is exactly, I have passion and energy and fire for" (AM3). This sense of relational responsibility extended past the needs of other human beings to an expression of devotion to God and his mission. Many stepped in initially by functioning in soup kitchens, children's church, hospital visitation, etc., and probably would concur with DL2, who said, "I really felt called to just participate and to do what I could at the church".

Although Dahlvig and Longman (2014) mentioned calling as a motivator at the beginning of the leadership development process, many participants in the current study expressed the importance of calling, not only as an impetus for their leadership development but also throughout their vocational journey. One denominational leader (DL6) probably described this idea best: "So again, one yes has led to the other yes, to a different assignment and different types of leadership opportunities. But always saying yes to the Lord and holding true to the plans and purposes that he has for my life." One

"yes" leading to another, another act of obedience, perhaps best describes how these women responded to their calling. many also experienced numerous inhibitors, both internal and external, to their calling and progression in leadership development.

Theme 2: The Presence of Inhibitors as Related to Calling. Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) women's leadership model posits that women often decide whether to engage in the next stage of leadership development based on the amount of validation or resistance they receive from others. If a woman experiences too much resistance from others, she might retreat from advancement or withdraw altogether from leadership (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The body of research indicated many barriers or inhibitors to women's leadership development that included gender inequality, male-oriented organizational structure/culture, difficulty juggling multiple roles, lack of mentors, church tradition, biblical interpretation, and denominational doctrine that do not support women in ministry (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Campbell-Reed, 2019; Carbajal, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Grandy & Mavin, 2020). Participants in this study reported the presence of inhibitors, both internal and external, that were common to women leaders and Christian women leaders during their initial foray into engagement in their leadership development pathway.

Inhibitors Subtheme 1: Internal Inhibitors Related to Calling. Participants of this study reported three major internal inhibitors to their engagement in leadership and leadership development. The first was the internalization of a church tradition that did not

acknowledge women as clergy; the second was the challenge of balancing ministry and life; and the third was being underqualified.

Coleman (2020) suggested that women who have taken on traditionally male roles may face challenges in their own perceptions of themselves as leaders. Many participants described a reluctance to answer their call based on their own and others' beliefs that women could not be called to church leadership, stemming from their views on church doctrine, tradition, and biblical interpretations. Many of the participants of this study grew up in traditional church settings where women were not raised to or offered senior leadership roles. One senior leader (SC6) stated, "I kind of came from a background where women weren't really pastors. You know, it's, there was no prejudice against it, it's just, it wasn't in my context, so I didn't think about it." Many of these women, who had internalized these views, related that they were able to overcome their reluctance to answer their call to ministry when they encountered someone who encouraged them to do so.

A review of the literature indicated that the single most significant barrier reported by women seeking to engage in a leadership pathway was the challenge of creating and maintaining a balance between life and ministry responsibilities (Coleman, 2020; The Barna Group, 2017). Some women in this study delayed their response to their call to ministry leadership because they could not see how to maintain a healthy balance between their life and ministry. The one chaplain who was interviewed stated, "I personally know it [delayed response to calling] is because I wanted to raise my babies.

Like, I don't want to go and lead an organization and a church and have someone else raise my kids" (CH1). Delaying their pursuit of calling was especially true for those women who received their call as young women, as they felt that the timing was not right and they needed to raise their families first. Others raised their families while pursuing leadership, but spoke of the expectations on them as women to provide the majority of parenting while trying to serve in senior leadership roles.

Many of the participants also struggled to respond to their calling because they felt unworthy or unqualified. One district leader (DL3) remembered the first time she sat at a table of leaders who were introducing themselves and stating their backgrounds and qualifications. Although others listed out their degrees and pedigree, she stated, "Um, I'm a stay-at-home mom who loves Jesus. And I'm just one of those people who says yes when he [God] gives me an opportunity" (DL3). She stated that this was a defining moment in her leadership journey because she realized that God indeed had chosen her, despite feeling underqualified. These women were facing both internal and external barriers to their calling.

Inhibitors Subtheme 2: External Inhibitors Related to Calling. Our world system and most of the global Christian church are rooted in a historical patriarchal tradition, which restricts the level of participation of women as leaders through doctrine and biblical interpretation (Akpanke Odey & Ajima Onah, 2020; Ferguson, 2018; Kgatle, 2019; Kobo, 2018). The external inhibitors to leadership development experienced by the participants in this study were often those familiar to women, both within and outside the

church, as found in the literature. These included traditional church culture, biblical interpretation, and stereotypical gender roles.

Because many of the participants in this study grew up in a church culture and tradition that did not affirm women in leadership, they often described times when mentoring, leadership development, and advancement opportunities were given to their male counterparts but not offered to them. One leader who grew up in such a background shared that she desired to engage in leadership development. However, she often witnessed opportunities for leadership being presented more frequently to young men and less often to women in the church setting (CH1).

Much of the patriarchal stance around women in church leadership was rooted in a patriarchal biblical interpretation of the Scriptures (Kgatle, 2019; Langford, 2017). Though Pentecostal exegesis of these "problem passages" purported to support women at all levels in the ICC, some participants of this study expressed that they often saw a more dominant male-oriented presence in senior leadership roles. One senior leader (SC4) shared that, although she felt women were more accepted in leadership roles within the denomination, some stereotypical expectations remained and needed to be addressed, allowing them to be processed out with both men and women clergy present. Women in society and the workplace were stereotypically viewed as communal, passive, caring, nurturing, and supportive (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Coleman, 2020; Ferguson, 2018). One leader shared that she often missed parts of a leadership training because the women

were expected to “clean up after lunch” although her male counterparts were allowed to return to the training event on time (AM5).

Though many participants of this study expressed the presence of external and internal inhibitors when answering their call, they all eventually answered their individual calling. They began their journey of leadership development and advancement. In the following paragraphs, I will share their responses as to how mentoring helped or hindered their leadership journey.

Research Question 1

A grasp of the characteristics, benefits, and limitations of both formal and informal mentoring strategies for women’s leadership development may increase understanding of how existing ICC women clergy members perceive the possibilities of leadership development. RQ1 asked, “How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceived to be productive toward leader development?” Participants were asked to describe both their formal and informal mentoring experiences, share the perceived benefits of these experiences, and provide recommendations for others regarding both formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Formal and informal mentoring strategies were addressed separately, encompassing the themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants’ interview responses.

Formal Mentoring Experiences. Formal mentoring strategies are often perceived as traditional and hierarchical, top-down approaches that provide expert

oversight of a protégé for a specific period, focusing on career development, imparting skills and knowledge, organizational orientation, and acclimation (Ghosh et al., 2020; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). In this basic qualitative study, participants were asked to describe any formal mentoring experiences they had, the perceived benefits of those experiences, and their recommendations for designing a formal mentoring opportunity. Four major themes were identified from participant responses: varied formal mentoring opportunities, positive mentor-protégé relationships, the self-reported growth of protégés, and the importance of holistic mentoring strategies. Table 6 provides a summary of emergent themes and subthemes.

Table 6

RQ1 Alignment with Resulting Subthemes and Themes of Formal Mentoring Strategies

Interview question	Subtheme	Theme
Please describe any formal mentoring that you may have received as a clergy member, either from within or outside the ICC.	Varied in form. Varied in quality. Varied availability.	3. Varied mentoring opportunities.
What, if any, aspects of your formal mentoring experiences were beneficial toward your leader development?	Mentor's character. Characteristics of a mentoring relationship. Nature of mentoring interactions.	4. The presence of mentor-protégé antecedents.
	Professional growth. Personal growth.	5. Self-reported growth of protégé.
If you were to design a formal mentoring process toward leadership development, what would you include	Moral strategies. Aesthetic strategies. Intellectual strategies.	6. The importance of holistic mentoring strategies.

Theme 3: Varied Formal Mentoring Opportunities. Participants were asked to describe those mentoring experiences that they considered formal mentoring strategies. Responses varied greatly, as participants described their experiences in terms of the form, quality, and availability of the mentoring strategy (see Table 6). Each of these subthemes, representing varied mentoring strategies, was discussed separately.

The first subtheme was that participants of this study reported formal mentoring opportunities in *various forms* that endured for different lengths of time. Often form followed function, meaning that the type of mentoring strategy was based on the purpose or expected outcomes of the mentoring opportunity. Participants reported experiences that included the initial credentialing process, one-on-one mentoring, "on-the-job" mentoring, and mentoring in the form of cohorts. Four women relayed that their formal mentoring experience was limited to the initial credentialing/licensing process early in their vocational career. One senior clergy member relayed, "The only thing I could probably think of that would be like [formal] is when we got licensed doing polity…. I got pretty much, you know, just licensed and then everything else was just learn as you go" (SC3). Each of these four participants purported that the rest of their mentoring opportunities were informal in nature.

A few participants described one-on-one mentoring experiences with either a professor or another pastor during their time in college, seminary, or on assignment. These intentional experiences often occurred early in the vocational call of each person and included conversations about life and ministry balance. One assisting minister described her time with her mentor as, "probably the most structured that I've ever had, where we were intentional about meeting…. much of our conversation was relational and personal" (AM3). Another study participant described her seminary mentor as one who began speaking to her prior to her licensing. SC5 related, "She kept like talking to me a lot and she was kept pressing it, you know… And she just kept encouraging me to do

it…. she just walked along with me." SC5 described this mentor, a woman clergy member herself, as one who sought her out and persisted in encouraging the younger woman to pursue her vocational calling.

Some participants described their formal one-on-one mentoring as "on-the-job" training, which seemed to occur at the onset of their vocational call and first ministry assignment or when they advanced in their career and took on a new role or assignment. Though initiated by their direct supervisor and focused on the responsibilities of the new role, participants shared that the mentoring often went beyond the task and skill acquisition of the role to include conversations about personal growth and life-ministry balance. One denominational leader described her mentoring opportunity as intentional and encouraging, stating, "I started working here in 2021 [and from] the get go we've had weekly meetings. Tuesdays at ten are our standing day… and he's been so encouraging" (DL3). Another leader (AM2) shared that though her "on-the-job" mentoring was centered around her skill development as a newly hired children's ministry director, her mentor expressed interest in her spiritual walk as well, stating, "We met weekly [and] talked about things, ministry, my own personal spiritual walk, that type of thing" (AM2).

The majority of the participants who engaged in formal mentoring opportunities described their experiences as participation in cohorts either within or outside the ICC denomination. Each of these cohorts had a specific focus, such as women in leadership, emotional health, or senior leadership development. Each cohort included reading, regular meetings via Zoom, and relational networking. Most cohorts met monthly for a

period of eight to 12 months and culminated in a "summit" or face-to-face weekend. Many recipients had participated in one such cohort called Women in Ministry Leadership (WIML). One assisting minister relayed that WIML was "the most instrumental [formal] mentoring … I have developed skills for myself in ministry and then as a leader outside of ministry. That just continues to further educate me in my leadership role and which is what has led me into women's ministry" (AM1). Another participant (SC2) explained that the WIML experience "helped women in ministry leadership to realize their specific calling. I think just so that it would help them fulfill and live out their gifts and what God has called them to do" (SC2). Most participants who engaged in cohort experiences seemed to speak of these opportunities fondly. Whatever form these formal mentoring opportunities took, participants reported that the quality of the mentoring strategy was crucial for their continued engagement in ministry and leadership development.

The second subtheme of the varied formal mentoring was the *varied quality* of mentoring opportunities experienced by the participants (see Table 6). In 2003, Wanberg et al. found that the most successful mentoring opportunities were often characterized by the quality of mentoring interactions, specifically in terms of frequency, scope, and the strength of influence. Participants of this study often described the quality of their formal mentoring in similar terms. Participants in this study expressed that regularly scheduled meetings were helpful to their leader development because they provided structure and opportunities for professional and personal growth. AM3 stated, "My time [with another

pastor was] probably the most structured that I've ever had, where we were intentional about meeting."

Scope speaks to the breadth of the mentor-protégé interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). Most participants implied that the quality of their formal mentoring experiences improved when the mentoring went beyond the scope of acquiring skills and knowledge about their role and included discussions about their personal faith walk and life-ministry balance. One assisting minister (AM2) described with fondness her first oversight role in children's ministry and the mentoring she received from her direct supervisor. She recounted, "So that was my first real experience… we [supervisor] met, talked about things ministry, my own personal spiritual walk, that type of thing" (AM2).

Participants also characterized the quality of the varied mentoring forms in terms of strength of influence. Du and Wang (2017) described the strength of influence as "the degree to which proteges are influenced by the mentoring they receive" (p. 323). One assisting minister, who continued to meet with her mentor for several years, related that her mentor was "available to me, listening to me, making it real, you know… that kind of followed me through an ongoing issue" (AM3). A denominational leader also reported that she had been in a mentoring relationship with her male mentor for years, noting that "He has been a coach, he's been a mentor, he's been a friend, he's been a pastor and a trainer" (DL1). Although the majority of participants did not report such long-term mentoring experiences, they often expressed that the influence of the mentor extended beyond their formal mentor-protégé engagement. One senior leader aptly described this

phenomenon of influence when referring to her mentor, who had since passed away. "Whenever she saw me, she was like, 'I remember you … you needed so much encouragement.' And she did; she encouraged the heck out of me [until] I just I knew I had it in me [to lead]" (SC5).

The third subtheme was that of the *varied availability* of formal mentor opportunities. Participants reported varying availability in the amount and timing of these opportunities. The perceived number of available opportunities to participate in formal mentoring ranged from none beyond the credentialing process to a large number of opportunities. Four of the 19 participants, all senior clergy or denominational leaders, reported having no formal experiences beyond the credentialing process. One denominational leader stated, "I really haven't been on the receiving end of really any formal mentoring" [beyond the licensing process] (DL2). Perhaps the most interesting responses came from an experienced senior clergy member (SC6) who had served in several denominational roles in her career. When asked about her formal experiences, she relayed that, though she sought formal mentoring, others perceived her as so capable that they did not offer to mentor her. Instead, she put herself intentionally in God's hands and considered Him her formal mentor. Only a few participants recalled having several formal mentoring opportunities. One denominational leader (DL4) recounted having had several mentoring opportunities from both within and outside the denomination, although most other participants reported having had only one or two formal mentoring opportunities.

Interestingly, a few participants shared that much of their leadership training within the ICC did not occur until they were further along in their vocational careers and were on track for senior clergy or denominational roles. One senior clergy member recalled, "[I] did not receive a whole lot [of formal mentoring] until probably the last five to six years" (SC7). Another senior clergy member reported that she probably had more invested in her as a senior leader, and that it was offered when she sought it out for herself, feeling she had been "thrown into the water over my head in some ways" (SC3). Formal mentoring opportunities varied in form, quality, and availability for the participants, and those who received formal mentoring could easily identify the benefits of these opportunities.

Benefits of Formal Experiences. As part of RQ1, participants were asked to describe, if any, aspects of their formal mentoring experiences that they perceived as beneficial or productive toward their leader development. Those who reported having had formal mentoring felt that these experiences were largely beneficial and productive toward their leadership development. The perceived benefits were categorized into two themes –the presence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents and the self-reported growth of the protégé. Subsequently, each of these themes was divided into subthemes and was discussed in detail (see Table 6).

Theme 4: The Presence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. Wanberg et al. (2003) suggested that the outcomes of mentoring, both proximal and distal, are often influenced by the presence or absence of positive antecedents in three mentoring

dynamics. These antecedents included the mentor's character, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of mentoring interactions. Participants in this study reported the presence of each of these antecedents as beneficial to their mentoring experience and leadership development, which were discussed as subthemes.

The first subtheme that emerged as a positive subtheme was the antecedent of *the mentor's character.* Participants often portrayed their most effective mentors as those who were of "good and godly" character or "walked the walk" of Christian life and ministry. One denominational leader relayed that she often filters her willingness to engage in formal mentoring by wondering, "How like Jesus are you?" (DL1). She mentioned that she is seeking specific traits in a mentor, such as kindness, respect, and honesty (DL1). Other participants reported that their mentors modeled Christ-like behavior by loving them without judgment. One senior clergy member expressed the importance of a nonjudgmental posture of her mentors, stating, "Several of the people that I would have called my most precious mentors allowed me to express things that really didn't look like Jesus without judgment" (SC6). Another participant shared that she appreciated "the strength of God" in her women mentors and that her cohort opportunity provided her with access to strong, godly women, which she had not previously experienced in her leadership development pathway (CH1). Another denominational leader spoke of how pivotal her exposure to godly women mentors had been, saying, "I think the experience has taught me at new levels how to be a follower of Jesus" (DL3). Almost as important as the mentor's character was to this study's participants, the nature

of the mentor-protégé relationships also determined if the participants classified their formal mentoring experiences as beneficial.

The second subtheme that became apparent was that the antecedents of the *characteristics of mentor-protégé relationships* had the potential to produce positive outcomes or successful mentoring toward leader development. According to RCT, positive mentor-protégé relationships are often bidirectional, benefiting both the protégé and the mentor, and are characterized by confidentiality, flattened power, and trust (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2016). An assisting minister expressed that she often looked for "a safe person to be able to ask all the things" (AM4). Another denominational leader stated that, "You have to get somebody who you feel that you can trust, that you feel like really can invest in you" (DL5). Being someone that the protégé could trust or would consider trustworthy was a common trait that these women looked for in a mentor.

The third subtheme that became apparent was the positive impact of the presence of the third antecedent- the *nature of the mentoring interactions.* Participants reported that regular meeting times, accessibility to the mentor, active listening on the part of the mentor, and being held accountable all contributed to their positive perceptions of the mentor-protégé interactions. One senior clergy member reported, "I found it beneficial because it was regular meeting times. It was, you know, regular and consistent, I felt [the] mentor zeroed in on what I was saying and remembered what I was saying. Followed up on things with me, challenged me, held me accountable to things that I was saying to her.

So, that was a big benefit to me. I couldn't get away with things, so to speak. And I needed that to grow in that time" (SC2).

Who the mentor was and how they related to the protégé mattered to the participants. Moreover, the presence of these positive mentoring antecedents provided environments where the protégés often reported feeling encouraged, seen, and heard, which supported their efforts to seek both professional and personal growth in their leadership development pathway.

Theme 5: Self-Reported Leadership Growth. One of the most common benefits of formal mentoring reported by the study's participants was self-reported leadership growth, both professional and personal. Both types of growth are identified as subthemes and are discussed in greater detail here.

The first subtheme was that of *self-reported professional growth*. Participants reported that their formal mentoring included the acquisition of skills and knowledge that helped them to advance in their leadership abilities both in their particular role and within the denomination. Some of these skills included acquiring role-specific tasks, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills, as well as organizational language and healthy communication skills. Formal mentoring around role-specific skills often occurred early in the participants' vocational careers or at the onset of a higher position within the ICC. For example, one role-specific skill that was mentioned was the ability to "divide the Word rightly." One senior leader recalled that early in her ministerial career, her mentor led her by example and practiced the way to "break it down for me to understand" (SC5).

Some participants spoke of gaining role-specific skills by observing their mentor in action. One denominational leader, who described herself as "a very practical person" who learned through seeing and observing her mentor in active pursuit of her role, stated, "I find that 'just in time learning' is super helpful to me…and that it is really going to be much more tangible and much more meaningful to me" (DL5). A senior clergy member (SC1) stated that her pastor-mentor was "very instrumental" in her learning of ministerial skills, such as setting church direction, teaching the congregation, understanding group dynamics, and making compromises that benefited all concerned.

Vocational ministry in the Church is, in large part, about relationships and the challenges that arise within those relationships. These challenges require that women learn the skills of problem-solving and conflict resolution. Participants often reported that many of these skills were more "caught than taught," as their mentors shared their knowledge and experience with them in both word and deed by having them participate in such situations. One participant realized that her mentor provided her with ample opportunities to be present in difficult situations and then debriefed those situations to help her learn how to solve problems and resolve conflicts. She relayed, "So I saw how they even approached the person and how that played out and how they reacted to different scenarios. I found that to be super helpful for me. Just to watch people do it, you know, in person, right in front of me" (DL5). One assisting minister relayed how crucial it was to her leadership development to address conflict more professionally, rather than how she had in the past. She stated that, "Identifying things, not, you know, being passive

aggressive or shoving things down and letting things go, ignoring things, but really just learning how to address things immediately in a godly manner" (AM1). Conflict resolution and reconciliations are part of the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ and His disciples. The participants of this study often spoke fondly of the opportunity to learn these skills as part of their leadership development pathway.

Every organization has its own culture and language. Part of formal mentoring involves transferring knowledge from the mentor to the protégé regarding organizational operations and culture (Ghosh et al., 2020; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Revelo & Loui, 2016). Many of the participants in this current study felt that their mentors provided the language to give voice to and deepen their understanding of the Church's ministry, their specific roles, and their calling. One participant emphasized the importance of language acquisition in her formal mentoring experience, as she had lacked it in her upbringing. She stated, "But it [mentoring] gave me language for certain things. … And for me, that is really important because I come from a second-generation Mexican American upbringing, and I also was raised in a Hispanic church, so that didn't necessarily give us the language for certain biblical truths (DL6). Another participant, a denominational leader, stated, "You know, [mentoring] strengthened my vocational [life], you know, helped me to have vocabulary for, you know, certain situations that were happening in my life (DL4). Participants in this study appeared to value learning the vocabulary of an organization. They saw this acquisition as a means to improve their confidence and advance on their leadership development pathway.

The second subtheme of self-reported growth was that of *personal growth*. Many participants reported that their formal mentoring experiences led to increased self-awareness and self-efficacy, motivating them to continue engaging in their leadership development. According to Carden et al. (2022), "self-awareness consists of a range of components, which can be developed through focus, evaluation and feedback, and provides an individual with an awareness of their internal state (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses), that drives their behaviors (beliefs, values, and motivations) and an awareness of how this impacts and influences others" (p. 164).

Some participants in this study described receiving feedback from mentors that led to an increase in self-awareness regarding their calling, strengths, and weaknesses. Referring to her initial experience with her mentor, one assisting minister recalled that her mentor, "saw something in me that I didn't quite have defined yet" (AM2). A denominational leader declared that her increased self-awareness was the primary benefit of her formal mentoring experience, stating that she felt the experience "provided [her] with a feeling of being seen as a person and a leader" (DL4). Participants reported increased self-awareness about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as increased confidence in their roles as women and leaders. One senior clergy reported that she was able to "discover things that I allowed to either hinder me, as a person, as woman… and allowed me to also recognize some of my strengths" (SC4). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested that any increase in a leader's self-awareness has the potential to enable the leader to respond to leadership development from a more authentic self. The participants

self-reported increased self-awareness, and the resulting confidence seemed to propel many of these women toward increased self-efficacy.

Maddux (2002) described "s*elf-efficacy* as the leader's perception of their ability to perform a task given their skills in each circumstance" (as cited in Dahlvig & Longman, 2014, p. 20). Although many participants did not specifically use the term "self-efficacy" to describe their increased confidence in performing their roles, they did describe increased self-efficacy in terms of skills learned and increased confidence in leading. Some of the skills learned, in addition to those previously mentioned, included self-care and achieving a balance between life and ministry. One assisting minister stated, "[Mentoring] really helped me to fine tune some leadership skills in that I address things [now], I don't hold things in. I also learned to care for myself… and not over functioning but also setting healthy boundaries (AM1). Many participants viewed these skills as essential to their growth as leaders due to the numerous demands of ministerial life.

According to Dahlvig and Longman (2014), if a woman completes the task of self-efficacy, she moves toward the next stage of the women's leader development model, toward leadership experience, where she can draw upon what she has learned about herself, leadership, and the organization to continue her growth. One senior leader probably summarized best the impact of mentoring on her professional and personal growth that echoed the response of the other participants, "I have walked in my calling in a more confident way. I still have a long way to go. But it has changed my perspective on how I look at how God has called me to minister as a woman" (SC2). Having

successfully traversed this stage of women's leadership development, participants eagerly described what they considered essential in the development of holistic mentoring strategies.

Theme 6: The Importance of Holistic Mentoring Strategies. Goodwin et al. (2021) defined holistic mentoring strategies as "practices that intertwine the professional with the personal, and bring together the aesthetic, intellectual, and moral" in supporting mentees (p. 707). As part of the RQ1 interview protocol, participants were asked, "If you were asked to design a formal mentoring process toward leadership development, what would you include"? With great fervor, many participants eagerly described *holistic mentoring strategies* that they perceived to be essential to a formal mentoring process that would address both the perceived professional and personal needs of developing women. Based on Goodwin et. al.'s (2021) definition, the participants' responses to creating positive formal mentoring experiences were categorized into the subthemes of moral, aesthetic, and intellectual strategies (see Table 6). Each of these subthemes was discussed in depth.

The first subtheme was *moral strategies*. Goodwin et al. (2021) described moral strategies as those that deal with the protégé's identity, integrity, and equilibrium. The process requires rigorous self-examination, gaining a proper understanding of the world or context in which they serve and live, and is best done in community (Goodwin et al., 2021). Likewise, the participants in this study often recommended that formal mentoring

experiences include opportunities for self-discovery, shared experiences, and relational time within cohort communities.

Many participants suggested taking several assessments, such as the Myers-Briggs personality assessment (Myers-Briggs, 1987), a relational style assessment, a learning style assessment such as Kolb's (1976), a spiritual giftings test, and a Christian vocational assessment called the APEST (Hirsch, 2007), so that a leader could better understand herself as a leader and a woman. One senior clergy member expressed that this increased self-awareness could help the leader to be her more authentic self (SC6). One denominational leader explained that her own mentoring had included these types of assessments, and she identified the added benefit as seeing herself as whole, saying, "Oh, so I'm not broken because I'm this way, that's just how I'm wired" (DL2). Another denominational leader related that these personal assessments could help a leader understand who they are, the way God created them, and how God would want them to serve (DL5). This increased understanding of self and calling can help a leader increase their self-efficacy as they pursue their leadership development.

The participants of this study often expressed a desire to include shared experience as part of a formal mentoring opportunity that intertwined both personal and professional elements of the leaders' lives. Many participants would create cohorts that included experienced mentors as well as those they considered peers. Cohorts or peer mentoring groups (PMGs) benefit both the mentor and the protégé, increasing self-awareness, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging (Adkisson et al., 2020; Alvarez &

Lazzari, 2016; Dajani et al., 2021). One denominational leader described how she envisioned this experience as follows:

> I would also provide a relational component for female leaders to integrate with other female leaders who carry weight and responsibility to develop friendship and safe spaces to process leadership questions and to ask what's going on in their lives as part of relational support (DL4).

The need for relationship-building time was often linked to the idea of creating a sense of community among the participants of this study.

Research suggests that cohorts or PMGs often result in networking and community building among their members (Adkisson et al., 2020; Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Dajani et al., 2021). One denominational leader emphasized that these experiences should have a "community component" to enable women to "live life on life" beyond the event, thereby supporting the ongoing development of the leader (DL6). One assisting minister commented that women leaders should be engaged in both the local church community and the denominational community as a point of accountability, while "walking in all things of life" with their mentors (AM5). Although the moral strategies were often the primary focus of discussions on building formal mentoring experiences, the aesthetic strategies were also important to the participants in this study.

The second subtheme was *aesthetic strategies*. Aesthetic strategies are employed to connect proteges to both the external beauty of the world and their own internal beauty, with the intent of putting mentees at ease and making them open to learning

(Goodwin et al., 2021). These strategies can include creating neutral or "safe" spaces for learning and relationship building, attending to the mentee's sense of beauty for self-care, and increasing their sense of worth to build self-confidence (Goodwin et al., 2021). Participants in this study seemed to understand the power of the environment in which effective mentoring might take place, describing not only what a space should include, but also who occupied the space and the activities that should occur to help the leader be open to learning.

Most participants relayed that these cohort opportunities should culminate in a weekend face-to-face opportunity. And not once did a participant describe a corporate space as the location for a formal mentoring opportunity. Instead, most felt that the location should be beautiful and in a natural setting. One denominational leader purported that she would be "doing it [culminating summit event] at a beach house where we're all in one house" (DL3). Another participant even recommended that these formal experiences should be "like a home experience…you need to sit at a table, take out the real dishes [and] be real with each other" (SC5).

Another important element was that the environment should support time for developing relationships with God and one another. Participants suggested allowing for times of solitude, silence, and reflection. One senior leader expressed that she would duplicate the type of environment in which she herself had participated, recalling, "I loved the freedom, so I would probably design something that allows for silence and solitude. … Having time alone with Jesus in a beautiful space. Being able to hear the

Holy Spirit speak to you does wonders for the soul" (SC7). Some participants expressed the need for quiet. Others wanted to fill their time with conversations. One senior leader professed that she appreciated what she dubbed "incidental teaching" and related "I would put time aside just to have conversations with people because it is in those incidental teaching moments that we learn much" (SC1). Although alone time with God or other godly women was important to these participants, many leaders also made sure to provide ways for participants to be refreshed throughout the event.

Participants suggested that cohort members be given opportunities to choose how they might attend to their self-care for a portion of the summit weekend. Drawing upon their own mentoring experiences, the participants suggested activities for both rest and restoration that included fun activities and even naps. One senior leader shared how much she appreciated that time for rest was built into a summit weekend she attended. She stated, "When I showed up on Thursday night, the leader said I know that you have six kids and you don't get away a lot, but I want you to know that if you don't want to come to any of these meetings and all you want to do is rest, that's okay" (SC7). Playing together was also suggested by participants as a way to build relationships and be refreshed. One denominational leader (DL3) relayed that she would include time for face-to-face interaction, play, and sharing stories as part of the relationship-building process. Another senior clergy member shared that "There has to be some elements of fun and relationship building" (SC2). Providing an aesthetically pleasing environment that would be conducive to relationship building and rest and refreshment was important to these

women; however, they also stressed the importance of learning as part of a formal mentoring process.

The third subtheme was *intellectual strategies*. According to Goodwin et al. (2021), intellectual strategies are employed to help the mentee reconnect with their core inspirations and envision their future selves as leaders, thereby propelling them toward continued leadership development. Intellectual strategies included sharing specific skills and tools to help mentees manage their professional and personal lives. Tools are the means to accomplish a task or practice an ability, and a skill is the ability to perform a task well. For example, to improve self-awareness (skill), one might employ a Myers-Briggs assessment. When asked to design a formal mentoring program, participants stressed the employment of both skills and tools that addressed the specific focus, goals, and anticipated outcomes of the particular experience. Participants suggested that three skills be taught through formal learning experiences: emotional health, relational skills, and life and ministry balance. Each of these was discussed with the accompanying recommended tools.

Perhaps the skill that over 30% of participants were most passionate about was developing emotional health. Emotional health refers to a person's ability to recognize and manage positive and negative emotions (Scazzero, 2015). Many of the participants shared about the harm that they or others had experienced from very skilled and gifted, but emotionally unhealthy leaders. One senior leader recalled, "Leaders who have not been through a healing process of their own will burn out and they will make bad

decisions" (SC3). One denominational leader spoke of requiring all leaders to undergo some inner healing process for themselves, so that as leaders, they "also know how to hold that space for other people" (DL2). Participants also shared some recommended tools for enhancing emotional health, including Emotionally Healthy Leadership cohorts, professional counseling, and books on emotional well-being.

Another skill set that participants identified as valuable to their leadership development was that of relational skills, which included active listening, conflict resolution, and advocacy for oneself and others. The tools that participants suggested included training in "best practices" through conversations and the opportunity to shadow more experienced leaders. One assisting minister who was given such an opportunity valued the difference of the "real experience overseeing a ministry as opposed to being a part of the ministry" (AM2). One denominational leader, who is also a mentor and life coach, shared that design depended on a mentor-protégé agreement regarding the purpose of the mentoring experience and should always include "an opportunity … so that they can get their feet wet but not have the full responsibility" at first (DL2).

Research in many fields has shown that juggling multiple roles is one of the most significant barriers for women seeking leadership development and advancement (Coleman, 2020; The Barna Group, 2017). Participants in this study echoed the research findings. With a sense of humor and frustration over this barrier that was common to women in leadership, one senior clergy member shared,

> You still have to bring the kids with you on Sunday morning and make sure that they're dressed, and they're fed, and their teeth are brushed, and your four-year-old is not running around like a crazy person with his head cut off, like a chicken with its head cut off. So there are, there's, there's a layer of responsibility and weight that you feel that men will never, ever feel (SC7).

Participants suggested that proteges be given the opportunity to discuss life/ministry balance in formal settings, such as panel discussions, and informally with peers and mentors.

Participants in this study frequently mentioned the value of holistic mentoring strategies in their suggested designs for formal mentoring opportunities, emphasizing the importance of addressing the whole being —body, mind, and spirit —as well as their vocational lives. One denominational leader probably captured the potential of holistic mentoring strategies for positive outcomes best by sharing that she would create a "three-pronged approach" that included sharpening the character of Christ in the protégé, imparting ministry skills, and teaching life and ministry balance (DL1). Most participants were very clear and passionate about those holistic strategies that they would include in a formal mentoring experience.

Fifteen of the 19 participants had received some form of formal mentoring beyond the initial credentialing process. In the next section, participants were asked to describe any *informal mentoring* they had experienced, the perceived benefits of those experiences, and the recommendations they would give to emerging women clergy

members about pursuing informal mentoring strategies to enhance their leadership development.

Informal Mentoring Experiences. Informal mentoring strategies have been lauded as an effective means of providing guidance and support for mentees across various fields (Dajani et al., 2021; Du & Wang, 2017). Informal mentoring relationships are often initiated by either the mentor or the protégé because they feel drawn to one another, and most often, they are not the result of an organizational assignment (Hastings & Kane, 2018). However, as informal mentoring strategies are more organic and spontaneous in nature, they can be more complex to quantify and qualify than formal mentoring strategies (Du & Wang, 2017). In this basic qualitative study, participants were asked to describe any informal mentoring experiences they had, the perceived benefits of those experiences, and their recommendations for emerging leaders seeking informal mentoring opportunities. The emerging themes and subthemes culled from participant responses about informal mentoring were discussed in detail (see Table 7).

Table 7

RQ1 Alignment With Resulting Subthemes and Themes of Informal Mentoring Strategies

Interview question	Subtheme	Theme
Please describe any informal mentoring that you may have received as a clergy member, either from within or outside the ICC.	Varied in form. Varied in availability.	3. Varied mentoring opportunities.
What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were beneficial toward your leadership development?	Mentor's character. Characteristics of a mentoring relationship. Nature of mentoring interactions.	4. The presence of mentor-protégé antecedents.
	Personal growth. Professional growth.	5. Self-reported growth of protégé.
What, if any, recommendations would you make to emerging clergy members about seeking informal mentoring opportunities?	Moral strategies. Aesthetic strategies. Intellectual strategies.	6. The importance of holistic mentoring strategies.

Theme 3: Varied Informal Mentoring Opportunities. Participants of this study were asked to describe those mentoring experiences that they considered informal mentoring strategies that helped them develop as leaders. These participants described their informal experiences in terms of mentoring strategies that varied in form and availability (see

Table 7). Each of these subthemes, representing varied mentoring strategies, was discussed separately.

The first subtheme was the *varied forms* of these informal mentoring opportunities. These forms included informal mentoring by individuals for various lengths of time, listening to various multimedia forms, and reading books. When sharing about individuals who had "spoken into their lives," participants described a wide range of people, including family members, neighbors, church community leaders, and pastors.

Many participants described informal mentoring from family, especially parents, and adult family friends. Many of these relationships were lifelong. One denominational leader tearfully shared how important her pastor parents were to her development as a person and a leader, saying, "It's a pretty unique, open, and productive kind of relationship. … They know me from day zero and that is helpful sometimes. … I feel like it's a privilege of no size, you know, it's, it's an enormous privilege" (DL1). Another participant, CH1, enthusiastically shared that her parents provided her with extensive exposure to others who spoke into her life when she was younger, helping her to recognize her calling. One senior leader spoke fondly of a family friend "who was my mentor probably from my whole life until she died, and she talked to me a lot about the personal kinds of things of being a Christian, a lot about Scripture" (SC1). Although some participants were raised in Christian homes and communities, not all had these types of opportunities; instead, they found informal mentoring opportunities later in life through interactions with other pastors and leaders.

Participants mentioned that the relational time spent with other leaders in informal settings, such as between sessions at conferences, was beneficial with life and ministry issues. One assisting minister described these chance encounters as instrumental in her development as an individual and a leader, relaying these "quick one-offs where it's someone that you don't see very often, but they speak into your life every once in a while and God just uses them to kind of ping you forward" (AM5). Another assisting minister shared that she had several pastor friends whom she considered "crucial relationships" in her development as a leader, because whenever there was an issue or a struggle, "they hold me accountable or they help me to see the other side of something" (AM1). A senior clergy member conveyed her commitment to being a lifelong learner and making it a point to "glean something from every conversation I have with senior leaders" (SC6). Each of these participants described how these individuals spoke into their lives and ministries at different seasons, and others sought leadership development opportunities through multimedia sources rather than in-person interactions with people.

Some participants mentioned listening to multimedia sources, such as audio tapes, DVD series, podcasts, blogs, and vlogs, to supplement their personal and leadership development. One senior leader recalled, "[I would] listen to tapes, listen to sermons, listen to whatever" (SC6), stating that she did so to improve her skills as a leader. Another senior leader recalled using a DVD series on emotional health to improve her communication skills and learn how to address conflict (SC3). Some participants viewed

their multimedia experiences as informal mentoring, and many more considered reading books as a significant source of informal mentoring.

Eight of the participants mentioned reading books as their primary informal mentoring experience. One denominational leader professed, "I would say another huge mentoring piece for me has been books. Books have mentored me time and time and time again" (DL3). The choice of book topics was often linked to the perceived need of the participant in a particular season of their lives or was recommended to them by another leader. One assisting minister recalled, "Certainly some reading has come. Usually as a recommendation from other ministers or pastors in my life" (AM2). A senior clergy member (SC7) shared that her former pastor would select books that pinpointed areas he felt she needed to address for personal and professional growth.

Some participants cited specific titles of books or topics that they felt directly helped them develop as leaders. One woman professed, "I am an avid reader…I have a deep passion for theology and understanding the issues that are shaping Christianity today. I spend a lot of time researching progressive Christianity and as a pastor, it's important to me to be able to speak into these things and equip the body how to basically stand firm in their faith" (AM4). One denominational leader shared that a book titled *"Lead Like a Girl"* by Lovell Casiero was very impactful on her leadership development because it helped her appreciate and accept that women lead differently than men, as *"*women are inclusive and sponsoring others that are not defensive or territorial" (DL4). Other topics included books on soul care, rhythms of life, ministry-life balance, and

raising children while serving in ministry. Each topic was chosen by or selected for the participants' felt needs in their season of life and leadership development.

Another subtheme that emerged was that these informal mentoring experiences *varied in availability.* Participants' access to informal mentoring with individuals varied greatly, from having no opportunities to having multiple opportunities to be in the presence of other leaders. One assisting minister linked her lack of informal mentoring opportunities with individuals to her lack of "right connections" (AM2). By contrast, other participants felt that they had had multiple informal mentoring opportunities available with individuals or PMGs. One senior clergy member stated, "I probably had more informal mentoring than I've had formal … mostly it's happened organically where, I've just felt the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask somebody to mentor me" (SC2). One denominational leader spoke fondly of an informal PMG of non-ICC pastors that she became involved with later in her leadership development pathway. "And then lately more, much more recently God has blessed me with a very small group. So there's three pastors here in the xxx [location] who are lady pastors" (DL1). An assisting minister explained that she also had "lots of informal mentoring while watching people do ministry, seeing what's effective, what's not effective, how people respond to the ministry" (AM2). Some participants spoke fondly of individuals who had a profound impact on their lives. However, others opted for multimedia and books as a means of informal mentoring, especially when they felt there were no mentors available. One senior leader recalled, "So I've never had that [informal mentoring with individuals], but

usually it's books or a seminar here and there, a podcast that I would listen to" (SC4). Whether their perceived mentoring opportunities came through individuals, PMGs, multimedia, or books, all participants were able to expound on the benefits of informal mentoring opportunities for enhancing their leadership development.

Benefits of Informal Experiences. When the participants of this study were asked, "What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were beneficial toward your leader development?" two themes emerged- the presence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents and self-reported growth. Subsequently, each of these themes was divided into subthemes and discussed in detail (see Table 7).

Theme 4: The Presence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. Positive mentor-protégé antecedents refer to the dynamics that influence the outcomes of mentoring, encompassing the mentor's character, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of the mentoring interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). As with their responses to the benefits of formal mentoring, participants in this study reported the presence of these mentoring dynamics in their informal mentoring opportunities, which were discussed as subthemes. The first subtheme that emerged was the importance of the *mentor's character*. As participants in this study considered individuals, PMGs, multimedia sources, and books as informal mentors, it was more challenging to quantify what they perceived as the "good and godly" character of a mentor. However, even though many of the encounters with individuals were often brief, and the multimedia and book encounters involved material, participants still expressed two mentor characteristics

that were important to them —those of possessing wisdom and competency. Participants of this study who experienced informal mentoring opportunities appreciated the wisdom and knowledge of those they considered informal mentors. One denominational leader declared her admiration and the impact of such an informal encounter with a woman clergy member who had been in ministry for over twenty-five years, stating, "it was just enriching and I can remember thinking I want to be like this person" (DL4). One senior leader (SC7) expressed how she felt "humbled and honored to be in that space" with the leader whom she considered wise and accessible, particularly when SC7 encountered a situation with which she was unfamiliar and reached out for help to the more senior leader. An assisting minister, new to her role, spoke glowingly of a woman who offered to mentor her, "You know I did have some time with her … and you know it was wonderful gleaning from her wisdom" (AM3). The admiration and appreciation of the wisdom gleaned from informal mentoring opportunities were not limited to face-to-face encounters.

Shanks (2022) purported that informal encounters in the workplace can be considered informal learning but also might be understood as informal mentoring, as these encounters can help someone to "improve their performance or skills" (p. 443). Participants in this study viewed listening to speakers at conferences or from multimedia sources, as well as reading specific authors, as informal mentoring opportunities, not just information gathering or informal learning opportunities. The participants described speakers and authors as informal mentors and often characterized them as wise if the

participant thought the content of their speaking or writing aligned with the Word of God. One assisting minister explained, “I’ve gained either wisdom or knowledge from those experiences [conferences] …. I’ve been blessed to attend many of those, and there are so many takeaways” (SC4). The wisdom from those who were further down the leadership pathway than themselves was one of the most important mentor characteristics that the participants of this study mentioned about their informal mentoring encounters, followed closely by the perceived competency of the informal mentor as both a woman and a leader.

Dahlvig and Longman (2014) purported that a woman has reached leadership competence, the culminating stage of the WLD model, when she is “consistently demonstrating effective leadership” (p. 20). Study participants professed that they learned of an informal mentor’s competence by hearing or observing the mentor in action. Some of these opportunities to observe the competency of an informal mentor were “one-offs,” although others spanned a couple of decades. One assisting minister described sitting around a table with more senior women leaders between conference sessions and gleaning from their experiences, noting that “having the opportunity to have them speak into your life and vice versa have been some of the most beneficial” (AM5). One denominational leader described observing her pastor for over twenty years, “I wouldn’t say it’s like ever been anything formal. It’s always been about coming together, partnering together, and doing life together. He’s probably one of the next to my husband, he’s probably one of the greatest influencers” (DL3). Whether observing other

leaders in action to learn how to navigate life or ministry, the character of the mentor mattered to the participants of this study. One denominational leader probably started it best, saying, "to be able to seek out someone who has the character. … You can learn task management and things like that, but character comes harder, and all those other things are much easier if your character is in the right place" (DL2). Whether the informal mentor was face-to-face, multimedia, or a book, the character of the mentor mattered.

The second subtheme that emerged was the importance of the *character*istics of the mentoring relationships. Much of the research on mentoring relationships was rooted in RCT, where mentor-protégé relationships were described as bidirectional and transformational (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2003). These relationships were often characterized by confidentiality, flattened power dynamics, mutuality, and trust between mentor and protégé (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). Likewise, participants of the current study described these face-to-face mentor-protégé relationships in terms of safety and mutuality that contributed to their perceived transformation in their lives, ministry, and leader development. One denominational leader described her informal mentoring encounters within the ICC as "a safe refuge place that you can go to people that are trustworthy, reliable, and judgment-free" (DL1). Many participants in this study found safe informal mentoring encounters within the ICC.

However, others sought safety in informal relationships outside of their local church or the ICC because they needed alternative perspectives or a distance from congregants or employees. One assisting minister felt that she found varied perspectives and safety outside the ICC and professed, “I have found my informal mentoring beneficial because it’s kind of outside of ICC. So that way I’m not in this ICC vacuum” (AM4). Whether the participants of this study had informal mentor-protégé encounters within or outside the ICC, feeling safe and free to discuss their lives, ministry, and leadership development was important to them. Likewise, mutuality in a relationship was important to these women.

Mutuality in relationships benefits both parties, and it is those relationships in which both parties feel heard, understood, and known (Jordan, 1986). Although the participants in this study did not specifically employ the term mutuality, they often described informal mentoring encounters as those in which they felt seen, understood, and on equal footing with a more senior leader. One denominational leader portrayed her encounters with her informal mentor as being beneficial to both mentor and protege, saying, “You know what we gave each other such a beautiful, beautiful balance in our lives and just learning to hear from one another, receive from one another, contend for one another” (DL3). Another participant (DL1) communicated that she appreciated being able to be herself with her informal mentor, stating, “Just to have access to that [informal mentor] … absolutely devoid of any sort of mask, right? I show up in the room, messed up as I am” (DL1). An assisting minister shared that she felt championed and on equal

footing with her male senior leader during informal mentoring encounters, relaying that he was "willing to open any door for me … cheering me on … and I'm not stepping on his toes" (AM 4). Whether these mentor-protégé relationships were brief encounters or long-term, many participants expressed the benefits of their informal mentor-protégé relationships.

The third subtheme that became apparent was the positive impact of the presence of the third antecedent- the *nature of the mentoring interactions.* Wanberg et al. (2003) described these interactions in terms of frequency, scope, and strength of influence. Frequency was difficult to assess, as most participants in this study described brief, singular encounters with more senior leaders. Participants more often described the benefits of their informal mentoring encounters in terms of scope and strength of influence.

As to scope, many participants relayed that many of these informal mentoring encounters included discussions on life, ministry, and leadership. One assisting minister (AM5) fondly recounted sitting around a table with pastors who asked about her personal and professional life. She shared that she valued these leaders "walking alongside you are in the current season of life that you're in and having the opportunity to have them speak into your life and vice versa" (AM5). One denominational leader appreciated these informal encounters at ICC conferences so much that she sought out such opportunities each time she attended one, stating, "I took the initiative to then be at that event and sit near her, because I knew that more is caught than taught" (DL3). Though most

participants described their informal mentoring encounters as brief, many professed that such encounters were beneficial and should be sought out.

Du and Wang (2017) defined strength of influence as "the degree to which proteges are influenced by the mentoring they receive" (p. 323). Participants of this study spoke fondly of the impact of these informal mentoring encounters upon their lives, ministry, and leadership development. One senior clergy member relayed, "those[encounters] have been encouraging. I've gained either wisdom or knowledge from those experiences or those encounters" (SC4). Some participants stated that these informal mentoring encounters helped them to be accountable, even providing "tough love" when appropriate. One senior leader who had frequent informal encounters with the same senior leader shared,

> When it came to being real, you want to see somebody who was real gave me …some tough love, but she loved me for real. She told me when I was ugly, but then she hugged me and told me why she wanted to tell me why I was ugly. You know, it took a big person and when I needed her, she was there to wipe my tears. She was just the most amazing person (SC5).

Another senior clergy member described the impact of her informal mentoring encounters upon her life and leadership best, stating, "So it [informal mentoring] moved me to the next level in my walk with Him. [I became] more confident in who I was, and who He had created me to be, so that I can go and do what He wanted me to do" (SC5).

Whether the participants' informal mentoring opportunities were brief one-offs or repeated encounters with individuals or PMGs, or with books and multimedia, participants expressed that they benefited and grew both personally and professionally from such encounters.

Theme 5: Self-Reported Growth From Informal Mentoring Strategies. The participants in this study reported that their informal mentoring experiences included face-to-face encounters with individuals or PMGs, as well as reading books or listening to multimedia, such as podcasts. Although these mentoring strategies may have been brief or lacked human contact, participants still reported growth in their lives, ministry, and leadership development. Both personal and professional growth emerged as subthemes and were discussed here in greater detail.

The first subtheme described by the participants of this study was *self-reported personal growth*. Many participants shared that informal mentors were not just interested in what the protégé was doing in ministry, but also concerned about their personal well-being, including self-care, their walk with God, and life/ministry balance. One denominational leader expressed her appreciation for "coffee dates where we [informal mentor and protégé] were able to actually talk about our life situation or whatever I was wrestling with at the time" (DL6). Likewise, a senior clergy mentor felt free to email her informal mentor and say, "Hey, I have this situation and I don't know how to do it. I've never been here before" (SC7). The participants' self-reported growth can be best categorized as increased self-awareness.

Dahlvig and Longman (2014) proposed that women's leader development is shaped by the organizational context and the degree of self-awareness held by the woman leader. Participants in this study reported increased self-awareness, particularly when they had repeated interactions with informal mentors or peer mentors. The area of increased self-awareness most often reported by participants was learning about and accepting perspectives on themselves, life, ministry, and leadership that differed from their own. One denominational leader (DL2) shared that her informal mentor helped her recognize family ideals and expectations that hindered her in life and leadership development, and offered her a different perspective. She shared that this informal mentor "encouraged me to think about what was best for me … what suited my personality better, that was really beneficial to me" (DL2). An assisting minister expressed that she appreciated having both men and women as formal mentors "because I think both perspectives are valid, but in particular, a female perspective is going to help navigate some of the things that only we [women clergy members] experience" (AM4). Another denominational leader shared, "I found their [informal mentors] perspective very useful … I feel like I need to have some different perspectives and challenges to my own way of thinking to sharpen me" (DL1). The one chaplain who responded to this study's invitation shared, "In my effort to be self-aware, I ask the people closest to me sometimes questions that are hard to actually get the feedback that I know is honest" (CH1). Participants perceived that an increase in self-awareness impacted their self-efficacy and professional growth.

The second subtheme was that of *self-reported professional growth*. As with formal mentoring opportunities, participants self-reported the acquisition of wisdom, knowledge, and skills that they felt benefited their understanding of their ministry and roles, increased their self-efficacy, and advanced their leadership development. One senior clergy member shared that they receive the same benefit from all sources: "I have had informal training from almost every pastor I have been the privilege to work with and through reading" (SC3). Some participants relayed face-to-face encounters that they considered informal mentoring opportunities.

One senior clergy (SC4) member reported that just being present and listening to other leaders had been encouraging, full of wisdom and knowledge. An assisting minister expressed that she often learned how to address challenges in her own church environment by having "conversations with other pastors from different churches, maybe about an issue, maybe just about a common challenge that we had" (AM3). One denominational leader concurred, relaying that members of her PMG "would just come and listen and pray and discuss options, maybe solutions" (DL1).

Some participants also considered prayer times with other leaders as informal mentoring opportunities that provided valuable wisdom to them. One assisting minister relayed, "You're receiving prayer from someone and God uses them to speak [wisdom] into your life" (AM5). Another participant shared how her prayerful encounters with other leaders enhanced her own growth as a minister and an individual; "I think what has

benefited me through informal mentoring most has been just teaching me how to listen to the Holy Spirit" (SC2).

Some participants traced their acquisition of skills, wisdom, and knowledge to face-to-face encounters, while others reported receiving the same benefits from books and multimedia. One denominational leader (DL3) asserted that books were key to her development as a leader. "Having never been to college, I would say another huge mentoring piece for me has been books. Books have mentored me time and time and time again" (DL3). A senior clergy member recalled choosing books to "pinpoint the areas where they [mentors] may say I need to grow" (SC7). An assisting minister (AM1) shared that books and podcasts "helped me to fine-tune some leadership skills," including healthy communication styles, setting boundaries, and addressing conflict (AM1).

Whether face-to-face or multimedia encounters, most participants reported increased self-efficacy that advanced their leadership development. One assisting minister expressed the impact of informal mentoring on self-reported growth best by saying, "[it's] someone that you don't see very often, but they speak into your life every once in a while and God just uses them to kind of ping you forward and, you know, water that seed a little bit more (AM5). All of the relayed experiences helped to inform any advice they would offer to emerging leaders about procuring informal mentoring opportunities.

Theme 6: Importance of Holistic Informal Mentoring Strategies. As part of the RQ1 interview protocol, participants were asked, "What, if any, recommendations would

you make to emerging clergy members about seeking informal mentoring opportunities"? Many participants passionately described holistic mentoring strategies that they perceived as essential to gaining access to informal mentoring opportunities that would benefit emerging leaders in their personal and professional development, and potentially advance their leadership development. Goodwin et. al. (2021) categorized mentoring strategies as moral, aesthetic, and intellectual strategies (see Table 7). Each of these subthemes was discussed in depth.

The first subtheme was *moral strategies*. Moral strategies are those that address the protégé's identity, integrity, and equilibrium. They are assessed through self-examination and community involvement to gain a proper understanding of the context in which one lives and serves (Goodwin et al., 2021). Unlike formal mentoring strategies that incorporate holistic programmatic approaches, the participants in the current study often recommended that emerging leaders seek informal mentors who would serve them in their particular stage of life and ministry. Most participants communicated that emerging women clergy members assume two postures when seeking potential informal mentors. These postures included being proactive and vulnerable and would require some self-awareness on the part of the protégé to proceed.

Eleven of the 19 participants in this study specifically spoke about being proactive in seeking out informal mentors and not waiting for a mentor to approach the protégé. One assisting minister recommended seeking out informal mentoring opportunities sooner rather than later. "If you can find someone who can carve time out

of their life, out of their family time, out of their ministry to spend time with you, oh my God, do it! do it!" (AM3). One denominational leader (DL4) explained that "mentoring opportunities.

usually initiate with you, so look for multiple avenues of investment … just pray that God will send you the right people at the right time, but also be proactive, you know, seize those opportunities when they come along" (DL4). Many participants in this study did not limit seeking out informal mentoring opportunities to individuals or PMGs. Instead, they recommended that emerging leaders proactively seek out books and multimedia sources to develop the protégé's character. Senior leader SC1 shared, "If you're open to hearing what the Spirit wants to teach you, [God] puts people in your path, either through books or through relationships or through other people that will form your character" (SC1).

Many participants of this study also recognized that the ability to be proactive required a posture of vulnerability on the part of the emerging clergy members. One denominational leader recommended that emerging leaders overcome their fears and misconceptions about the willingness of more senior leaders to mentor those in the early stages of leadership development. She stated,

> I think that young people may [think] 'oh, I'm too scared or what if that person is too busy?' … don't be afraid to just ask. Keep pressing until the right person is able to speak into your life and hold you accountable, or provide some sort of relationship or mentorship (DL6).

One senior leader, who acknowledged the risk of betrayal in mentoring relationships, recommended that emerging leaders find two to three people whom they were willing to trust early in their leadership development pathway because “mentoring… it’s a lifeline and you can’t wait until you’re in some crisis to go look for who can help” (DL1). One participant (CH1) recommended that, without being both proactive and vulnerable, “we [women] miss out on things when we hold ourselves back” (CH1) from opportunities that have presented themselves, thereby limiting the potential for growth and leadership development.

The second subtheme was *aesthetic strategies*. Goodwin et al. (2021) described aesthetic strategies as those that help the mentee to connect to both their inner and outer worlds, facilitating openness to learning and increased self-confidence. The recommendations proffered by the participants in this study focused not on the 'where' of a safe space, but on *who* emerging leaders should seek to feel safe yet challenged to grow.

The majority of the participants recommended seeking multiple mentors, including both men and women, those older and younger than themselves, and those from within and outside the ICC. One participant recommended having the majority of informal mentoring relationships with other women, “but be sure to include a member of the opposite sex for critique, because you need their perspective [to learn] how to relate and have some understanding” (CH1). A senior clergy member would not exclude male mentors but articulated that she believed “at least a portion of their mentoring should be

from other women … [because] if a woman is mentored solely by men, it's possible that she just makes herself something pleasing to guys" (SC6). One assisting minister expressed that "there is a beauty in having male and female leadership presence because we are the fullness of Christ when we are together" (AM5).

Participants of this study also recommended that emerging leaders be willing to be mentored by those older and younger than themselves to gain varied perspectives of their world. Some of the participants of this study recalled fondly those individuals of previous generations who had spoken into their lives and ministries and would recommend the same to emerging clergy members. One senior clergy member recalled, "I grew up in an atmosphere where older people just poured into you because that's what they did" (SC1). A chaplain shared, "Most of my mentoring came the quiet strengths of the greatest generation. It's a different kind of mentoring. It's not all words. A lot of it's just watch and learn" (CH1). One senior leader counted those older and younger than herself among potential mentors because, as she said, "I appreciate the different views that people bring" (SC2). One assisting minister captured the sentiment of multigenerational mentors best by stating, "Make sure that you are around saints of different ages … seeking out [those] that you respect, spending time with them, and asking them life questions and ministry questions" (AM2).

The participants of this study also recommended seeking mentors from within and outside the ICC, not only for safety reasons but also to gain multiple perspectives. One denominational leader (DL1) shared that having mentors from within the denomination

was very useful, but also cultivating those informal mentoring relationships outside the ICC created a neutral space that provided her with different perspectives about life, ministry, and leadership. Likewise, AM4 recommends finding "someone who is not part of your tribe for perspective, [and] safety" (AM4).

One denominational leader summarized the recommendations for multiple mentors best, saying, "We kind of coined the phrase 'there's not a single Yoda'. [find those] that offer relational support and growth, [and] relational networking … just pray that God will send you the right people at the right time" (DL4). Many participants emphasized the importance of feeling safe with mentors and also highlighted the value of identifying informal mentors who can provide opportunities for learning and growth.

The third subtheme was *intellectual strategies*. Informal intellectual strategies are employed to help a mentee connect with their core inspirations, envision their future selves, and propel them toward continued leadership development (Goodwin et al., 2021). Intellectual strategies often include specific skills and tools to help mentees manage their professional and personal lives. A skill is the ability to perform a task well, and a tool is the means to accomplish the skill (Goodwin et al., 2021). When participants were asked what recommendations they would make to emerging clergy members about seeking informal mentoring, they emphasized the importance of finding mentors who possess wisdom and experience in three key areas: relational skills and life and ministry balance. Although the skills were important, the participants emphasized the importance

of choosing face-to-face mentors, authors, or multimedia personalities as the means or "tools" for skill set acquisition. The choice of tools was the focus of discussion.

Informal mentoring tools included individuals, books, and multimedia sources. Participants in this study recommended that emerging leaders choose informal mentoring sources. Choosing informal mentors who would be further along on their leadership pathway than the emerging leader, who would challenge them to grow and stretch. One denominational leader recommended finding respected individuals with whom the protégé could connect and develop an informal relationship with "someone that you're interested in learning [from], acquiring a skill set that maybe you don't have" (DL5). One senior leader observed, "I think that a lot of times people pick people who are going to say things that they like instead of say things that are really going to grow them" (SC3). Another senior clergy member exhorted emerging leaders to choose those who would challenge over those with whom they might feel comfortable, saying, "I would tell them to get uncomfortable ... and find someone that they can be with and make sure that they make connections" (SC5). When informal mentors are scarce, participants in this study recommended that emerging leaders equip themselves with books and multimedia resources.

Participants recommended selecting books and multimedia sources that align with the emerging leaders' current life and ministry, as well as their stage of leader development. One assisting minister asserted, "[There] is so much available for research … so much at our fingertips…so much informal [mentoring] as far as educational things

you can do," (AM4) suggesting that an emerging leader can access a plethora of information to advance their leadership development. Another participant, AM2, recommended that emerging leaders ask informal mentors and other leaders for "the top books that helped them in their leader development" (AM2). Whether individuals, books, or multimedia, participants in this study frequently mentioned the benefits of informal, holistic mentoring strategies for the development of an emerging leader's personal and vocational lives.

RQ1 asked, "How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceived to be productive toward leader development?" Participants of this study described their formal and informal mentoring experiences, the perceived benefits of these experiences, and made recommendations for both formal and informal mentoring opportunities. In the next section, the data analysis results address formal and informal mentoring opportunities that participants in this study described as less than productive for their leadership development.

Research Question 2

Although it was important to gain an understanding of the holistic mentoring strategies that participants perceived as beneficial to their leadership development, it was equally important to understand those mentoring practices that participants perceived as less beneficial or unproductive for their leadership growth. RQ2 asked, "How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-

protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceived to be unproductive toward leader development?" Two themes emerged from the participants' responses: varied mentoring opportunities and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents (see Table 8). The resulting themes and subthemes for formal and informal mentoring strategies were discussed separately**.**

Table 8

RQ2 Alignment With Resulting Subthemes and Themes of Holistic Mentoring Strategies

Interview question	Subtheme	Theme
What, if any, aspects of your formal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial toward your leadership development?	Varied in quality.	3. Varied mentoring opportunities.
	Varied in availability.	
	Mentor's character.	7. Absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.
	Characteristics of mentoring relationships.	
	Nature of mentioning interactions.	
What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial toward your leader development?	Varied in quality.	3. Varied mentoring opportunities.
	Varied in availability.	
	Mentor's character.	7. Absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.
	Characteristics of mentoring relationships.	
	Nature of mentoring interactions.	

Unproductive Formal Mentoring Strategies. Participants reported participating in formal mentoring strategies that included the initial credentialing process, one-on-one mentoring, "on-the-job" mentoring, and mentoring in the form of cohorts. As part of RQ2, participants were asked to describe, if any, aspects of their formal mentoring experiences that were perceived as less than beneficial or unproductive toward their leader development. Two major themes emerged in the participants' responses: varied mentoring opportunities and the absence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents. Subsequently, each of these themes was divided into subthemes and was discussed in detail (see Table 9).

Table 9

RQ2 Alignment With Resulting Subthemes and Themes of Formal Mentoring Strategies

Interview question	Subtheme	Theme
What, if any, aspects of your formal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial toward your leader development?	Varied in quality.	3. Varied mentoring opportunities.
	Varied in availability.	
	Mentor's character.	7. Absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.
	Characteristics of mentoring relationships.	
	Nature of mentoring interactions.	

Theme 3: Varied Mentoring Opportunities. The first theme that emerged from the participants in this study was the varied mentoring opportunities that they perceived as less than beneficial or unproductive for leadership development. Participant responses

varied greatly regarding the perceived quality and availability of formal mentoring opportunities. (see Table 9). Each of these subthemes was discussed separately.

The first subtheme of the varied formal mentoring was the *varied quality* of mentoring opportunities that the participants experienced (see Table 9). The most successful mentoring opportunities were often based on the quality of mentoring interactions in terms of frequency, scope, and strength of influence (Wanberg et al., 2003); conversely, those experiences that are less than beneficial could be described employing the same terms. In this study, the participants expressed dissatisfaction with both the scope and the strength of influence of their formal mentoring opportunities.

Wanberg et al. (2003) purported that scope refers to the breadth of mentor-protégé interactions, and that the protégé's perception of the quality of those interactions is often based on the mentor's interest in both the professional and personal life of the protégé. Some participants in this study explained that their mentors taught them skills and expectations for tasks, but did not seem concerned with them as individuals. One denominational leader expressed her disappointment, saying, "I think there were times where things were really focused on a task or a project or something like that, as opposed to [my] character development or really growing in my Christian walk" (DL2). An assisting minister (AM2) expressed similar feelings about a mentor who only gave "you the menial tasks and thinks that just being around ministry is going to mentor you for ministry" (AM2).

Strength of influence was defined as "the extent to which mentoring influences the protégé" (Wanberg et al., 2003, p. 314). Some participants in this study explained that some of their formal experiences lacked influence because the focus of their mentoring opportunity did not address their perceived needs related to their roles. One senior clergy member (SC7) reported that an ICC-sponsored cohort was not beneficial because it did not address issues pertinent to her role as a senior pastor. She felt the experience was "too generic in expression versus made to help the Senior Leader in her role. And if I'm going to be honest, if I'm going to be a part of a group, it has to be beneficial for me because it takes time away from my family" (SC7). Although the strength of influence was a concern to some participants, the varied availability of formal mentoring opportunities was the most frequently mentioned topic within this theme.

The second subtheme was that of the *varied availability* of formal mentor opportunities. Participants often reported the perceived lack of opportunity as the chief reason they did not engage in formal mentoring. Some participants raised concerns that opportunities might not be available to certain ICC clergy due to poor communication, geographical location, gender, or race and ethnicity.

Participants asserted that if mentoring opportunities existed, either within or outside the ICC, these opportunities were poorly communicated, if at all. One senior clergy member (SC3) reported that she had missed formal mentoring opportunities due to poor communication about opportunities within the denomination, stating, "[I] did not hear of any [opportunities] or heard of them too late to engage" (SC3). A denominational

leader believed that her ministry location was a hindrance to engaging in formal mentoring opportunities. She exclaimed, “I don’t know if it’s just my little spot on earth, but this is what I found is that I looked near [and found no opportunity] … And I looked a little farther, and I looked even farther and farther for a group of within the ICC” (DL1).

Gender is often a barrier to opportunities for training or mentoring in male-oriented environments where hierarchical organizational structures and cultures prioritize the advancement of men over women (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Campbell-Reed, 2019; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020). The ICC professed an egalitarian approach to women in ministry (Dunahoo, 2017); however, participants of this study had experienced mentoring opportunities being offered to their male counterparts instead of them. A chaplain recalled, “I’ve met a lot of women and oftentimes they have this desire and opportunity hasn’t presented itself because oftentimes that’s something given to young men … we’re [ICC] less likely to give women those opportunities in the church setting” (CH1). An assisting minister also expressed some frustration because of the traditional gender expectations placed on her in formal mentoring opportunities, saying,

> There were many formal mentorship events where I was unable to be present for the whole thing because I was often helping to serve lunch, set up tables, or clean dishes. As a result, I often missed out on things (AM5).

A few participants reported a perceived lack of formal mentoring opportunities for those of different races and ethnicities. One denominational leader felt “that there are

gaps in our [ICC] mentoring programs, especially for diverse people groups. I feel like certain cultures and clientele are afforded these types of opportunities" (DL4). She and other participants would like to see more mentoring and development for nonwhite clergy members. One African American woman expressed that her race is underrepresented at mentoring events. She wondered if the ICC felt "we're not interested or it's not appealing to us, or if again it's the lack of having the information and being invited" (SC4). Another denominational leader expressed, "I just really wish that there was more opportunities for young women of color to be developed in a way that feels safe and that they feel represented and that they would have the tools for ministry" (DL6). Whether the root of the perceived lack of availability was due to communication, gender, race, or ethnicity, all of these women asserted that there were not enough formal mentoring opportunities available to them through the ICC. Those participants who were able to engage in formal mentoring opportunities reported that some of these experiences were less than productive due to the lack of a mentor-protégé relationship.

Theme 7: Absence of Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. When designing formal mentoring opportunities, Wanberg et al. (2003) suggested that organizations would benefit from considering mentor-protégé antecedents when establishing or evaluating mentoring programs, thereby achieving the desired outcomes. The antecedents of their dynamic process of mentoring model included the character of the mentor, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of the mentoring interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). Participants of this study described their formal mentoring

opportunities as less than beneficial toward their leadership development due to the absence of these antecedents, which were discussed as subthemes (see Table 9).

The first subtheme that emerged was the *absence of the antecedent of the mentor's character.* Most often, participants portrayed their formal mentors as those with "good and godly" character, but some participants experienced mentors who did not seem to display good character. One denominational leader attributed this lack of character on the part of her formal mentor to immaturity and insecurity, finding it difficult to remain engaged in the mentoring opportunity, stating, "If [you are] really unstable, I might cut you off because that may not be safe" (DL1). An assisting minister (AM3) felt "blindsided" by the moral failure of her formal mentor, relaying that this lack of godly character was very damaging to her and she felt abandoned in her leadership development.

The second subtheme to emerge was the *absence of positive characteristics* of *mentoring relationships*. Mentor-protégé relationships were often described in research as bidirectional and transformational and were characterized by confidentiality, flattened power, mutuality, and trust between mentor and protégé (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2003). Participants in this study reported the absence of these mentoring dynamics in their formal mentoring opportunities, particularly in terms of power and mutuality.

Unbalanced power in these relationships is often perceived as hostility toward the mentee. One senior clergy member (SC6) described a situation where she felt her mentor felt infringed upon and responded to the protégé with "claws out". This senior leader had experienced situations like this before in her leadership development pathway, explaining, "I think that sometimes women are not the support to other women that they should be. I think sometimes there's the feeling of intimidation or threatening or not being secure in who they are in Christ and their place in the kingdom" (SC6). Women who experienced unbalanced power in their formal mentoring experiences described these situations as hindrances to learning and transformative growth. One denominational leader recounted that her formal mentor seemed threatened by the mentor-protégé relationship for reasons unknown to the protege and "so at times I felt put down or pushed aside or kept out of conversations…therefore, I wasn't able to learn. … it felt very unsafe (DL5). Some participants of this study also described a lack of mutuality between mentor and mentee.

Jordan (1986) described mutuality in relationships as benefiting both parties, where both feel heard, seen, and understood by one another. Although the participants in this study did not specifically employ the term mutuality, they often described formal mentoring encounters where mutuality appeared to be absent. Some participants experienced formal mentoring opportunities where the mentor seemed more concerned with the position of being a mentor than the protégé's growth and leadership

development. One denominational leader communicated that her mentor seemed to be in the relationship for her own gain and not the growth of this leader, stating,

> I just felt like they weren't seeking my best interest. … if whatever they were doing was going to move me more forward than them, then they weren't interested. So, I think that was a really poor, think that was a poor experience" (DL5).

Another participant, a senior clergy member, had a similar experience where the mentor "cared more about the position than they did about the person" (SC3). Participants also relayed that the nature of the mentoring interactions was less than beneficial to their leadership development.

The third subtheme that emerged was the absence of the third antecedent- the *nature of the mentoring interactions.* The nature of mentoring interactions can be described in terms of frequency, scope, and strength of influence (Du & Wang, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). Most of the formal mentoring opportunities were scheduled events, and as such, participants did not report any challenges with the frequency of their mentoring interactions.

Du and Wang (2017) proposed that scope in mentoring relationships refers to the breadth of interactions between the mentor and protégé, and strength of influence refers to the impact of mentoring on the mentee's development. Often, these two dynamics were intertwined in the participants' responses. One senior clergy member asserted that her mentor did not seem to understand "the most important thing in the process of

mentoring isn't the process, it's the person" (SC1). Another participant relayed that she had been taught skills and the expectations of her role without any concern for the development of her character or faith walk (DL2). One participant shared that her personal and professional development had been hindered by a formal mentor and suggested that mentees "be careful what you accept sometimes even from people that you trust because I've been wounded by people's words that really weren't about me" (CH1). Though participants of this study described some unproductive formal mentoring opportunities, the majority of unproductive mentoring experiences reported were from informal mentoring experiences.

Unproductive Informal Mentoring Strategies. Informal mentoring strategies have been lauded as an effective means to provide guidance and support for mentees in many fields; however, due to their organic and spontaneous nature, informal mentoring strategies can be more complex to quantify and qualify than formal mentoring strategies (Dajani et al., 2021; Du & Wang, 2017; Hastings & Kane, 2018). When the participants of this study were asked, "What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial toward your leader development?" two themes emerged: varied mentoring opportunities and the absence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents. Each of these themes and their subsequent subthemes was discussed in detail (see Table 10).

Table 10

RQ2 Alignment With Subthemes and Themes of Informal Mentoring Strategies

Interview question	Subtheme	Theme
What, if any, aspects of your informal mentoring experiences were less than beneficial toward your leader development?	Varied in quality. Varied in availability. Mentor's character. Characteristics of mentoring relationships. Nature of mentioning interactions.	3. Varied mentoring opportunities. 7. Lack of presence of mentor-protégé antecedents.

Theme 3: Less Than Beneficial Varied Mentoring Opportunities. When asked about informal mentoring strategies that were less than beneficial to their leadership development, participants' responses varied in quality and availability. Each of these subthemes was discussed in detail (see Table 10).

The first subtheme of varied informal mentoring opportunities was that these opportunities *varied in quality*. Some participants utilized books, podcasts, and webcasts as informal mentoring opportunities to support their leadership development. Most participants in this study would support the use of these materials for leadership development, but they would advise that leaders be mindful and discerning about the content and quality of the materials chosen. One participant (CH1) relayed that "some of it [content] does not match up to the Word of God. And so if you want to be a solid Holy Spirit-led person, be careful, be very careful" (CH1). One assisting minister declared, "I

think they [women] open the door to new age influences and potential progressive influences" (AM4). One senior clergy would continue to recommend books and other multimedia sources as informal mentoring opportunities. However, they would remind leaders that "all content is not good content … and [in] those different forms, there's always pieces that are not beneficial" (SC4). Four of the nineteen participants of this study recalled employing only books and multimedia sources as informal mentoring and recall no other mentoring beyond that of the pre-service licensing process. One senior clergy member flatly stated, "I haven't had any mentors" (SC4). Although participants most often addressed the less-than-beneficial quality of multimedia sources, it was the lack of availability of informal opportunities with other leaders that participants expressed most often.

The second subtheme of varied mentoring opportunities was the *lack of availability* of informal mentoring with more seasoned women clergy members. Informal mentoring opportunities are more organic in nature and are often initiated by either a mentor or protégé who feels drawn to one another (Du & Wang, 2017; Hasting & Kane, 2018). Participants in this study often reported this perceived lack of opportunity as the primary reason they did not engage in informal mentoring. Participants attributed this lack of opportunity to engage in informal mentoring to a lack of relational capital on their part and a perceived unwillingness on the part of more senior leaders to engage in mentoring relationships.

Some participants felt that they lacked relational capital or networking abilities to access informal mentors. One assisting minister shared, “I never made the right connections to be able to have a broad experience like that [mentoring]. It wasn’t the most beneficial [situation] because I didn’t have that the right fit and I didn’t have the right person” (AM2). Likewise, another assisting minister shared, “I have some connections, a few people, but there wasn’t [enough opportunity]. I think I just wanted more” (AM4). One senior clergy member attributed her lack of opportunity to missed or poor communication about such opportunities, stating, “I haven’t had any mentors or the resources being made known” (SC4). Some participants cited low relational capital as the reason for the lack of informal mentoring opportunities. In contrast, others attributed the lack of opportunity to the unwillingness of the more senior leaders.

One senior clergy member (SC6) sought informal mentors for years but found no one willing to mentor her. She emotionally shared her disappointment and frustration, saying,

> I’ve always sought people who would feed me and who would teach me, and I’ve gone to people with certain situations and said, ‘Hey, I think I might need some mentoring through this. ’ And every conversation ends with something similar. ‘You’re so competent, you’re so capable. You’ve got this, you already know what to do’. I felt disappointed (SC6).

One denominational leader shared, “All I can say is that I looked and looked and I had a very hard time finding ladies [to mentor me]. I don’t know why” (DL1). One assisting

minister expressed her dismay at the perceived lack of mentors and the impact it had on her, saying, “There’s not a whole lot of female pastors or higher leadership out here and it can feel isolating” (AM4).

Whether the lack of mentors was absolute or merely perceived, participants in this study asserted that the absence of informal face-to-face opportunities hindered their leadership development. One senior leader lamented, “Sometimes I think if I would have had people or more opportunities for mentoring, perhaps, I could be farther along in certain areas” (SC4). Another senior leader expressed, “I wish that it [mentoring] would have been started years earlier, God knows” (SC3). One denominational leader asserted that “mentoring would have made the process easier and leader development faster. … I didn’t really have a whole lot of that…And it really put me on a trajectory that was not great for me” (DL2). Some participants described varied mentoring opportunities that were less than beneficial to their leadership development. In contrast, others reported that the absence of positive mentor-protégé relationships was unproductive for leadership development.

Theme 7: The Absence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. Wanberg et al. (2003) introduced the dynamic process of the mentoring model and suggested that the presence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents improved the quality of mentoring outcomes. The positive mentor-protégé antecedents included the character of the mentor, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of the mentoring interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). Participants of this study described their informal

mentoring opportunities as less than beneficial toward their leadership development due to the absence of these antecedents. Each antecedent was discussed as a subtheme related to the absence of positive mentor-protégé relationships.

The first subtheme that emerged was the *absence of the antecedent of the mentor's character.* Some of the participants who received informal in-person mentoring described mentors who lacked godly character. One denominational leader shared what she believed godly character entailed, "there are some qualifications and some characteristics, some of them really common, [such as] kindness or respect or some stuff like that in the character of the person" (DL1). She went on to explain that if she observed someone being less than honest, she was challenged to "separate the person, their character or the way that they live their face from what they're saying" (DL1), making it challenging to remain engaged with a mentor. Another denominational leader (DL3) recounted an incident with a mentor who shared private information that the mentee had confided to her. DL3 recalled her reflection about the incident at the time, saying, "This is not what Jesus would do, or how Jesus would act, or what Jesus would say" (DL3). She went on to share that this ended the mentoring relationship as "this was probably my most painful experience in ministry from somebody that I looked up to" (DL3). One senior clergy member also ended an informal mentoring relationship because she observed, "People do the wrong thing and then realizing I don't want to be that" (SC1). Participants perceived the lack of a mentor as less than beneficial to their

leadership development, and others recalled that the characteristics of the mentoring relationships were less than productive to their growth.

The second subtheme to emerge was the *absence of positive characteristics* of *mentoring relationships*. Though research asserted that positive mentor-protégé relationships were characterized by confidentiality, flattened power, mutuality, and trust between mentor and protégé (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2003), participants of this study reported the absence of these mentoring dynamics in some informal mentoring opportunities. Participants reported a lack of mutuality and flattened power that they felt hindered their personal and professional growth and leadership development. Often, these two characteristics were intermingled in the participants' retelling of their unproductive informal mentoring experiences.

One denominational leader recounted an informal mentoring relationship where her mentor devalued her ideas, stating, “[she] wasn’t willing to try new things. … So I didn’t get to like explore some new possibilities or think outside the box” (DL5). She attributed her mentor’s response to loss of perceived power on the part of the mentor, saying, “I think it was because somebody [her mentor] was again threatened, that they would lose some popularity if [I were] to succeed (DL5). One assisting minister (AM1) relayed an experience where her peer mentor was unwilling to share power and responsibility in a mutual endeavor, recalling, “I ended up being partnered up with a lady that really wanted to overtake the prayer ministry … just that became very unbeneficial

(AM1). Another assisting minister expressed her dissatisfaction with her informal mentor, explaining, “I think the biggest negative for me has just been people that just weren’t willing [to mentor me] or were protecting their own turf” (AM2). Although some participants experienced the absence of mutuality and flattened power in their informal mentoring relationships, other participants described mentor-protégé interactions that were less than beneficial to their leadership development.

The third subtheme that emerged was the absence of the third antecedent- the *nature of the mentoring interactions.* One senior clergy member’s response summarized most of the participants’ responses, citing “poor communication, lack of follow-up, the mentor not listening or not following up, or poor time management” (SC2) as reasons for less-than-beneficial mentoring interactions. She also traced her unproductive informal mentoring experience to the lack of consistent meeting times, explaining, “So then our meeting times did not happen regularly. When they did happen, they were either cut off short or it went way too long” (SC2). Some participants expressed frustration with informal mentors who disengaged from the relationship due to the mentor's busyness. One senior leader (SC3) recalled her confusion and hurt from a mentor who stepped back and told her, ‘I don’t have time for you anymore.’ SC3 relayed that mentoring interactions could be improved, and if mentors would “be willing to engage and truly engage” (SC3). Another senior clergy member shared a similar story, saying, “I think she [mentor] was in a busy place in her life. That [mentoring relationship] fizzled out” (SC4). Although participants in this study described some unproductive informal mentoring

opportunities, the majority of participants were still willing to actively engage in informal mentoring opportunities.

The women who participated in this study described the formal and informal mentoring strategies that they perceived as beneficial, as well as those that they perceived as less beneficial to their leadership development. Additionally, participants were asked to provide background information on their motivation for pursuing leadership. Seven themes emerged from the data provided by the participants: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. In the next section, the patterns, relationships, and themes that emerged were discussed.

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes

Qualitative data analysis is an inductive and comparative process that researchers employ to bring order and meaning to the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Upon completion of the data analysis from the participants of this study, seven themes with subsequent subthemes emerged: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. In addition to the themes that emerged, I deduced some thematic patterns between the formal and informal

responses to both RQ1 and RQ2, as well as some relationships between the participants' responses and Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of WLD. These patterns and relationships were discussed in detail.

Patterns and Relationships Between Formal and Informal Themes of RQ1

Participants of this study were asked to describe any formal or informal mentoring strategies that they perceived to be productive toward leader development. Four common themes emerged from their responses: varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, and the importance of holistic mentoring strategies (see Table 11).

Table 11

Thematic Patterns Between Formal and Informal Responses to Research Question 1

Theme	Formal Response	Informal Response
3. Varied mentoring … opportunities	Varied in form. Varied in quality. Varied availability.	Varied in form. Varied availability
4. The presence of mentor-protégé antecedents	Mentor's character Characteristics of a mentoring relationship Nature of mentoring interactions	Mentor's character Characteristics of a mentoring relationship Nature of mentoring interactions
5. Self-reported growth of protégé	Professional growth Personal growth	Professional growth Personal growth
6. The importance of holistic mentoring strategies	Moral strategies. Aesthetic strategies. Intellectual strategies	Moral strategies. Aesthetic strategies. Intellectual strategies

Theme 3: Patterns of Varied Mentoring. When participants of this study were asked to describe both formal and informal mentoring opportunities they engaged in either within the ICC or outside the ICC, their responses included a variety of mentoring experiences. These mentoring opportunities varied in form and availability (see Table 11). Although participants often described formal opportunities as varying in quality, this subtheme was not mentioned in their responses regarding beneficial informal mentoring strategies. Varied form and availability were discussed in detail as participants' responses included both of these dynamics in formal and informal mentoring.

Regarding the first subtheme of varied form, formal opportunities included the initial credentialing process, one-on-one mentoring, on-the-job training, and cohort-based learning. The most frequently mentioned form of formal mentoring was a WIML cohort experience offered from outside the denomination. This cohort met monthly for a period of eight to 12 months and culminated in a "summit" or face-to-face weekend. One assisting minister relayed that "WIML was the most instrumental [formal] mentoring … [I] have developed skills for me in ministry and then as a leader outside of ministry. That just continues to further educate me in my leadership role and which is what has led me into women's ministry" (AM1). A senior clergy member (SC2) explained that the WIML experience "helped women in ministry leadership to realize their specific calling. I think just so that it would help them fulfill and live out their gifts and what God has called them to do" (SC2). The participants reported that, though there were other forms of

formal mentoring, cohorts seemed to be the preferred form of formal engagement for leadership development.

Similarly, participants described informal mentoring opportunities that included one-on-one mentoring, on-the-job training, and PMGs. Participants reported a wide range of people who had mentored them informally, including family members, leaders, and pastors. Participants reported that the time spent in informal mentoring opportunities with other leaders was beneficial to their growth. One assisting minister (AM5) described these encounters as instrumental in her development as an individual and a leader, relaying that her informal mentors spoke into [her] "life every once in a while and God just uses them to kind of ping you forward" (AM5). One senior clergy member conveyed her commitment to being a lifelong learner and making it a point to "glean something from every conversation I have with senior leaders" (SC6).

Although face-to-face encounters were considered preferable, participants viewed books and multimedia sources as informal learning and mentoring opportunities, choosing to follow particular personalities or authors as mentors. Forty-two percent of the participants mentioned reading books as their primary informal mentoring experience. One denominational leader shared that books were her primary form of informal mentoring, "I would say another huge mentoring piece for me has been books. Books have mentored me time and time and time again" (DL3).

The second subtheme that emerged in both formal and informal mentoring opportunities was that of *varied availability.* Participants communicated a wide range of

perceived availability of both formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Participants reported the availability of formal opportunities as nonexistent to multiple. Four of the 19 participants, all senior clergy or denominational leaders, reported having no formal experiences beyond the credentialing process. One denominational leader stated, “I really haven’t been on the receiving end of really any formal mentoring” [beyond the licensing process] (DL2). A woman shared that the bulk of their formal training occurred further along in their vocational career when they were about to engage senior clergy or denominational roles. One senior clergy member stated, “I probably had more informal mentoring than I’ve had formal … mostly it’s happened organically where, I’ve just felt the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask somebody to mentor me” (SC2).

All participants reported having had some informal mentoring opportunity. Some participants spoke fondly of individuals who had a profound impact on their lives. However, others opted for multimedia and books as a means of informal mentoring, especially when they felt there were no mentors available. One senior leader recalled, “So I’ve never had that [informal mentoring with individuals], but usually it’s books or a seminar here and there, a podcast that I would listen to” (SC4). One assisting minister linked her lack of informal mentoring opportunities with individuals to her lack of “right connections” (AM2). Participants often attributed their ability to engage in either formal or informal mentoring experiences to their relational capital with other, more experienced women leaders, their ability to network, or denominational communication.

Theme 4: Patterns in the Presence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents.

When participants in this study were asked to describe the benefits of their formal and informal mentoring opportunities, they often related aspects of their mentor's character or the nature of the relationship that they perceived as beneficial to their leadership development. Wanberg et al. (2003) described three mentoring dynamics, or positive mentoring antecedents that impacted the outcomes of a mentoring experience, including the mentor's character, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of mentoring interactions. Participants of this study reported the presence of each of these antecedents in their formal and informal mentoring experiences. Each antecedent was discussed as a subtheme.

The first subtheme that emerged as a positive subtheme was the antecedent of *the mentor's character.* Participants often portrayed their most effective mentors as those who were of "good and godly" character. One denominational leader (DL1) asserted that a mentor with a godly character displays traits such as kindness, respect, honesty, and the wisdom and knowledge of God, as well as a deep understanding of life and ministry. Other participants explained that they also appreciated a mentor who was not judgmental toward the mentee. Whether the mentoring opportunity was a face-to-face opportunity, or book authors or multimedia presenters, formal or informal in nature, participants valued a mentor with "godly character". Almost as important as the mentor's character was to this study's participants was also the nature of the mentor-protégé relationships

The second subtheme was that the antecedents of the characteristics of mentor-protégé relationships had the potential for the transformative development of women. Positive formal or informal mentoring relationships are often characterized by confidentiality, flattened power, and trust (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2016). Participants did not use terms such as flattened power or mutuality to describe these mentor-protégé relationships; however, the participants most often mentioned finding mentors they could trust. One denominational leader recommended that an emerging leader find "somebody who you feel that you can trust …that you feel like really can invest in you" (DL5). Other participants concurred with the sentiment that the mentor's trustworthiness enabled a healthy environment where the mentee could grow as a woman and a leader.

The third subtheme was the *nature of the mentoring interactions.* Participants who met with individuals or PMGs, in either formal or informal settings, reported that regular meeting times, accessibility to the mentor, active listening on the part of the mentor, and being held accountable all contributed to their positive perceptions of the mentor-protégé interactions. One senior leader (SC2) suggested that mentoring interactions needed to be consistent to create an environment of trust and growth. The presence of these positive mentoring antecedents provided environments in which the protégés reported feeling supported in their efforts to advance their leadership development.

Theme 5: Patterns in the Self-Reported Growth of the Protégé. One of the most common benefits of formal and informal mentoring opportunities reported by the

study's participants was self-reported growth — both personal and professional. Both types of growth are identified as subthemes and are discussed in greater detail here.

The first subtheme described by the participants of this study was *self-reported personal growth*, especially in the area of increased self-awareness. Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested that any increase in a leader's self-awareness has the potential to enable the leader to respond to leadership development from a more authentic self. Many participants attributed their increased self-awareness and personal growth to the feedback they received from both formal and informal mentors about their strengths, weaknesses, calling, personal walk with God, and life-and-ministry balance. One senior leader shared, "So it [feedback from mentor] moved me to the next level and my walk with Him … to be more confident in who I was and who He had created me to be so that I can go and do what He wanted me to do" (SC5). Participants often reported that their growing self-awareness increased their confidence to pursue their leadership pathway.

The second subtheme was that of *self-reported professional growth*. Participants reported acquiring knowledge and skills from both formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Participants reported learning role-specific tasks, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills, organizational language, and healthy communication skills from face-to-face mentors, authors, and multimedia personalities. Participants often reported that many of these skills were more "caught than taught" through observation and conversations with their mentors, whether they were in formal or informal settings. One assisting minister described the importance of professional growth as an ongoing process,

stating, “I would definitely encourage that learning is not a one-and-done thing. I think we need to be in a constant state of learning and growing, not have the attitude that we have arrived because we have not” (AM1). Although the participants did not specifically mention the term self-efficacy, they often spoke fondly of the opportunity to learn these important skills, which improved their confidence and helped them progress on their leadership development pathway.

Theme 6: Patterns of Holistic Mentoring Strategies. As part of the RQ1 interview protocol, participants were asked two questions about creating mentoring opportunities for others in the future. The following questions were posed: If you were asked to design a formal mentoring process for leadership development, what would you include? Moreover, what, if any, recommendations would you make to emerging women clergy members about seeking informal mentoring opportunities? Participants recommended formal designs that were very structured and informal mentoring strategies that were very organic in nature. Goodwin et al. (2021) employed holistic mentoring strategies to codify the data for both sets of responses. The holistic mentoring strategies were categorized into three subthemes: moral, aesthetic, and intellectual strategies (see Table 11). Each of these subthemes was discussed in depth.

The first subtheme was *moral strategies*. Goodwin et al. (2021) described moral strategies as those that enhance the protégé’s sense of identity, integrity, and equilibrium through self-examination to gain a proper worldview**.** Participants in this study often recommended that formal mentoring experiences include opportunities for self-discovery

through various assessments, shared experiences around life/ministry balance, and relational time in cohort communities with those who share a similar role or leadership pathway. One denominational leader (DL1) proposed a three-pronged approach to formal design that included opportunities for increasing self-awareness, acquiring skills, and achieving a life/ministry balance.

Unlike their recommendations for formal mentoring opportunities, which focused on program and content, the participants' recommendations for informal mentoring centered on the posture of the mentee. These women recommended that emerging leaders adopt a posture of proactivity and vulnerability when seeking mentors who would provide them with wisdom and knowledge for their current season of life, ministry, and leadership. One denominational leader suggested, "Keep pressing until the right person is able to speak into your life and keep you accountable or provide some sort of mentorship" (DL6), suggesting that securing informal mentoring relationships was the responsibility of the emerging leader.

The second subtheme was *aesthetic strategies*. Aesthetic strategies are employed to put mentees at ease, allowing them to explore and learn about their external and internal worlds (Goodwin et al., 2021). These strategies create environments that support learning, relationship building, and self-care, thereby increasing the protégé's self-confidence (Goodwin et al., 2021). Participants in this study appeared to understand the role of the environment in facilitating effective formal or informal mentoring. Similar to their responses about moral strategies, participants described formal mentoring strategies

in terms of place, including space, relational opportunities, and learning opportunities. However, their responses about informal mentoring focused on the mentor as a safe person. One denominational leader recommended that more senior leaders "develop friendships and safe places to process leadership questions" with emerging leaders (DL4). Whether describing formal or informal mentoring strategies, participants often stressed the importance of a safe environment with mentors who would challenge them to grow as leaders and individuals.

The third subtheme was *intellectual strategies*. According to Goodwin et al. (2021), intellectual strategies are employed to propel leaders toward continued leadership development by reconnecting them to their core values and destiny as leaders, and sharing specific skills and tools to that end. Participants in this study recommended that formal designs include the acquisition of skills and wisdom from more senior leaders, suggesting that emerging leaders seek informal mentoring opportunities with mentors who exhibit wisdom and skills. One denominational leader relayed that learning such skills enabled her to accept herself and realize that she was "not broken because I'm this way, that's just how I'm wired" (DL2). Whether the mentoring opportunities were formal or informal, participants in this study recommended the need for relational skills, emotional health, conflict resolution, and a balance between life and ministry.

In their responses to RQ1, participants expressed the value and importance of formal and informal holistic mentoring strategies that addressed the whole being —body, mind, and spirit —as well as their vocational lives**.** In the next section, I shared the

perceived patterns of participants' responses to any formal or informal mentoring experiences that they perceived as less than beneficial to their leadership development.

Patterns and Relationships Between Formal and Informal Themes of RQ2

Participants in this study were asked to describe any formal or informal mentoring strategies that they perceived as less than beneficial or unproductive for their leader development. Two themes emerged from their responses: varied mentoring opportunities and the absence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents (see Table 12). Patterns between each theme and its subthemes have been discussed.

Table 12

Thematic Patterns Between Formal and Informal Responses to Research Question 2

Theme	Formal mentoring	Informal mentoring
3. Varied mentoring opportunities	Varied in quality. Varied availability.	Varied in quality. Varied availability
7. The absence of mentor-protégé antecedents	Mentor's character Characteristics of a mentoring relationship Nature of mentoring interactions	Mentor's character Characteristics of a mentoring relationship Nature of mentoring interactions

Theme 3: Patterns of Varied Mentoring. When participants of this study were asked to describe both formal and informal mentoring opportunities they engaged in either within the ICC or outside the ICC, their responses included a variety of mentoring experiences. Although varied forms were discussed in RQ1, this subtheme was not mentioned in their responses to RQ2 regarding unproductive mentoring strategies.

However, these formal and informal opportunities varied in quality and availability and were discussed as subthemes (see Table 12).

The first subtheme of varied formal and informal mentoring opportunities was that these opportunities *varied in quality*. Applying Wanberg et al.'s (2003) measures of frequency, scope, and strength of influence to the participants' responses indicated a lack of perceived quality of both formal and informal mentoring strategies. Participants shared that some formal and informal mentors focused on the role or task at hand and did not seem concerned with the individual as a whole person, letting their personal walk with God or felt needs go unaddressed. One denominational leader shared this concern, stating, "I think there were times where things were really focused on a task or a project as opposed to [my] character development or really growing in my Christian walk" (DL 2). Many participants utilized books and multimedia sources as informal mentoring strategies when face-to-face mentors were unavailable. The only caveat they offered was that leaders discern the quality of the materials chosen. Although participants were concerned about the quality of formal and informal mentoring opportunities, the perceived lack of availability of mentors was expressed most often.

The second subtheme of varied mentoring opportunities was the perceived *lack of availability* of formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Participants in this study often reported this perceived lack of opportunity as the primary reason they did not engage in either form of mentoring. Participants attributed this lack of opportunity to a variety of reasons, including poor communication and preferential opportunities based on

gender, race, and geography on the part of the ICC. One denominational leader shared, I've had a little bit of mentoring, maybe in a class here or there, but I have not had any within ICC, not within the denomination" (DL2). Other reasons offered were related to the perceived lack of ability in the protégé, including poor relational capital and networking skills. One assisting minister related, "I never made the right connections" (AM2). Other participants cited the lack of mentors or the unwillingness of more senior leaders to engage in a mentoring process with emerging leaders.

Whether the lack of mentors was absolute or merely perceived, participants in this study asserted that the absence of formal and informal mentoring opportunities hindered their leadership development. Lack of availability was not the only reason given for perceptions of unproductive mentoring, as some participants relayed that the absence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents also hindered their leadership development.

Theme 7: The Absence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. According to Wanberg et al.'s (2003) dynamic process of mentoring model, the presence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents had the potential to improve the quality of mentoring outcomes. These mentor-protégé antecedents included the character of the mentor, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of the mentoring interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). When asked to share about less-than-beneficial formal and informal mentoring opportunities, participants' responses included the absence of these antecedents. Each antecedent was discussed as a subtheme of the absence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents (see Table 12).

The first subtheme that emerged was the *absence of the antecedent of the mentor's character.* Participants portrayed their formal and informal mentors as individuals with "good and godly" character; however, some participants experienced mentors whose character lacked this quality. The lack of character was often ascribed to immaturity, emotional instability, or insecurity on the part of the mentor. One denominational leader (DL1) shared an unbeneficial experience where she ended a mentoring relationship because she felt her mentor was "unstable" and "unsafe". Moral failure was only cited by one participant as the reason for "ungodly character". The perceived ungodly character of the mentor led some participants to disengage from the mentoring relationships.

The second subtheme to emerge was the *absence of positive characteristics* of *mentoring relationships*. Often described in research as bidirectional and transformational in nature, this antecedent is characterized by confidentiality, flattened power, mutuality, and trust between mentor and protégé (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Gordon, 2017; Miller, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2003). Although the participants did not specifically use these words, their recollections of some of their formal and informal mentoring experiences could be characterized by unbalanced power and a lack of mutuality. Participants shared experiences where unbalanced power was displayed as hostility toward the mentee, and a lack of mutuality was displayed as a lack of interest in the mentee's ideas. One senior leader (SC6) suggested that the hostility directed toward the mentee might be attributed to insecurity or

jealousy on the part of the mentor, as the mentee "infringes or encroaches on their [mentor] area" (SC6). Some participants chose to end the mentoring relationship, while others persevered for their own personal growth. Women who experienced the absence of mutuality and flattened power in their formal and informal mentoring experiences described these situations as hindrances to learning and transformative growth. Participants also relayed that the nature of the mentoring interactions was less than beneficial to their leadership development.

The third subtheme that emerged was the absence of the third antecedent- the *nature of the mentoring interactions.* The nature of mentoring interactions can be described in terms of frequency, scope, and strength of influence (Du & Wang, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). As most formal mentoring opportunities were scheduled events, participants did not report any challenges with the frequency of their mentoring interactions. However, some participants did report poor communication and poor time management on the part of the mentor as hindrances to their informal mentoring experiences. Scope in mentoring relationships refers to the breadth of interactions between the mentor and protégé, and the strength of influence refers to the impact of mentoring on the mentee's development. Often, these two dynamics were intertwined in the participants' responses about formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Participants expressed disappointment and frustration with both formal and informal mentors when they did not appear to engage in active listening or follow up with the mentee. Likewise, formal and informal mentoring experiences where the mentor focused

on teaching skills around tasks without any concern for the development of the mentee as an individual were described as less than beneficial or unproductive to the women clergy member leadership development. One senior leader captured this sentiment best, sharing that some mentors did not see me to understand that "the most important thing in the process of mentoring isn't the process, it's the person" (SC1).

The Relationship of Emerging Themes to Women's Leadership Development Theory

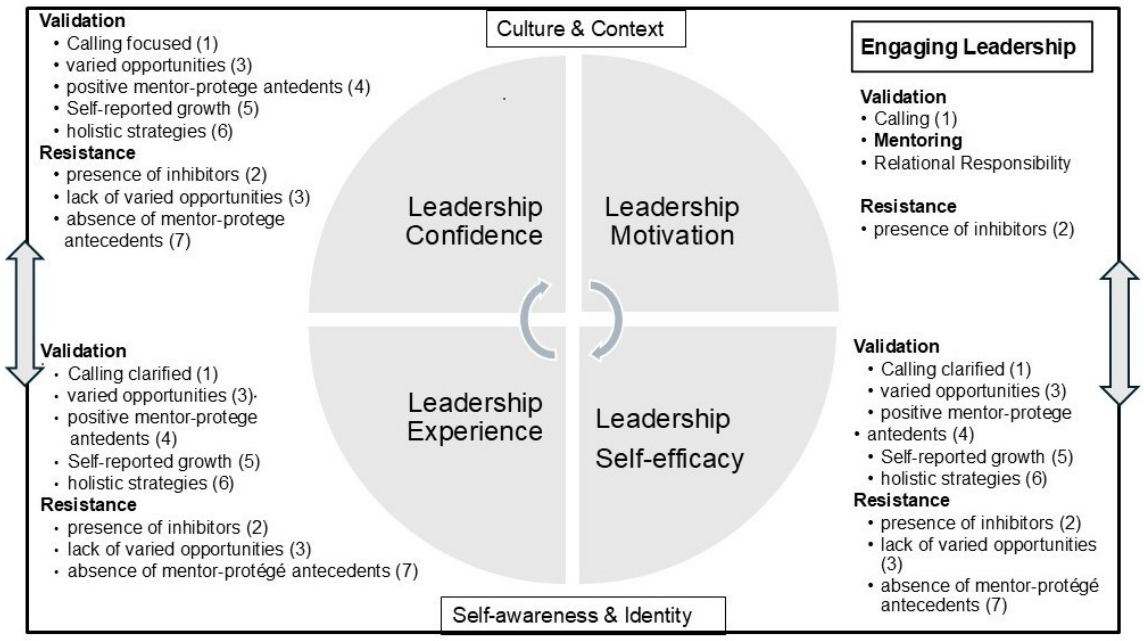
Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested that women developed differently from their male counterparts and proposed a staged model of women's leader development (WLD). The WLD model was employed as the conceptual framework for this study, as the participants in both studies shared some commonalities, including a sense of calling, motivation to engage in leadership, and the pursuit of leadership development through mentoring strategies (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). At the conclusion of my data analysis, I suggested an expansion of Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model based on the relationships between elements of their model and the emerging themes of this study.

Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of WLD comprises four stages, represented by the four quadrants of a circle: leadership motivation, leadership self-efficacy, leadership experience, and leadership competence (see Figure 2). The premise is that women engage in a leadership development pathway when motivated by a calling, mentoring, or relational responsibility, as shown in the upper right-hand quadrant of the box (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). In this expanded model, I have highlighted *mentoring* as the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of existing

ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that may lead to more women clergy within the ICC (see Figure 2). Each theme was discussed in relation to the conceptual model.

Figure 2

The Impact of Mentoring on Women's Leadership Development Model



Note: Contributors to women's leadership development in Christian higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Adapted with permission from Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, and expanded upon based on this study's data analysis.

Theme 1: The Importance of Calling as a Motivator. Whelchel (2012) defined calling as "the call to God and to His service in the vocational sphere of life [as being] based on giftedness, desires, affirmations, and human need (para. 1, 2). The participants of this study were asked to describe their calling to ministry leadership and explain how

that calling impacted their engagement in a leadership development process. The subthemes that emerged from the data described the nature of calling as shared by these women. These subthemes included the uniqueness of the call to the individual, the evolutionary nature of calling, the clarification of calling over time, and the connection between calling and relational responsibility. One denominational leader described her calling as a series of "yeses" in response to various opportunities, saying, "So again, one yes has led to the other yes, to a different assignment and different types of leadership opportunities. But always saying yes to the Lord and holding true to the plans and purposes that he has for my life" (DL6). Although most of the data from this study aligned with Dahlvig and Longman's (2014), I have expanded on their model to include the perceived ongoing impact of calling as a motivator, based on the participants' responses. Participants in this study described calling as a continuous motivator throughout their leadership development, explaining that their callings became increasingly focused as they engaged in formal and informal mentoring within their leadership pathway. This was represented in Figure 2 in each quadrant.

Theme 2: The Presence of Inhibitors to Leadership Development. In each stage of the women's leadership model, the leader's willingness to engage in the following developmental task can depend on the amount of validation or resistance they receive from others and their response to that validation or resistance (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Too much resistance could cause a woman to retreat or withdraw

altogether from leadership, only to reengage if compelled to do so at a later time (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

When asked how they responded to their calling, some participants seemed to engage easily; however, others encountered internal and external inhibitors to their calling. Many of these inhibitors aligned with those found in current leadership research. Internal inhibitors included the internalization of church tradition, the challenge of balancing life and ministry, and feeling underqualified. Participants often reported internalizing church tradition that did not support women in leadership, as expressed by one senior leader, "I kind of came from a background where women weren't really pastors … there was no prejudice against it, it just wasn't in my context, so I didn't think about it" (SC6).

External inhibitors included traditional church culture, biblical interpretation, and stereotypical gender roles that were unsupportive of women's leadership development. Although the ICC purported an egalitarian perspective toward women in leadership, some participants in this study observed that the practice did not always align with the policy. One assistant minister shared that she would like to see the ICC exhibit, "action versus just expression with words that we support women in leadership" (AM4). In Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model, resistance to leadership development was acknowledged once the leader engages a leadership pathway; however, their model does not acknowledge that inhibitors can hinder a woman from even beginning the process, so I have added this theme as a form of resistance to the leadership motivation quadrant. In addition, I have

added theme two to each quadrant as participants reported encountering these barriers throughout their vocational career, even as they advanced their careers and assumed new roles (see Fig. 2). The following themes addressed the research questions about formal and informal mentoring opportunities, the benefits of these experiences, the importance of holistic mentoring strategies, and the unproductive aspects of mentoring experiences as described by the participants of this study.

Theme 3: Varied Mentoring Opportunities. Participants in this study were asked to describe both formal and informal mentoring opportunities they had engaged in, either within the ICC or outside the ICC. Their responses included a wide range of varied formal and informal mentoring experiences. Their reported experiences varied in form, quality, and availability. Participants' responses indicated that some experiences were very beneficial, particularly women's leadership cohorts. The lone chaplain in this study expressed her delight in an opportunity to learn from women mentors, saying, "what that [WIML] gave me [was] other women which I had not had access to, as all of my previous discipleship training, formal training [was] with men" (CH1). Participants also reported that their experiences were less than beneficial or unproductive for the women clergy members' leadership development, often recalling situations where the mentor seemed to focus on the task rather than the person.

Although forms of formal and informal mentoring varied, participants spoke most often about the varying availability of mentoring opportunities. Some participants reported having had multiple opportunities for mentoring, but others expressed

disappointment and concern about the perceived paucity of mentoring opportunities. One senior leader shared, "[I] did not hear of any [opportunities] or heard too late to engage" (SC3). Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model suggests that validation and resistance between each stage can either advance or hinder a leader's development process. Although I concurred with this idea, I have expanded the model to include theme three in three quadrants under validation and resistance, as I treated validation as synonymous with beneficial and resistance as synonymous with unproductive mentoring opportunities (see Fig. 2).

Theme 4: The Presence of Positive Mentoring Antecedents. Wanberg et al. (2003) suggested that the outcomes of mentoring, both proximal and distal, are often influenced by the presence or absence of positive antecedents related to three mentoring dynamics: the mentor's character, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of the mentoring interactions. Participants of this study reported the presence of these mentoring dynamics in both formal and informal mentoring opportunities. Participants often portrayed mentors as individuals of "good and godly" character, characterized the mentor-protégé relationships as transformational, and described the nature of the mentoring interactions as contributing to their positive perceptions of mentoring strategies as beneficial and supportive of their leadership development. One assisting minister summarized the beneficial impact of such a mentoring experience on her life, portraying her cohort mentors as so "instrumental, it gave me the confidence to be able to go forward in what God has called me to do" (AM1). Again, I expanded

Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model to include theme four in three quadrants under validation, as I treated validation as synonymous with those experiences the participants described as beneficial (see Fig. 2).

Theme 5: Self-Reported Growth of the Protégé. One of the most common benefits of formal and informal mentoring opportunities reported by the study's participants was self-reported personal and professional growth. Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested that women's leader development is shaped, influenced, and framed by the organizational culture and context, as well as the leaders' self-awareness. Any increase in a leader's self-awareness has the potential to enable the leader to respond to leadership development from a more authentic self (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Many participants in this study reported an increase in self-awareness and self-confidence, which they attributed to the feedback they received from both formal and informal mentors. This self-reported personal growth seemed to validate the participants and enable them to grow professionally as well. Acquiring knowledge and skills from both formal and informal mentors increased their self-efficacy and confidence, helping them progress on their leadership development pathway. One assisting minister expressed the value of her cohort mentoring experience to both her personal and professional growth, saying, "It really just gave me this boost and this confidence and also the leadership knowledge just watching how these women mentored and just poured out their knowledge, love, and skills (AM1). The stages of Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of WLD included leadership motivation, self-efficacy, experience, and competency.

Women advance their leadership process based on the amount of validation they receive. I have added theme five to each of the three quadrants of growth under validation, as participants have attributed their self-reported growth to the engagement of mentors (see Fig. 2).

Theme 6: The Importance of Holistic Mentoring Strategies. Participants of this study were asked to offer their recommendations for those seeking formal or informal mentoring opportunities as part of their leadership development. Participants' responses were analyzed using Goodwin et al.'s (2021) holistic mentoring strategies, which categorized strategies as either moral, aesthetic, or intellectual in nature. Formal and informal holistic mentoring strategies that respected and engaged the participant personally and professionally were lauded by the participants, particularly those environments that supported learning, relationship building, self-care, and increased the protégé's self-confidence. One denominational leader recommended a formal cohort design that focused on developing the leader as a woman and a leader by "sharpening the character of Christ in a person … and [teaching] ministry skills (DL1). Another denominational leader stressed the importance of a holistic environment to support women's leadership development, stating, "relational support would be first … just having people to talk to, to process with, to ask questions [of] in a safe way" (DL4). Again, this theme supports Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) theory, which states the importance of context or environment and self-awareness as the realm in which leadership development occurs. Likewise, the employment of holistic mentoring

strategies was viewed as validation for the advancement through the stages of self-efficacy, experience, and competence (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

The willingness of a woman to engage in the following developmental task is often dependent on the amount of validation or resistance she receives from others and impacts the emerging leader's progression toward leadership competence (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Too much resistance could cause a woman to retreat or withdraw altogether from leadership, only to reengage if compelled to do so (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014, p. 13). Participants' responses to any formal or informal mentoring experiences that they perceived to be less than beneficial or unproductive to their leadership development have been categorized as resistance.

Theme 3: Unproductive Varied Mentoring Opportunities. When participants in this study were asked to describe both formal and informal mentoring opportunities they perceived as less than beneficial or unproductive for their leadership development, their responses included a variety of mentoring experiences that varied in quality and availability. The perceived lack of quality may have hindered the progress of their leadership development; however, the perceived lack of opportunity to engage a mentor was often cited as the chief reason they did not participate in some form of mentoring. One denominational leader shared, "I really have not had a lot of mentoring at all. I mean my supervisor mentors me in some ways. I've had a little bit of mentoring, maybe in a class here or there, but I have not had any real mentoring within ICC, not within the denomination" (DL2). Whether the lack of mentors was absolute or merely perceived,

participants in this study asserted that the absence of formal and informal mentoring opportunities hindered their leadership development. The authors of the WLD model believed that mentoring was a chief motivator for women to engage in leadership, playing a key role in the training and encouragement of leaders (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Conversely, the perceived lack of mentors or the disinterest of more senior leaders in engaging in mentoring could be construed as an inhibitor or resistance to leadership development, as represented in Figure 2.

Theme 7: The Absence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. According to Wanberg et al.'s (2003) dynamic process of mentoring model, the presence of positive mentor-protégé antecedents has the potential to improve the quality of mentoring outcomes. Conversely, the absence of these antecedents proved less than beneficial or unproductive for the participants of this study. Participants reported that some of their formal and informal mentoring experiences included mentors who seemed to lack godly character, mentor-protégé relationships that were characterized by unbalanced power and lack of mutuality, and mentoring interactions that lacked in terms of frequency, scope, and strength of influence (Du & Wang, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2003). Lack of godly character was by far the most significant concern for the participants in this study when considering engaging in mentoring. One denominational leader removed herself from one mentoring experience for this reason, recalling her mentor, "Okay, this is not Jesus-like. This is not what Jesus would do, or how Jesus would act, or what Jesus would say" (DL3). Some participants remained in these relationships, but others chose to leave the

mentoring relationships. Whether the participant exited or remained in these situations, they described them as hindrances to learning and transformative growth. As such, theme three was associated with the resistance in the leadership model (see Fig. 2). The analysis of patterns and relationships between the participants' responses about formal and informal mentoring strategies and their alignment with the research questions and conceptual framework informed an understanding of salient data and discrepant cases, which is discussed in the next section.

Salient Data and Discrepant Cases

Analysis of qualitative data often reveals emergent themes. *Salient data* refers to the most important themes and provides the most profound insights into the research topic (Buetow, 2010). A *discrepant* case in qualitative research refers to an instance in which a participant provides contradictory or conflicting information regarding data from other participants (Antin et al., 2015). When presenting the final analysis of qualitative data, a researcher must account for both the qualitative and quantitative aspects.

Salient Data

Qualitative data were collected from 19 ICC women clergy who had experienced some formal or informal mentoring and had voluntarily responded to an invitation to participate in this study. Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom, utilizing a semistructured interview protocol with open-ended questions tailored to align with the local problem, the conceptual framework, and the research questions. Interview responses were transcribed using voice recognition transcription software applications and checked

for accuracy. Participant responses were hand-coded with consideration toward emergent themes, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. Each interview was transcribed within a week using a voice recognition transcription software application, and each transcript was checked against the recording for accuracy; corrections were made as needed. Lodico et al. (2010) described saturation as the point at which the researcher subjectively determines that no further participants will provide additional insight on a topic. Although the goal was to collect data from 12 participants, four from each role—assisting ministers, senior clergy members, and denominational leaders —43 women responded to the invitation to participate. Due to time constraints and scheduling, I interviewed 19 participants and determined that I had reached saturation.

Once the transcripts had been checked for accuracy, I conducted a preliminary inductive exploratory analysis of the data to obtain a general sense of what each participant had said, employing open, axial, and selective coding (Cope, 2010; Creswell, 2012). I returned to the data and identified seven emergent themes: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, the self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.

I reported the findings using rich and descriptive language to convey meaning and understanding of the local problem. Using direct quotes from the participants and interspersing my interpretations, I detailed each emergent theme with subsequent themes,

patterns between formal and informal themes, and relationships of the themes to reflect an alignment with the current research, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. I believe the results of this basic qualitative study research effectively addressed the local problem within the ICC, which was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member leaders, potentially helping to fill the current leadership gap. This study's participants provided a wealth of rich insights and information about the formal and informal holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that, if heeded, might lead to more women engaging in ICC leadership.

Discrepant Cases

As I interviewed each participant only once, the opportunity for discrepancy lay in two potential situations. First, a discrepancy was possible if a difference existed between the interview transcript and what the participant stated in member checking. Second, a disconfirming case can arise if one or more participants provide a narrative that differs from most of the participant responses (Booth et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). Rather than dismissing or ignoring these disconfirming cases, I have been forthcoming about two potential discrepancies in the reporting of the findings, as they can provide a richer and increasingly in-depth insight into the phenomenon being studied (Booth et al., 2013).

First, a discrepancy was possible if a difference existed between the interview transcript and what the participant stated in member checking. The discrepancy was not actually about accuracy, but I was concerned because one participant (AM3) seemed

reticent to share about a less-than-beneficial and traumatic mentoring incident, as she stated she feared repercussions from others. I had offered to shut off the audio recording, but she declined and continued to share her perceptions. A day later, as I was reviewing my field notes, I decided to employ member checking and asked her if she still wanted the data shared. She decided that the data should be included. I asked her to send an email that confirmed her choice and have kept it on file in a secure location.

Second, a discrepancy may occur when one or more participants provide a narrative that differs from the majority of the participant responses (Booth et al., 2013; Patton, 2015). One potentially discrepant case was the inclusion of a chaplain as a participant in this study. Initially, the participant pool was to include assisting ministers, senior clergy members, and denominational leaders of the ICC. The inclusion of this chaplain was a pleasant and unexpected surprise, as I had not considered this group when designing this study. Though her responses to the research questions were similar to those of the other women in this study, her licensing training was much more involved and focused on a two-year formal mentoring process. I discerned no misalignment with the other participants' responses, and I wondered if this type of training and mentoring was more formative in shaping her as a leader. Although these two instances might be considered discrepancies, I believe that the inclusion of these two women's stories provided a richer insight into the formal and informal mentoring experiences that participants considered beneficial or less beneficial to their leadership development pathway.

Evidence of Quality

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that qualitative researchers ensure the quality of their research by providing evidence of credibility, dependability, transferability, and promoting action and collaboration (as cited in Lodico et al., 2010, p. 169). Patton (2015) suggested that the accuracy and credibility of study findings can be ensured if the researcher applies four distinct but related elements of inquiry. These elements include the systematic collection of quality data, the conscientious and systematic analysis of data, the credibility of the researcher based on training, experience, and presentation of self, and the reader's philosophical belief in the value of the qualitative inquiry. Although no formulas exist to ensure the quality of qualitative analysis, adhering to the principles helps readers determine the value of the study (Booth et al., 2013; Patton, 2015).

The procedures employed to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings in this basic qualitative study included a systematic data collection process, as mentioned in the previous element. Additionally, a systematic approach to data analysis included manual open coding, axial coding, and identification of emergent themes. The findings of this study were validated through member checking, and the significant findings were presented in narrative form, incorporating participants' words to provide meaning and demonstrate the interconnectedness of emergent themes.

Member Checks

Member checking is "the process in which a researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259).

For this basic qualitative study, participants were asked to review the preliminary findings for accuracy of wording and to clarify any points that needed further explanation. This process was completed by sending a summary of the research findings to the participants via email to determine the accuracy of the document. Participants had 10 days to review the findings and respond with corrections or accept them, either via email or by phone. If corrections were needed, the corrections were made in the findings, and another summary was sent to finalize member checks.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

Throughout the data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting process, I kept notes in a reflective journal to document my own propensity toward bias in my study. As a clergy member of the ICC who has experienced both beneficial and less-than-beneficial mentoring from within and outside the ICC, I was mindful that I accurately report the voice of the participants' responses without coloring their opinions with my own. The use of an interview protocol helped me focus on the participants' responses and avoid inserting my own bias into the interview process.

During data collection and analysis, I was confronted with my own biases, particularly around the participants' perceived lack of opportunity for leadership advancement due to gender and race. I have always had a heart for the "underdog" and sometimes would prefer to fight for their voice. Race and gender were common barriers for women pursuing leadership development (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Coleman, 2020), and some participants in this study reported incidents related to both gender and

race that were detrimental to their leadership development. I was mindful to withhold any of my own biases and opinions about these reported incidents during data collection, data analysis, and the reporting of my findings, so that the results would reflect the voices of the participants and not my own.

Summary of Outcomes

The local problem within the ICC was the lack of understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy leaders, which could help fill the current leadership gap. To address this problem, I designed and executed a basic qualitative study, the purpose of which was to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that might lead to the development of more women within the ICC. I employed purposeful sampling for my sample of women clergy in the most eastern district of the ICC. Data were collected from 19 respondents who had experienced some form of formal or informal mentoring from within or outside the ICC, and were interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol with open-ended questions. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceive to be productive toward leader development?

RQ2: How do women clergy within the religious organization, who have been engaged in self-selected mentor-protégé relationships, describe mentoring strategies that they perceive to be unproductive toward leader development?

In addition, the participants were asked two background questions regarding the nature of their call to ministry and how they responded to their calling, providing context for their initial motivation to pursue a leadership pathway. The participants in this study provided a wealth of rich and insightful information about the formal and informal holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that they perceived as beneficial or unproductive for leadership development. After an inductive data analysis process, seven themes emerged: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. Each was discussed in relation to the problem and the research questions, and included recognized patterns between formal and informal mentoring, as well as relationships of the themes to Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) WLD model.

Emerging Themes and Implications

Theme 1: The Importance of Calling as a Motivator. Participants described their callings as unique, evolutionary in nature, more focused over time, and linked to relational responsibility. Although each of these subthemes was important, the latter two subthemes provided insight into why these women most often engaged in a leadership

development pathway. First, participants described their callings as becoming more focused over time. One assisting minister (AM1) described her calling as an "unfolding" and shared that she enjoyed "watching to see, you know, that what he's [God] called me to do is actually what I'm walking in." Second, many of these women responded to their calling because they saw a need and were willing to fill it. One denominational leader described this sense of relational responsibility well, explaining, "I really felt called to just participate and to do what I could at the church. … I felt a calling to not so much to preach but to pastor, to love people, to care for people, to mentor people" (DL2). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) described calling, mentoring, and relational responsibility as initial motivators for women to engage in a leadership pathway, but many of these participants relayed that they experienced these motivators as ongoing and validated through others throughout their vocational careers. These insights could help the ICC to understand how to engage women in the future.

Theme 2: The Presence of Inhibitors to Leadership Development. When responding to their calling, some participants encountered internal and external inhibitors to their leadership engagement. Many of these inhibitors aligned with those found in current leadership research. Internal inhibitors included the internalization of church tradition, the challenge of balancing life and ministry, and feeling underqualified (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020). Many participants had internalized a traditional church tradition that excluded women from leadership. One senior leader (SC6) stated, "I kind of came from a background where women weren't

really pastors … it wasn't in my context, so I didn't think about it." External inhibitors included traditional church culture, biblical interpretation, and stereotypical gender roles that were unsupportive of women's leadership development (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020). One leader shared that she had often missed parts of the training because the women were expected to "clean up after lunch" while her male counterparts were allowed to return to the training event on time (AM5). Although these inhibitors were present at the outset of the participants' careers, many would persist throughout their vocational careers. Although the ICC leadership purports an egalitarian approach to women in clergy ministry, denominational leaders must recognize that pockets of traditional church culture and patriarchal doctrine still exist in some local churches, potentially inhibiting women's engagement in leadership.

Theme 3: Varied Mentoring Opportunities. Participants described a variety of formal and informal mentoring experiences that varied in form, quality, and availability. Participants appreciated informal encounters with more senior clergy, but most seemed to prefer the opportunity to engage in formal cohorts. One assisting minister (AM1) described her cohort experience, which occurred outside the ICC, as instrumental to her development as a leader, providing her with the skills and confidence. Most participants reported having had only one or two formal mentoring opportunities, typically later in their careers. One senior clergy member recalled, "[I] did not receive a whole lot [of formal mentoring] until probably the last five to six years" (SC7). When asked to design a formal mentoring opportunity, many participants recommended cohorts with others in

the same role, where holistic mentoring strategies were engaged. However, when mentoring opportunities seemed unviable, over 40% of participants resorted to books and multimedia for their leadership development. One denominational leader commented, "Books have mentored me time and time and time again" (DL3). Overall, the participants' largest complaint was the perceived lack of formal mentoring opportunities within the ICC. Many participants expressed disappointment in the perceived lack of opportunities for both types of mentoring, often attributing this to poor communication about opportunities, unavailability at the ICC, or their geographical location.

Theme 4: The Presence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. Participants of this study often described the benefits of their formal and informal mentoring opportunities in terms of their mentor's character, the characteristics of the mentoring relationships, and nature of the mentor-protégé interactions The most effective mentors are those who were of "good and godly" character and displayed traits such as kindness, respect, honesty, being nonjudgmental and exuding the wisdom and knowledge of God, life and ministry. One participant filtered her willingness to engage in formal mentoring by wondering, "How like Jesus are you?" (DL1). In addition, participants described positive mentoring relationships in which they felt they could grow, characterized by trust between the mentor and the protégé. One denominational leader stated that, "You have to get somebody who you feel that you can trust, that you feel like really can invest in you" (DL5). Participants also described mentoring interactions where validation occurred through active listening and accountability, which they found supportive of their

efforts in leadership development. These participant insights could be invaluable to the ICC leadership in considering the recruitment and training of mentors to help emerging leaders engage in a leadership pathway.

Theme 5: Self-Reported Growth of the Protégé. One of the most common benefits of holistic mentoring opportunities, as described by the participants in this study, was self-reported personal and professional growth. Participants described their personal growth as increased self-awareness, which they attributed to validation by mentors who addressed the proteges as women first and clergy members second. One denominational leader described her growth, stating, "God's more concerned with who I am becoming than what I'm doing" (DL3). Participants often described this increased self-awareness as leading to increased self-efficacy and a further pursuit of professional growth, including leadership development, for many of the participants. One senior clergy member (SC1) purported that her pastor-mentor was "very instrumental" in her professional growth, helping her to understand how to handle various vocational situations that arise in ministry. Dahlvig and Longman (2014) purported that women develop best in the context of the protégé's self-awareness and an organizational culture that supports leadership development. Providing women within the ICC with mentoring opportunities leads to increased self-awareness in a supportive cultural environment, which, in turn, may increase the number of women clergy within the ICC.

Theme 6: Holistic Mentoring Strategies. Participants in this study, understanding the power of a supportive environment, most often recommended formal

cohorts that included opportunities for self-discovery through various assessments, shared experiences around life/ministry balance, and relational time. Additionally, the participants recommended that emerging leaders assume a posture of proactivity and vulnerability when seeking informal mentoring opportunities. One denominational leader suggested that emerging women clergy members seek out both formal and informal mentoring opportunities, stating, "Be intentional to find developmental programs that offer relational support and growth. … pray that God will send you the right people at the right time, but also be proactive to seize those opportunities when they come along" (DL4). Supporting women in leadership through the creation of cohorts or training mentors might help the ICC to engage more women in senior leadership.

Theme 7: The Absence of Positive Mentor-Protégé Antecedents. Mentor-protégé antecedents include the character of the mentor, the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, and the nature of the mentoring interactions (Wanberg et al., 2003). When asked to share about less-than-beneficial formal and informal mentoring opportunities, participants' responses included mentors who lacked godly character; mentoring relationships characterized by unbalanced power and a lack of mutuality; and mentor-protégé interactions marked by poor communication and poor time management on the part of the mentor. Although unbalanced power, lack of mutuality, and inconsistent mentor-protégé interactions did hinder some women's engagement in leadership development, participants more often cited a lack of godly character on the part of the mentor as a reason to disengage from a mentoring opportunity. One

denominational leader shared that she found it challenging to remain engaged in the mentoring opportunity, stating, "if [you are] really unstable, I might cut you off because that may not be safe" (DL1). The stress placed by participants about the importance of the mentor's character could inform the ICC when recruiting, screening, and training potential mentors.

The participants in this study provided a wealth of rich and insightful information about formal and informal holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that they perceived as beneficial or unproductive for their leadership development. They offered many constructive recommendations for the design and implementation of holistic mentoring strategies, which, if heeded, might lead to more women engaging in ICC leadership. Though some participants expressed disappointment and frustration around the perceived lack of opportunities for both types of mentoring, most professed a desire to engage in holistic mentoring strategies for their continued growth. Most participants also eagerly expressed their willingness to mentor future generations of women clergy members. One assisting minister summarized this sentiment best, stating, "If the Lord puts anyone [woman] in my path … I'm going to bring them into the fold as best as I can because I believe they have a place here. I just want to help with that. I don't want them to be alone in the process" (AM4). In the next section, I provide a brief description of the project, a scholarly rationale for the chosen project, a review of the literature related to the specific project genre, a description of the project, project evaluation plans, and project implications.

Section 3: The Project

In this section, the appropriate project is described in response to the current study's findings and recent research, addressing the local problem within the ICC. Section 3 includes a description of the project, a scholarly rationale for the chosen project type, a review of recent literature, a detailed description of the project, a plan for evaluating the project, and implications for the project. Walden doctoral candidates must create a project based on the findings of their study and current research related to the candidate's study (Walden, n.d.). What follows is a brief description of the four possible genres of project, along with a short rationale for the viability of each genre. In addition, I relate the project to the goals of addressing the local problem and effecting social change within the organization.

Four genres of projects were offered as possible projects (Walden, n.d.). The options included a program evaluation, a curriculum plan, a professional development/training curriculum, or a position paper with a policy recommendation. I determined that the first three options were not viable or realistic. A program evaluation is employed to evaluate an existing program within an organization as part of an evaluation study (Walden, n.d.). The current study was not an evaluation study, but rather an exploratory qualitative study examining the perceptions of current ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentoring strategies. Additionally, at the time of this study, the ICC had no formal mentoring or continuing education program in place to be

evaluated, making the program evaluation project unviable (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025).

Another option was a 9-week curriculum plan that would provide educators with detailed information for delivering instruction to students, including scope and sequence, assessments, materials, and evaluation. Similarly, a 3-day professional development/training curriculum would provide an educator with an hour-by-hour plan for implementing and evaluating learning outcomes for a specific audience. Although the curriculum plan and professional development curriculum would offer ICC clergy membership research-based information about women's leadership engagement and development, neither option would have a broad enough range of interest or attendance among ICC clergy membership (D. Kreider, personal communication, October 4, 2024).

Based on the findings of this study, I selected a position paper with an initial policy recommendation as my study project. The ICC's clergy members are encouraged to engage in lifelong learning, and the denomination offers some formal opportunities for learning through its two Bible colleges and at select local churches (The Foursquare Church, n.d.). However, at the time of this study, the ICC did not have any policy regarding mandatory formal mentoring, continuing education, or leadership development beyond initial licensing and chaplaincy training for clergy members (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025). One denominational leader suggested that a "framework is important" for "providing educational pathways and different types of learning opportunities as well as a community component" (DL6). The position paper

and subsequent policy could provide the ICC's denominational leaders with a background of the existing problem, present primary evidence from both literature and research as to the benefits of continuing education and mentoring, and outline recommendations for change in practice and policy that would bring organizational and social change relevant to the denominational leaders of the ICC around women's leadership development.

I proposed three goals for this project that extended beyond providing the ICC with evidence of the need for a policy on women's leadership development. First, I have provided the ICC with the language and rationale based on research for the construction of an initial policy for gender-specific formal mentoring. Second, I have presented an initial policy proposal recommending a holistic, role-specific leadership pathway for ICC denominational leadership, for consideration. Third, I have recommended a timetable for incremental implementation of the recommended policy throughout the denomination. Ultimately, my goal was to provide the ICC with an evidence-based proposal to advance women to more senior roles through formal mentoring pathways tailored to how women engage in and remain in leadership.

The following section provides a detailed rationale for the choice of a position paper and policy recommendation for this project study.

Rationale

Walden doctoral candidates are required to provide a scholarly rationale for the *why* and *how* of their project choice. The *why* provides the reader with an understanding

of the choice of project genre based on the findings of data analysis, and the *how* communicates the means by which the local problem is addressed through the project's content (Walden, n.d.).

Walden requires its doctoral candidates to create a project based on the findings of their research that addresses a local problem and brings about social change (Walden, n.d.). Four options for the project study are offered: a program evaluation, a curriculum plan, a professional development/training curriculum, and a position paper with a policy recommendation. What follows is a discussion of the viability of each option, along with the reasoning behind the chosen project.

Projects That Lacked Viability

I determined that the first three options were not viable or ideal based on the findings of this qualitative study. An evaluation report provides an organization with information as to the quality and effectiveness of an existing program (Walden, n.d.). As the ICC does not have a standardized program for leadership development beyond initial licensing and chaplaincy training, nor was this qualitative study an evaluation study, this genre of project was not considered a viable option. The originally 9-week curriculum plan, to be offered at the ICC college, was also discarded as an option because, although potentially viable, it would not necessarily engage a large number of participants due to limited time and finances. Most participants in this study preferred “just in time” learning as they transitioned into a new role. Likewise, the professional development curriculum offered to all ICC clergy at national and regional gatherings was discarded as an option

because it too would not cast a broad enough net to solve the local problem or bring social change within the organization. The organizational culture of the ICC remained primarily patriarchal (63% male clergy) and senior pastors (97% male), and the senior clergy tend to endorse and drive denominational initiatives at the local church level (Dunahoo, 2020; The Foursquare Church, 2024). Former attempts within the ICC to engage existing clergy in programs to advance women have been attended primarily by women and seem to lack support from the male clergy (D. Kreider, personal communication, October 4, 2024). Based on the local problem and the findings of this study, the most viable option for this project was a position paper with policy recommendations.

Viable Project Option

At the time of this qualitative study, the ICC denominational leadership had no policy in place that provided its clergy membership, including both men and women, with any formal mentoring or training beyond initial licensing, chaplaincy training, or church planting (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025). Denominational discussions about developing a growth pathway have been mentioned at leadership conferences and some regional meetings; however, at this time, no specific pathway has been outlined (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025). The project would provide the ICC with evidence-based recommendations for developing and implementing a policy to initiate, implement, and evaluate a growth pathway.

The participants of this study desired ongoing, "just-in-time," role-specific training and mentoring that addressed the particular needs of women. One denominational leader expressed the need for such training or mentoring, stating, "I find that [mentoring] to be just-in-time learning and it is super helpful to me … and that is really going to be much more tangible and much more meaningful to me" (DL7). Some participants, particularly those in senior clergy or denominational roles, desired more specialized training and preferred role-specific training and mentoring that addressed issues specific to their stage in life and leadership role. One senior leader shared, "you can't throw all these women together and say let's do a cohort … [because] being a senior woman leader is way different than just being a woman leader" (SC7). Most participants concurred that mentoring strategies that they perceived would benefit their leadership development, but many expressed a lack of opportunity for the mentoring they desired.

Participants in this study often reported this perceived lack of opportunity as the primary reason they did not engage in either form of mentoring. Although all participants in this study were able to perceive the benefits of holistic mentoring strategies, not all had access to formal or informal mentoring beyond the licensing process. One denominational leader commented, "I haven't been on the receiving end of really any formal mentoring" (DL2). One senior clergy member (SC6) shared her frustration and disappointment as she sought informal mentors for years but found no one willing to mentor her. Only four participants reported having no access to formal mentoring;

however, even those who received some form of either formal or informal mentoring often had to engage in opportunities from outside the ICC or rely on books/multimedia for their personal and professional growth because they were unaware of any opportunities within the ICC.

Whether the participants perceived a lack of training or mentoring availability within the ICC was rooted in poor communication, a lack of relational capital, a lack of mentors, or nonexistent opportunities, all of these women asserted that not enough holistic mentoring opportunities were available to them through the ICC. One denominational leader who participated in this study suggested that a framework for "providing educational pathways and different types of learning opportunities as well as a community component" was needed in the ICC to empower more women (DL6). I have written a position paper with a policy recommendation as my project choice. This position paper and subsequent policy would provide the ICC with the background for the existing problem, a summary of the findings, significant evidence from current literature and research, and outline recommendations that relate to the stakeholders within the denomination for the implementation of a growth pathway policy.

Address the Local Problem Through the Project

Though the ICC denominational leadership purported an egalitarian stance for women in all levels of ICC leadership, the majority of the local, regional, and denominational leadership remained male (Dunahoo, 2017; Remington, 2021; Rockland, 2017; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017). Men constitute 63% of the ICC clergy membership

and hold 93% of the senior clergy roles (Dunahoo, 2020). In 2002, the ICC convention body put forth a resolution to affirm its position on women in ministry, accompanied by recommended verifiable outcomes (Schell, 2007). By 2007, a biblical position on women in leadership had been released (Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017); however, the understanding of the processes and pathways that supported the leadership advancement of women remained undefined and unclear. The authors of the ICC's position paper stated that the future of the denomination would require leaders to take "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes, and the means to ensure ongoing accountability" (Schell, 2007, p. 72). To date, no formalized policy for these steps or ongoing accountability around women's leadership development exists within the ICC (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025).

To overcome the dissonance between the ICC's orthodoxy and orthopraxy, I conducted a basic qualitative study that explored the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that may resolve the local problem and lead to more women within the ICC. The perceptions of the participants could offer valuable insights to the ICC leadership about the forms of holistic mentorship/training that these participants perceived as productive or less productive toward their leadership development. These insights and recommendations have the potential to address the local problem, which was the limited understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that supported women clergy member leader development, which might help fill the current leadership gap.

The project would provide the ICC with a deeper understanding of how women engage in leadership differently from their male counterparts and a better understanding of the holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support women in their leadership development. Additionally, this paper can provide evidence-based language and rationale for the policy. The acceptance and implementation of a policy that supports women's leadership development could help the ICC to fulfill its own directive to take "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes, and the means to ensure ongoing accountability" as proposed in 2002 (Schell, 2007, p. 72). A policy that supported a growth pathway informed by the perceptions of the current women clergy members has the potential to engage more women, provide more equitable access to mentoring/training, help fill the leadership gap, and initiate a significant move toward gender parity in senior leadership, resulting in social change within the organization.

Review of the Literature

I conducted a scholarly literature review of topics related to the position paper and subsequent policy recommendations, interweaving the findings of this qualitative study with current research. These topics include an explanation as to the appropriateness of the project to address the local problem, the continued underrepresentation of women in senior clergy leadership roles, the need for a policy change that would support the advancement of women in leadership development, the use of transformational leadership as the lens for women's leadership development and the appropriateness of mandatory engagement of emerging women leaders in multimodal mentoring design for the

development of women. This section concludes with a discussion of how the literature review was conducted, including the selection of keywords and efforts to identify related research, the process of achieving saturation, and justification for the number of resources presented.

The Appropriateness of the Genre to Address the Local Problem

Walden (n.d.) requires its doctoral candidates to present an appropriate project to address the local problem stated in the candidate's research. I wrote a position paper with a policy recommendation as my project choice to address a local problem within the ICC, specifically the limited understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support women in leadership development, which could help fill the current leadership gap. A review of the literature suggests that a position paper can be a practical choice when an author aims to inform, impact, and influence an audience toward a particular point of view (Creswell, 2012; Possin, 2002). I believe this position paper can be beneficial in addressing the timely and complex issue of engaging, developing, and deploying women to more senior roles within the ICC.

One goal of this position paper was to provide denominational leadership with an evidence-based understanding of the complexity of issues surrounding a leadership pathway for women, including the barriers women face, their perceived needs, and how they engage in leadership differently than their male counterparts. However, understanding alone is not enough to support change and will not resolve the problem. A position paper can also be an excellent way to provide the audience with specific action

steps based on best practices found in the research literature (Creswell, 2012; Possin, 2002). To that end, I have recommended a continuing education policy based on Krispin's (2020) Christian leader development outcomes framework (CLDOF) and the findings from my study. Employing a well-reasoned argument could open up a dialogue with the appropriate stakeholders, potentially influence these decision-makers toward a policy change, and bring about the change that would address the needs of these women (Creswell, 2012; Possin, 2002).

Continued Underrepresentation of Women in Senior Clergy Leadership

A second review of the current research literature revealed that though the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions continued in social studies, business and management, medicine, and higher education, some strides have been made toward increasing the number of women in senior leadership positions in the secular world (Catalyst, n.d.; Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022; Munive et al., 2023; Redmond et al, 2017; Teague, 2015). However, such advancements in gender parity in the global and national Christian church did not seem to keep pace with secular organizations (Allured, 2025; Chaves et al., 2021; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021); The Foursquare Church, 2024).

Globally, an increasing number of studies on the disparity in senior women's clergy leadership and leadership development have been conducted in South Africa, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Fry, 2021a; Moores, 2023; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). For example, Moores (2023) studied the experiences of women

Pentecostal leaders in the Australian Christian Churches and reported that, although their polity had supported women in senior clergy roles since 2016, only four women held the role of senior clergy in the 60 Australian churches (p. 6). Similarly, Purser and O'Brien's (2021) mixed-methods study of women ordinands in the Church of Ireland revealed that the distance between polity and practice persisted due to patriarchal attitudes and ecclesiastical structures that hindered the advancement of women to more senior roles (Purser & O'Brien, 2021). This disparity between the preferred and actualized engagement of women in senior church leadership is also found in the United States.

The *National Congregational Study Wave IV* (NCSIV), which was conducted in the United States of America in 2018–2019, reported a slight increase in the number of women holding primary clergy roles in all the surveyed congregations surveyed with a median increase to 14% from 11% as reported in the NCSIII of 2012 (Chaves et al., 2021, p. 36). However, in the evangelical church, women still held only 3% of the senior clergy roles, a figure unchanged since the *NCSWIII* conducted in 2012 (Chaves et al., 2021, p. 36). The ICC recently reported that its 2024 clergy membership of 6,531 included 2,588 women (39.62%), and that women held 433 or 16.34% of its senior clergy roles (The Foursquare Church, 2024, pp. 7–8). Though this appears to be a significant increase and above the national average reported in the *NCSIV* and the ICC's 2018 *NCOR* report, these ICC statistics are a bit muddied by the ICC's inclusion of 277 women who shared senior clergy roles with their spouses and without clarification related to the

amount of authority these women held (Chaves et al., 2021; Dunahoo, 2018; The Foursquare Church, 2024).

Research studies of women's leadership in mainline Protestant and evangelical denominations throughout the world have indicated that though most congregants in the broader Christian Church were women, and that women made up a large percentage of clergy members in some denominations, the majority of senior clergy leadership positions continued to be held by aging white men (Chaves et al., 2021; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Remington, 2021). One ICC denominational leader recently acknowledged that the ICC was puzzled as to why the advancement of women to more senior clergy or denominational roles seems "bottlenecked" (C. Jenkins, personal communication, April 23, 2025).

Overall, it appears that the increasing number of Protestant congregations claiming an egalitarian stance toward women in leadership has led to a rise in the number of women in senior leadership positions in recent years and will likely continue to do so in the future as younger women replace aging men (Chaves et al., 2021). However, "the presence of women in congregational leadership will continue to vary widely across denominations and religious groups, and the overall percentage of congregations led by women is likely to remain unchanged, at well below 30%, for the foreseeable future in American evangelical churches" (Chaves et al., 2021, p. 38). In response to such incongruously unequal statistics, many researchers have cited a need for organizational change to address the disparity in women's representation in more senior roles.

A Call for Organizational Change to Support Women's Advancement

Despite the inauspicious statistics and projections for the future of women's leadership advancement in the Church, many current researchers proposed that denominational and organizational policy must change to support women's leadership engagement and advancement (Akerlund & Smidsrod, 2024; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Various mainline Protestant and evangelical denominations, including the ICC, had a polity that supported the advancement of women to senior and denominational leadership, yet lacked organizational structures, culture, and policies that would support their advancement (Allured, 2025; Chaves et al., 2021; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Remington, 2021).

Many of the barriers to women clergy advancement experienced in other denominations, including a masculine organizational culture, discrimination, and gendered stereotyping (Chaves et al., 2021; Grandy & Mavin, 2020; Longman et al., 2018; Mujinga, 2020; Redmond et al., 2017), were experienced by the participants of this basic qualitative study. One senior clergy member stated, "They (ICC leadership) would say, 'yes, we believe in women in ministry', but yet it was an old gentleman's club … it was just that old mentality of white male and that is it" (SC7). Fry (2021a) purported that if women were not afforded the opportunities to access leadership development pathways, "there will likely always be a higher proportion of women than men who are unable to fulfill their professional potential within the Church's hierarchy" (p. 2105).

Without a change in organizational policy, it would be challenging to overcome any barriers that women face when trying to advance to more senior clergy roles.

Changing an organization's structure and culture is difficult at best and requires a concerted effort by the organizational leadership. However, Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested that the advancement of women to more senior roles should be done within a cultural context that helps remove the barriers women experience in their leadership development. Many male-dominated organizations tended toward hierarchical organizational structures and cultures that, perhaps unintentionally, supported the advancement of men over women (Allured, 2025; Fry, 2021a; Grandy & Mavin, 2020; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Some denominations have attempted to change their organizational culture and structure, but they still lack policy reform that supports greater gender equality (Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Currently, the ICC's executive organizational leadership had not outlined any specific formal developmental strategies or policies for clergy members beyond initial licensing, church planting, and chaplaincy (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025); yet the participants of this study expressed the need for the ICC to create a pathway that included education, training and community (DL6).

Purser and O'Brien (2021) suggested that cultural adaptation was an essential component to creating meaningful structural change and "required a parallel commitment to changing the ways of thinking and acting will not bring transformation and equality" (p. 90). When proposing policy changes, most studies emphasize the importance of

evidence-based recommendations and best practices, as well as the engagement of all organizational stakeholders in an honest assessment of the barriers to change, current policies, and proposed policies (Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Schwartz, 2023). Leadership development must become a core value and component of organizational policy before change can occur (Zulfqar, 2021). Therefore, the elements of organizational structure, psychological climate, and leadership behavior would need to be assessed and changed to support the increased development of women (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Lewis, 2021)

Organizational reform does not always eliminate gender inequality, and those with higher status are often able to maintain their positions of authority (Errida & Lofti, 2021). However, it was time for the ICC to reassess its mission of "better together on mission" and enact a policy change that provided targeted support for women in leadership development, aiming to achieve the ICC's goal of increasing the number of women in senior leadership roles (Remington, 2021). This would require the ICC to adopt a lens that addresses their ecclesiological and organizational structures, leadership development pathways, and policymaking; I have recommended the lens of transformational leadership development to provide direction for this pursuit.

Transformational Leadership As the Lens for Women Leaders' Development

Historically, leadership had been exercised through a show of power; however, in the 1990s, efforts were made to shift toward a transactional form of leadership, which included a mutual exchange of rewards for performance (Burns, 2003; Karakose et al., 2023). Transactional leadership (TL) rewarded those who exhibited the traditionally male

traits of dominance, independence, competitiveness, and aggression, with leadership development and advancement, and was particularly effective in male-dominated environments (Burns, 2003; Grandy & Mavin, 2020; Karakose et al., 2023; Khan, 2024). However, as more women entered the workforce, it became evident that women were less motivated to engage in such forms of leadership and even suggested that those women who did engage in transactional leadership styles may have done so at their own detriment (Karakose et al., 2023; Khan, 2024; Porter, 2025). In this study, one participant shared that she assumed a posture of masculine authority that shaped her role but found it seemed counter to her own desires to nurture and care for others (CH1). A review of leadership research indicated that many organizations in business, human resources, and education had begun to move from a transactional form of leadership toward transformational leadership models in an effort to address issues such as mediocracy in performance, poor employee retention, poor job satisfaction and low productivity (Burns, 2003; Desai & Desai, 2023; Karakose et al., 2023; Khan, 2024; Lewis, 2021; Porter, 2025).

First conceptualized by Burns (1978), a political scientist, TL had the potential to allow both leaders and followers to achieve the goals of an organization in a collaborative manner that recognized the potential of all stakeholders and holistically engaged the followers (Karakose et al., 2023). Bass (1996) outlined four tenets of TL, which included charismatic leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (as cited in Desai & Desai, 2023, p. 1449). Leithwood

(1999) would later expand the TL model in the realm of education to include three broad dimensions, each with defining subdimensions: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Karakose et al., 2023). TL is no longer a singular model of leadership, but rather an inclusive model that incorporates models linked to feminist leadership theory, social change models, and others (Karakose et al., 2023; Kwon, 2023; Porter, 2025).

Transformational leadership models employ a nonhierarchical form of leadership that increases organizational participation while cultivating increased individualized capacity, creativity, self-confidence, and self-efficacy through motivation and inspiration (Karakose et al., 2023; Lewis, 2021; Porter, 2025; Redmond et al., 2017). Research literature indicates that women are more likely to adopt a leadership style that emphasizes transactional leadership competencies versus transactional leadership (Desai & Desai, 2023; Lewis, 2021; Porter, 2025). Conversely, women in leadership were often described as caring, nurturing, and possessing an inclusive approach (Desai & Desai, 2023; Porter, 2025). These traits align well with the four tenets of transformational leadership proposed by Bass (1996), which include charismatic leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (as cited in Desai & Desai, 2023, p. 1449).

According to Bass (1990), *charismatic leadership* is characterized by behaviors that followers can trust and have faith in (Desai & Desai, 2023). In this study, the mentor's character emerged as an important subtheme in the mentor-protégé antecedents

that participants used to describe whether a mentoring strategy was beneficial or less than beneficial. One denominational leader summarized this thought well, stating, “My first filter is 'How like Jesus are you?” (DL1).

Bass’s (1996) second tenet was *inspirational motivation*, which refers to the capacity to provide significance and challenge to protégés through inspiration, encouragement, and challenge (as cited in Desai & Desai, 2023, p. 1449). The participants of this study concurred with this sentiment, describing a recurring theme of personal and professional growth inspired by mentors who challenged them to grow as individuals and leaders. One assisting minister stated, “God just uses them (mentors] to kind of ping you forward and, you know, water that seed a little bit more” (AM5).

The third tenet of TL was *intellectual stimulation*, which prompted intelligence, problem-solving skills, and rational thought (Bass, 1990; Desai & Desai, 2023). When properly executed, the recipients have the potential to become innovative, creative, and adopt fresh perspectives (Desai & Desai, 2023). In this study, the theme of holistic mentoring strategies included the subtheme of intellectual strategies. When participants were asked what they would include in a formal mentoring opportunity, many emphasized the importance of assessment and acquisition of knowledge and skills that would enhance their personal and professional development, including conflict resolution, problem-solving, and effective communication.

The fourth tenet was *individualized consideration* of mentor-protégé needs for the success and development of both individuals and the organization (Desai & Desai, 2023).

Those members of an organization engaged in a TL form of leadership were encouraged to move beyond self-interest and consider the needs of both mentor and protégé (Desai & Desai, 2023; Jordan, 1986). The participants of this study often described their mentoring encounters as beneficial because they felt seen, understood, and on equal footing with a more senior leader. One denominational leader portrayed her encounters as follows: "You know what we gave each other such a beautiful, beautiful balance in our lives and just learning to hear from one another, receive from one another, contend for one another" (DL3).

Some of the reported benefits of TL include building an organizational culture, encouraging participation from all stakeholders, increased collaboration, better rapport and communication, as well as the personal and professional growth of leaders (Bass, 1990; Desai & Desai, 2023; Lewis, 2021; Nicolaides & Naidoo, 2025). Some studies have indicated that women were often seen as the moral authority within a community, able to bring about social change when they operated under the tents of TL (Lewis, 2021; Mujinga, 2020). These tenets of TL actually reflected the servant-leadership style of Jesus Christ, who transformed the world by training twelve disciples through his words, character, and deeds, making TL an excellent lens through which a religious organization can change its culture and bring social change to the world's systems.

Many recent studies of women in the global Church were focused on the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership and the identification of the barriers to leadership development and deployment, often sharing the narratives of women who had

reached some level of senior leadership (Allured, 2025; de Jager et al., 2022; Fry, 2021a; Grandy & Mavin, 2020; Moores, 2023; Mujinga, 2020; Phelps, 2023; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Some researchers recommended moving beyond these topical narratives to consider TL as a viable tool to empower women and create a multimodal approach to women's leadership development that would decrease the disparity of women in senior roles and increase clergy resilience in a very stressful profession (Krispin, 2020; Schwartz, 2023; Sielaff et al., 2021).

Women Clergy Development Through Continuing Education

Some researchers noted that though women clergy from various denominations expressed the importance of preparation for more senior roles, specific pathways and supportive policies for women's leadership development were lacking (de Jager et al., 2022; Fry, 2021a; Moores, 2023; Mujinga, 2020; Phelps, 2023; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Based on the data collected from participants of this study, a perceived lack of mentoring and training existed that was supportive of women's leadership development and potential advancement to more senior leadership roles. Yet, many of the participants in this study expressed a desire and a need for a plan to develop women.

A review of the literature revealed a few studies that exemplified the tenets of TL and could be employed to create a comprehensive continuing education plan and policy for advancing women to more senior roles within the ICC. The few models that were found originated from the world of higher education (HE) and Christian higher education

(CHE). Two models in particular seemed best suited for the development of a gender-specific leadership continuing education pathway and policy.

Schwartz (2023), whose work was in higher education, recommended a multimodal mentoring network model (MMN) for leadership development. The premise behind the MMN was that "no one single mentor can offer all the types of knowledge, skills, abilities, connections, and support that a mentee requires (Schwartz, 2023, p. 36). Therefore, the creation of a mentoring constellation would decrease the burden on senior leadership and encourage more junior leaders to draw support from a diverse set of mentors, groups, and resources. (Schwartz, 2023). Although not a gender-specific model, Schwartz's (2023) MMN suggests that organizations can harness the benefits of traditional didactic mentoring, multiple mentors, peer mentoring, and topical affinity groups to create a flexible approach to leadership development that can be individualized and minimize the drawbacks of each form of mentoring. The MMN model offered many benefits that aligned with the tenets of TL, including equitable access to leadership development for women and various ethnic and racial groups, the avoidance of dual relationships, and providing opportunities for skill development, networking, sponsorship, and psycho-social support (Schwartz, 2023).

Krispin (2020) proffered a Christian leadership development outcomes framework (CLDOF) based on best practices in secular and sacred organizations. The CLDOF espoused five measurable areas of leadership development that also aligned with the tenets of TL. Krispin (2020) proposed that any organizational program for the

development of a Christian leader must address the development of both the leader and their leadership by providing opportunities for growth in Christian formation, personal formation, relational skills, intellectual skills, and management skills. These areas of leadership development also aligned with many of the elements that participants in this study recommended for developing a holistic leadership strategy that employed both formal and informal mentoring strategies.

Preparing the next generation of women to assume senior and denominational roles should be a top priority for any denomination that desires success and sustainability in a complex and ever-changing world (Krispin, 2020; Kwon, 2023; Sanou, 2021; Sielaff et al., 2021). When organizations lack intentional plans for leadership development, they expose themselves to reduced organizational productivity, increased power struggles, loss of legacy and knowledge, and a potential leadership void (Sanou, 2021; Sielaff et al., 2021). I had proposed a position paper that provided research-based evidence for the need for organizational change to support the development and advancement of women within the ICC, thereby filling the current leadership gap. Furthermore, as the ICC had no policy regarding continuing education for women's leader development, I had constructed an artifact —an initial policy—for the continuation of education and leadership development of women to advance to more senior roles.

How the Literature Review Was Conducted

This literature review was conducted in light of topics related to the findings of this qualitative study, the position paper, and the policy recommendation. A discussion

followed about the keywords employed for the search, the efforts made to acquire relevant sources, and a demonstration of saturation. The topics in this literature review included transformational leadership, the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles, the need for a change in organizational policy, the value of continuing education, and the recommendation of a plan and policy specific to advancing women in the ICC. I conducted my search of the current literature by using key terms such as transformational leadership theory, women in leadership, women in Christian leadership, continuing education, organizational change, feminist leadership, Pentecostal women, Christian higher education, and policy requirements.

The majority of my literature review information was culled from peer-reviewed articles that were either seminal or published within the last five years. I employed the search engines available to me through Walden, as well as Google Scholar. I also employed the technique of "browsing" to retrieve articles from the reference lists of the articles I had searched. I also sought information from governmental and denominational websites. I reviewed over forty articles relevant to this research and project, and I felt I had reached a point of saturation. Interestingly, though, I could not find any articles that addressed TL in the global Church. As in my initial literature review, I turned to articles from research in Christian higher education (CHE) for information about TL among Christians, as women in CHE face similar challenges and needs to those in the ICC. I was satisfied that my literature review was sufficient to inform the project. What follows is a

description of the project, a plan for evaluation, and an overview of the project's implications.

Project Description

Although creating a denominational-wide MMN would benefit the women clergy of the ICC, this would be an enormous endeavor as an initial effort to establish a gendered leadership development process. The ICC has long maintained a recommendation that its leaders engage in lifelong learning (Butcher, 2014; The Foursquare Church, 2020b) but has not offered a standardized pathway for the development of women to engage in leadership development toward more senior roles (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19. 2025; C. Jenkins, personal communication, April 23, 2025). A simpler starting point for the development of women within the ICC would be the creation and implementation of a scalable, gender-specific continuing education policy that requires mandatory engagement and can be acquired through formal or informal mentoring strategies from within or outside the organization. The project is an evidence-based position paper and a subsequent policy recommendation for an organization-wide continuing education plan to support the development and advancement of women within the ICC to fill the current leadership gap. This project description includes the resources required, existing supports, potential barriers with suggested solutions, a plan for implementing the policy with a timetable, as well as the roles of the doctoral candidate and other stakeholders involved.

Because the ICC has no policy that requires continuing education for leader development among its clergy members (Butcher, 2014; The Foursquare Church, 2020b), I constructed an initial policy for the continuing education and advancement of women toward more senior roles within the ICC (see Appendix A). This policy is based on evidence of best practices found in the literature review and the data analysis of this study. When designing the policy, I searched for similar policies in Christian higher education and other church denominations. Policies varied widely from denomination to denomination, from nonexistent to very expansive renditions (Christian Church in Oklahoma, 2017; Pacific Lutheran University, 2015; University of New England, 2023). Most of the policies were sourced from the websites of Protestant churches.

The development of organizational policies must include plans for purpose, design, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the necessary resources and incentives to build and sustain member participation (Raziq et al., 2024). The policy artifact in this project includes an introduction to the what and why of the policy, as well as the continuing education options and offerings. It also outlines the responsibilities of the individual, the local church, the district, and denominational leaders for the implementation of the policy (see Appendix A). This policy establishes the annual requirements for continuing education credits for all women seeking senior or denominational roles within the ICC. The purpose of continuing education is to strengthen women as leaders and individuals, and acknowledge that they often lead and experience challenges differently than their male counterparts.

Women can select continuing education offerings from the list of learning options rooted in transformative learning and based on Krispin's (2020) leadership development outcomes framework. Krispin (2020) recommended five categories of learning outcomes, each with aligned competencies: spiritual formation, personal formation, intellectual skills, relational skills, and management skills. Many of the competencies echoed the recommendations of the participants in this study regarding the skills and knowledge that these women believed those advancing to more senior roles would need. For ease of reference, the continuing education recommendations are listed by category and competency, and presented in a table format (see Table A1). In addition to the continuing education selections and annual requirements, the policy outlined options for accessing leader development opportunities, compliance and record-keeping responsibilities, as well as the expectations and responsibilities of the ICC at the local church, district, and national office levels of the denomination (see Appendix A). However, before implementing any policy, an organization must assess the resources needed, the existing supports, foresee any potential barriers and potential solutions, and determine the roles of various stakeholders.

Counting the Cost: Needs, Support, Barriers, and Solutions

In the Holy Scriptures, leaders are often reminded to *count the cost* before embarking on significant endeavors (The Holy Bible-ESV, 2011, Luke 14:28-33). When assessing the cost of effectively implementing policy and promoting change in organizational structure and culture, organizational leadership must evaluate the human

and financial resources required, the existing organizational supports and structures, and provide solutions to potential barriers that may arise (Walden, n.d.; Zulfqar et al., 2021). Additionally, such an enterprise requires a commitment *from* and collaboration *with* all stakeholders, the allocation of appropriate resources, and incentives to foster a participatory organizational culture (Schwartz, 2023; Zulfqar et al., 2021). As such, the ICC is uniquely positioned to embrace an initiative for the policy that supports the development of women to more senior roles as its theology, doctrine, polity, and organizational structure are theoretically supportive of women at all levels of leadership (Friesen, 2018; Remington, 2021; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017).

Needed Resources

Most often, initiating organizational change that leads to positive outcomes requires organizational innovativeness and begins with a needs assessment (Nicolaides & Naidoo, 2025; Raziq et al., 2024; Schwartz, 2023). The ICC would need to consider the human, technological, and financial resources required to create, implement, enforce, and evaluate a policy of continuing education for its women leaders.

The policy outlines several responsibilities that require human resources to accomplish the goal of providing a gendered continuing education process for its women leaders who desire to pursue more senior roles. Individuals or teams of leaders need to communicate the vision and rationale for the policy and program, evaluate compliance through record-keeping, communicate and create learning opportunities, maintain a database of its women clergy, assign qualified instructors, and evaluate the success of the

policy and its programs. The ICC should assign a program director and a program administrator to oversee, implement, and evaluate the policy and process. Financial resources will be needed for employee compensation, the procurement and maintenance of a learning management system (LMS), and a communication network. In addition, consideration should be given to incentives for individuals who voluntarily offer their expertise, as well as scholarships for women pursuing more senior roles in the ICC (Schwartz, 2023; Zulfqar et al., 2021). Finally, the ICC will need to procure and maintain technological services for communicating opportunities, an LMS for delivering offerings within the ICC, and a database for storing contact information and records. Although this seems like an enormous investment of human and financial resources, the ICC is blessed in that it has many existing supports that could aid in the implementation of the policy.

Existing Supports

The ICC as a denomination had always been on the "cutting edge" of ministry since it was founded by Sister Aimee in 1920, employing the most current means available to deliver the Gospel message, make disciples of Jesus, build churches, deploy missionaries, and support and train its clergy (Kipgen, n.d.; Van Cleave, 2014). As such, the ICC has several resources already available for the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the policy and program.

The ICC Board of Directors is responsible for setting the budget to meet organizational goals, hiring needed staff, and determining salaries for those employed at the national level (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). Financial

resources for communicating the policy/program and hiring a director will be included in the budget. Each of the six districts of the ICC also creates a budget each year for the support and care of their local pastors; monies can be allotted from each district for content creation, content delivery, and upkeep of the clergy database. Additionally, local church councils can include budgetary funds for the development of women clergy (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023).

The ICC has two colleges that offer bachelor's and master's degrees, both on campus and online (Life Pacific University, n.d). These colleges can provide the staffing, LMS, and content creation for continuing education offerings for the development of women clergy members. College leaders could also provide oversight to the continuing education program by appointing a director and administrator. Some district leaders and local church pastors are considered pastor-scholars who may also be willing to contribute applicable content.

Additionally, the ICC has two groups focused on the education of its clergy. The first is the ICC's Education Commission, established in 2014. The goal of the commission is to maximize leadership effectiveness through education and training, and to create "a culture of lifelong learning" (Butcher, 2014, para 4). The commission started an online learning community in 2015 for its clergy members, providing information to various educational channels that were available through its two colleges and local church-based institutes (Butcher, 2014, para. 6). The second educational group is a Scholars' Fellowship whose express purpose was to resource its denominational family

with current research and best practices. (Foursquare Scholars Fellowship, n.d.). This group of scholar-practitioners can be asked to provide content based on current research, engage in content delivery, and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and its programs.

Regarding technology, the ICC has systems in place to communicate news and opportunities to its clergy membership via email, social media platforms, and Zoom accounts. The current technology can be used to communicate continuing education opportunities from within and outside the ICC. The ICC also maintains a database of its clergy through an online resource and training platform for its clergy members (The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). Although the ICC has a wealth of resources already available for implementing and evaluating the policy and program, potential barriers to the policy's success need to be addressed.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Bringing organizational change can be challenging; therefore, organizational leaders need to have the foresight to recognize the barriers to change and bring potential solutions to the forefront of their planning (Fry, 2021a; Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022; Longman et al., 2018; Schwartz, 2023; Zulfqar et al., 2021). Based on the current research and the data collected from this study, I have identified three potential barriers to implementing a policy of continuing education for women in more senior roles. The three barriers included *conflicting organizational goals*, *a male-dominated organizational culture*, and the *perception of poor communication by the organization regarding*

leadership opportunities. I offered a brief discussion of each barrier and offered a potential solution.

When an organization has seemingly *conflicting goals*, each draws upon the same pool of limited financial, technological, and human resources (Fry, 2021a). Since the denomination celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2023, its president asserted that the organization must attend to four priorities to remain viable as a movement in the next century (The Foursquare Church, 2024). These four priorities were prayer, discipleship, health, and "together on mission" (The Foursquare Church, 2024, p.3). Each of these priorities has goals embedded within. For example, the "together on mission" initiative includes five distinct goals around the development of leaders. These goals include increasing the number of clergy of every ethnicity, age, and stage of life; licensing and deploying more pastors, chaplains, and missionary workers; intentionally growing life-long learners transformed by Jesus; creating a unified and collaborative organizational ethos built on trust and mutuality; and training and sending more clergy for church and movement development (The Foursquare Church, 2024. p. 4). It is interesting to note that the "increasing the number of clergy" goal does not mention gender, which seems in contrast to the goals of raising more women to senior roles (Remington, 2021; Schell, 2007; The Foursquare Church, 2020b; Tremper, 2017). These goals are prophetic and noble for the ICC's survival, but each priority and the subsequent goals will draw heavily upon the finite resources of the organization. My first recommendation to the ICC leadership is to establish a task force to assess the depth and breadth of resources already

available and potentially draw upon individuals or existing groups most interested in the development of women clergy and continuing education. Many of the participants of this study are willing to become involved in the development of more women and the processes needed to engage these potential leaders. One assisting minister (AM 4) expressed the sentiment of many others by stating that she was willing to help with the process of engaging initiatives to "bring them [women] into the fold."

The second potential barrier for the implementation of this policy is that the ICC remains a predominantly *male-dominated organization* (The Foursquare Church, 2024). Participants of this study cited that this ethos is often an inhibitor to opportunities for learning and advancement. Although the ICC leadership purports an egalitarian approach to women in ministry, denominational leaders must understand that pockets of traditional church culture and patriarchal doctrine still exist in some of the local churches, perhaps inhibiting women from engaging in leadership (Dunahoo, 2017; Remington, 2021; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017; Walker, 2018). Fry (2021a) purported that "the actions of an institution attempting to reform inequality limit its own potential to do so because other priorities within it lead to compromise, particularly in order to appease groups already high in social resources" (p. 2016). As the ICC has been and remains a male-dominated organization, moving toward an organizational culture that truly prioritizes the needs of its women will be challenging (see Fry, 2021a; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). However, Fry (2021a) also suggested that "the pursuit of equality and the maintenance of unity are not mutually exclusive" (p. 2021) and that women should still be championed *in*

situ. To overcome this barrier, organizational leaders must address patriarchal exclusivity and champion women in leadership at every level of the organization. One participant of this study asserted that "everybody has a seat at the table" (SC7). Providing "the seat at the table" will require that learning formats and opportunities be created to address the particular needs of women who lead and experience ministry differently than their male counterparts. This can be accomplished with the help of both educational entities of the ICC. Though organizational reform does not always eliminate inequality, the ICC needs to cultivate an organizational structure, psychological climate, and leadership behavior that supports the development of women and remind its clergy members of its egalitarian stance (see Dahlvig and Longman, 2014; Fry, 2021b; Lewis, 2021; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Remington, 2021).

The third potential barrier to overcome is the perception that opportunities are *not available or well communicated* to all women clergy members of the ICC. This perceived lack of availability or poor communication seems to be rooted in the format of communication used to apprise pastors of learning opportunities and upkeep of the database. In searching the ICC's website at the national and district levels, I often found that mentoring and learning opportunities were often "buried" within online articles and required in-depth navigational skills to access. Additionally, the ICC's database of all its clergy members is not always up to date (D. Giaimo, personal communication, August 21, 2024). As the website and emails are used to communicate mentoring and learning opportunities, challenging navigation and inaccurate contact information can leave

women without knowledge of and access to opportunities. This lack of access can be remedied by creating a website exclusively for ICC learning opportunities and updating the database at least annually. Occasionally, the ICC sends letters via the postal system to its clergy members when communicating a new initiative, perhaps sending a letter to "rollout" the new policy and program would be one way to ensure that all clergy members are aware of the new policy and how to access opportunities. Though barriers may arise, the ICC has many existing resources available for "creating an environment and ethos of leadership development explicitly offering gender identity where leadership and voice are engaged" (see Lewis, 2021, p. 59) and providing opportunities for "skill development, networking, sponsorship, and psycho-social support" (see Schwartz, 2023, p. 36) and potentially resolving the ICC leadership gap.

Plan for Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of any organizational policy requires ample time to create a comprehensive plan. Research of organizational change models suggested that lack of comprehensive planning was often considered the main reason for change initiatives' failure (Errida & Lofti, 2021). The ICC denominational leadership will need time to plan, gather resources, discuss challenges, craft documents, seek approval of organizational leadership, communicate to all stakeholders, and roll out the policy/program, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and resulting programs (Errida & Lofti, 2021; Onyenador et al., 2021; Zulfqar et al, 2021). I have provided a recommended timeline for the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the policy (see Table 13).

Table 13

Timeline for Policy Implementation

Month	Task
0–3	Policy Proposal to ICC Senior Leadership for Consideration.
4–6	Presented to the Board of Directors and the Task Force selected
7–10	The task force discusses concerns, assesses resources, makes recommendations, and reports back to the Board of Directors for approval.
11–12	The Board of Directors approves the policy and program.
13–18	The task force procures all resources- human, technological, and financial for the denomination and district leadership.
19–30	Beta rollout of policy implementation for most eastern districts
31-33	Evaluation of the effectiveness of the beta roll and modifications as needed.
34 45	Alpha rollout to the entire denomination
46-48	Evaluation and modification of the Alpha rollout.

As the timeline suggests, I recommend that the first step in implementation be to introduce the policy to senior leadership at the denominational and district levels, providing research-based evidence from current studies and the data collected from this study to demonstrate the need for such a policy and the resulting programs. I can provide the leadership with a summary of the research findings, a summary of the project, and the policy (see Appendix A) for consideration, responding to any questions that might be raised.

The next step will be the submission of the policy to the ICC's board of directors, which has the authority to create, implement, and evaluate policies (see International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). Once a decision has been made to accept the policy, the ICC will establish a task force to oversee the implementation process. The task force will assess the current resources, identify any additional unforeseen barriers, and offer solutions. It will also make recommendations for staff appointments and report back to the board of directors for approval of the policy. This may take some time, as the board of directors meets only twice a month, and it often takes four to six weeks for items to be added to the agenda (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19, 2025).

Once the policy has been approved, the board of directors will charge the task force with the responsibility of securing the necessary human, technological, and financial resources for the program's implementation (see International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). The task force and/or those authorized to do so will then establish a communication process to inform all stakeholders of the policy's rationale, the implementation plan, and access to learning and mentoring opportunities for women seeking leadership advancement. New initiatives of the ICC are often begun as beta programs. I would recommend that this rollout begin in the most eastern district of the ICC, where my study took place, as the participants of this study will be inclined to participate based on their expressed needs.

After one cycle of implementation in the beta district, the task force will evaluate the effectiveness of the policy. This evaluation will provide the ICC with some evaluative

data before implementing the policy nationwide. The task force would need to revise the program as needed. After these adjustments have been made, I recommend a denominational-wide or Alpha rollout of the policy and its resulting programs. After one year, the denominational district leadership will reassess the effectiveness of the policy and its resulting programs, making any necessary revisions. Although much time is needed for the implementation of policy, it also requires the participation and "buy-in" of all its stakeholders.

Roles and Responsibilities

Any organizational change requires not only time but also a significant amount of effort from various stakeholders (Andrews, 2023; Errida & Lofti, 2021; Munive et al., 2023). For the ICC to implement a gender-specific plan of leader development, it must engage all its stakeholders. The inclusion and participation of leaders at the denominational, district, and local church levels, as well as the entire clergy membership, the leadership of ICC's educational institutions and organizations, and members of local congregations, should be sought.

Strategic organizational leadership that drives social change often begins at the top (Munive et al., 2023). Social change requires "leadership that is visionary and inspires a sense of shared purpose across and between sectors and stakeholders" (Munive et al., 2023, p. 5). In the ICC, the president is charged with being the spiritual leader and chief executive officer; as such, he is responsible for casting vision and direction for the denomination (see The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). The ICC's

president has long advocated for increasing the representation of women in senior leadership roles (Remington, 2021). For this reason, I will approach his office directly to initiate a dialogue regarding the study's findings and the policy. As the *ex officio* member of all executive committees, the ICC president can offer insight and inspiration to the Board of Directors, as well as to other denominational and district leaders (The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). The president also sets the annual budget for the denomination, including the allocation for various directives and the distribution to each of the six districts (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023).

The ICC president can cast vision and direction, but the implementation of policy requires the expertise and approval of the ICC's board of directors. These men and women are charged with authority to create, implement, and evaluate policies (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). The leaders also recommend and approve the hiring of individuals to carry out any initiatives (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). For the implementation of this policy and its subsequent programs, the board of directors will need to establish a task force comprising individuals with expertise and interests in developing a women's leadership growth pathway. The task force could include members from the ICC's two colleges, the Scholars' Fellowship, the ICC's Education Commission, and any clergy members interested in the educational pathway. Many of these potential participants are scholar-practitioners with the skills and expertise to foresee any barriers to implementation, recommend a budget, provide content

based on current research, engage in content delivery, and be best suited for evaluating the policy and its programs' effectiveness**.**

The ICC is divided geographically or by affinity into six districts in the United States for oversight. Each district supervisor is responsible for providing pastors in their district with opportunities for leadership development, fostering a sense of community among their clergy through regular communication, and investing in the growth of local church leadership by funding initiatives (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). Though the role of the district supervisor ultimately supports the vision and initiatives of the denominational leadership, their contribution is often overlooked at the beginning of any initiative. These leaders could also contribute to the implementation effort by providing the ICC with a current database of clergy members and communications about the implementation of the policy and its programs. As this study was conducted in the most eastern district of the ICC in the United States, I would also recommend that this be the site of the beta testing of the policy. Local church leadership could identify those women who are called to pursue senior and denominational roles and inform and support these individuals about the opportunities for growth in which they could participate. Local church councils could allocate funding for women interested in advancing their leadership to participate in continuing education opportunities.

Finally, as the student who conducted this basic qualitative study and developed this policy, I will offer my participation in this process from start to finish. Initially, I will present the results of this study, highlighting the need for a women’s leadership growth

pathway, and discuss the policy with the office of the president. Secondly, I will share the same information with the board of directors, addressing any concerns or offering evidence-based advice as needed. Thirdly, I would be honored to serve in a key role on the task force, as I can bring my expertise and experience as a clergy member, former senior pastor, educator, and researcher to the table. I would also want to conduct both the beta and alpha implementations of this policy and serve as an evaluator for the policy's effectiveness and the resulting programs' effectiveness.

Organizational change remains a challenging endeavor that requires the participation of all stakeholders (Andrews, 2023; Errida & Lofti, 2021; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Munive et al., 2023; Schwartz, 2023). As previously mentioned, the ICC is well-positioned and fortunate to have competent leadership and a large number of stakeholders who can implement a policy of gender-specific continuing education for the advancement of women to more senior and denominational roles. Although vision, planning, funding, and implementation are important for any initiative, an evaluation of the project determines its effectiveness and longevity. I recommend a longitudinal evaluation for the project in the next section.

Project Evaluation Plan

Errida and Lofti (2021) purported that organizational change initiatives must be measured and monitored by establishing metrics and employing tools to determine the effectiveness and benefits of the anticipated outcomes. In this section, I describe the type of evaluation plan to be employed and justify the choice of evaluation method.

Additionally, I conveyed the project's overall goals, as well as its evaluation objectives, and identified the key stakeholders.

Type of Evaluation Recommended

I recommend a longitudinal assessment of the effectiveness of the continuing education policy to provide women with the knowledge and skills necessary for addressing their personal and professional growth, and preparing them for more senior roles in the ICC, potentially helping to fill the long-standing leadership gap. This evaluation plan includes both the creation and implementation of the policy over several years. In addition, this comprehensive evaluation plan has been constructed as an objectives-based approach employing both formative and summative forms of evaluation to collect the necessary data to measure whether the policy and subsequent programs meet the desired outcomes (Spaulding, 2014).

Justification for the Type of Evaluation Recommended

The evaluation plan is a form of applied research that an organization can employ to make practical decisions for the improvement of policy and programs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This longitudinal evaluation plan, recommended here, will provide the ICC with frequent and updated information about the impact and effectiveness of implementing the continuing education policy (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Regoli, 2019). Though a longitudinal evaluation cannot account for all influencing factors that may arise over time, this evaluation plan would serve “as a robust tool for understanding complex changes over time” (see Regoli, 2019).

Additionally, employing an objectives-based approach enables the evaluator to collect data relevant to multiple aspects of a program, rather than just the desired outcomes of the project (Spaulding, 2014). For example, information about the communication and ease of use of the continuing education technology can be ascertained, as well as the number of women who engaged in the process. Furthermore, employing formative assessment measures will allow the ICC to determine if benchmarks have been met and what adjustments need to be made to the policy and resulting programs. Summative assessment tools, on the other hand, provide data for the overall judgment of the policy and the success of the resulting programs (see Spaulding, 2014).

The Overall Goals of the Project

The local problem within the ICC is the limited understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member leaders, which might help fill the current leadership gap. For my project study, I have written a position paper outlining a continuing education policy to provide all women seeking senior or denominational roles with various educational opportunities, thereby strengthening them as individuals and leaders. I have framed three goals for this project: providing the ICC with evidence-based language and rationale for the development of an initial policy on gender-specific continuing education; recommending a holistic, role-specific leadership pathway; and proposing a timetable for the incremental implementation of the recommended policy throughout the denomination.

The Overall Goals of the Evaluation

The desired outcome of this project evaluation is to provide the ICC with data to inform decisions on gender-specific continuing education opportunities for women seeking more senior or denominational roles. To implement the recommended policy and programs, several objectives must be met. The objectives may require modification as the project progresses, but they provide a strong foundation for the introduction, creation, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of the policy.

For ease of readability, I created a two-part matrix of evaluation that aligned with the timeline, including eight objectives, the stakeholders involved in decision-making and data collection, the types of data collection tools, suggested deadlines, and the types of assessments (see Tables 14 & 15). Table 14 lists five objectives, including the introduction of the policy to the ICC leadership, the creation of a task force, the assessment of resources and potential barriers, the approval of the policy, and the procurement of all necessary resources —human, financial, and technological — prior to implementation. In the second column of Table 14, I have listed the stakeholders that I believe will be involved in the completion of each objective. The third column lists the tools for data collection, and the last column indicates whether the type of data collection was formative or summative. A variety of data collection tools aligned with each objective will be employed to collect the necessary data to determine the project's effectiveness (see Tables 14 & 15).

Table 14

Stage 1: Evaluation Matrix for the Continuing Education Policy

Objective	Stakeholder	A tool to collect data	When	Purpose
Objective 1: To introduce the policy to senior leadership for consideration.	President of ICC, doctoral candidate	Phone or Zoom calls, emails, and memos	Monthly and as needed	Formative
		Email notification of moving forward	90 Days	Summative
Objective 2: To accept the implementation of the policy and create a task Force.	President of ICC, Board of Directors, doctoral candidate	Board meeting discussion, emails, memos	Bi-monthly and as needed	Formative
		Email to announce policy and Task Force members	End of the sixth month	Summative
Objective 3: To assess resources, barriers, and revise policy for BOD approval.	Task Force, board of directors, president of ICC, Foursquare Scholars Fellowship, and ICC's Education Commission	Emails, memos	7-10 months	Summative
		Written report to the board and ICC president with resources and recommendations	Month 10	Formative
Objective 4: To approve the policy and program as presented by the Task Force.	President ICC, board of directors	Bimonthly reports at board meetings, emails, and memos as needed	11-12 months	Formative
		Approved policy. Email the policy to ICC clergy.	Month 12	Summative
Objective 5: To procure all resources for policy implementation- human, financial, and technological.	Task Force, ICC president, board of directors, executive committee, ICC Bible college leaders, district leaders	Monthly reports to the ICC president and board by the task force and the executive committee as to the status of resources.	Months 13-17	Formative
			Month 18 Final report.	Summative

Note. This table references all of the objectives prior to the implementation of the policy.

Table 15 lists the objectives, stakeholders, and types of data collection required for the implementation of the policy, initially as a Beta project in the most eastern district of the ICC, followed by an Alpha implementation across the entire ICC, with ongoing implementation and evaluation.

Table 15

Stage 2: Evaluation Matrix for the Continuing Education Policy

Evaluation objective	Stakeholder	A tool to collect data	When	Purpose
Objective 6: To evaluate the effectiveness of the Beta version of the policy in the most eastern district.	Task Force, district leaders, executive committee, board, women clergy of the most eastern district, doctoral candidate	Surveys and focus groups with women clergy members are tracked in the Hub. NCO Annual Report	At the end of each calendar year for three years. (months 19-30)	Formative
		Surveys and focus groups with women clergy members are tracked in the Hub. Report to the board and the NCO Annual report.	Month 30.	Summative
Objective 7: To make revisions and implement the Alpha policy and programs to all ICCs.	President of ICC, task force, district leaders, executive committee, board, women clergy of ICC, doctoral candidate	Board meeting discussion, emails, memos	Bi-monthly and as needed	Formative
		Email to announce policy and task force members	End of the sixth month	Summative
Objective 8: To evaluate the effectiveness of the Alpha version of the policy in ICC annually.	Task force, district leaders, executive committee, board, women clergy of the most eastern district, doctoral candidate	Surveys and focus groups with women clergy members are tracked in the Hub. NCO annual report.	And of Alpha year 1.	Summative
		Surveys and focus groups with women clergy members are tracked in the Hub. NCO annual report.	Year-end annually.	Formative

Ultimately, the anticipated outcome of this policy initiative is to provide a growth pathway for women at the ICC, resulting in more women advancing to senior roles within the ICC and filling the leadership gap.

Key Stakeholders

The implementation and ultimate success of this project requires the participation of many stakeholders, including leaders at the national, district, and local levels. At the national level, this would include the ICC's president, board of directors, and executive committee. The President is responsible for casting vision, providing direction, and ultimately initiating any new initiatives within the denomination. (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). The ICC's board of directors is entrusted with the authority to create, implement, and evaluate policies. The executive council offers support on specific projects (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). Additionally, as scholar-practitioners, the president of ICC's two colleges, members of the Scholars' Fellowship, the ICC's Education Commission, and higher education instructors are well-positioned to provide the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed for the creation and implementation of this project, making them the best-suited task force members**.** At the regional level, the six ICC district supervisors serve the denomination by supporting the denominational initiatives and providing a sense of community among the local pastors (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023). District staff support district supervisors in the dissemination of information, workload division, and

implementation of denominational initiatives. At the local level, the stakeholders include all senior and assisting ministers. Local congregations and their members are considered stakeholders as they are the recipients of the spiritual leadership provided by the local clergy. Ultimately, all stakeholders could benefit from a leadership pathway that engages more women in senior and denominational roles, potentially helping to fill the current leadership gap.

Project Implications

Walden requires its doctoral candidates to create a project based on the findings of their research that addresses a local problem and has the potential to bring about social change (Walden, n.d.). What follows is a discussion of the potential social change implications that this project may have for the ICC. Additionally, the significance of this project to stakeholders within the ICC and in the broader context is discussed.

Possible Social Change

Organizational change that drives social change often has leadership development initiatives at its core (Andrews, 2023; Errida & Lofti, 2021; Fry, 2021a; Munive et al., 2023; Zulfqar et al., 2021). The implementation of this project could potentially bring about social change at the ICC in four ways. First, this project can provide the ICC with an evidence-based understanding about women's leadership engagement and the benefits of investing in holistic mentor-protégé mentoring/ continuing education policy for the advancement of more women; allowing the organization to make decisions that provide a pathway for more women to engage in more senior roles; meet the perceived needs of the

current women clergy members; and potentially fill the leadership gap. One denominational leader in my basic qualitative study suggested that providing educational pathways and various types of learning opportunities, along with a community component, was necessary in the ICC to empower more women in ministry (DL6).

Second, the implementation of the project can provide current ICC women clergy members with the desired role-specific training, which can lead to increased self-efficacy and personal and professional growth, ultimately validating their readiness to pursue leadership advancement (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The project offers many learning options to overcome the challenge of creating a "one size fits all" leadership development pathway (see Krispin, 2020; Schwartz, 2023). The participants of this study desire ongoing role-specific training and mentoring that addresses the particular needs of women. One denominational leader expressed the need for such training, stating that just-in-time training was more tangible and meaningful to her (DL7).

Third, another potential social change within the ICC is a shift from a perceived male-dominated and patriarchal culture to one that pursues equitable power for women while maintaining unity among all its members (see Fry, 2021a). Although pockets of traditional church culture and patriarchal doctrine still exist in some local churches of the ICC, Lewis (2021) suggests that women were often seen as the moral authority within a community, able to bring about social change. Engaging more women in more senior and denominational roles is not intended to diminish male roles, but to "establish mutuality that allows us to affirm different ways of being" (see Purser & O'Brien, 2021, p. 93). One

participant of this study asserted that “everybody has a seat at the table” (SC7). This project has the potential to provide equitable training and networking opportunities tailored to the needs of women clergy members, preparing them for their seat at the table alongside their male colleagues.

Finally, as more women rise to and are seen in senior and denominational roles, the potential for more women to be inspired to answer their calling and engage in a leadership pathway may increase, as real or perceived barriers and inhibitors to advancement are removed. There is an adage that states, “You cannot be what you do not see.” Clear pathways to leadership are not always evident to women within an organization (Redmond et al., 2017). One assisting minister (AM1) shared that seeing other women in leadership was instrumental to her leadership pathway, bolstering her courage to engage in leader development and ministry. Increasing the visibility of women in local church pulpits and denominational roles may inspire others to do the same. These women may come from not only the current pool of women clergy but also from young women sitting in the local congregations both now and in the future, potentially creating a pipeline of women clergy to fill the leadership gap and move toward more gender parity for generations.

The Importance of the Project to Stakeholders in Local and Larger Context

Rebuilding an organization's culture often benefits all stakeholders, both locally and in broader contexts (Bass, 1990; Desai & Desai, 2023; Lewis, 2021; Nicolaides & Naidoo, 2025). The implementation of this project has the potential to impact the ICC,

the global Christian Church, and other world religions that support women in leadership, as well as contribute to the literature and research on gender-specific women's leadership development through continuing education and mentoring. The following discussion highlights the project's significance to stakeholders in both local and broader contexts.

The Importance of the Project to Stakeholders of the Local Context

The local context of the project is within the ICC, which comprises several groups of stakeholders, including the women clergy of the ICC, local church leaders, district leaders, national leaders, and the ICC as a denomination. The first group of stakeholders to benefit from this project would be current women clergy members seeking personal and professional growth and leadership development as they transition into more senior and denominational roles. Engaging in various continuing educational and mentoring opportunities can provide these women with the knowledge and skills necessary for advancing their vocational careers.

The local church leadership could also benefit, as well-trained leaders have the potential to cultivate a more positive organizational climate that fosters a culture supportive of its employees and volunteers. The local church congregation also benefits from a balanced leadership of men and women who are trained and qualified to bring the gospel message, give life direction to its members, and engage the community around them. As one assisting minister stated, "I think that there is a beauty in having male and female leadership presence because we are the fullness of Christ when we are together"

(AM5). As mentioned previously, the younger women in the congregation might also become encouraged to answer a call to leadership by seeing a woman as a role model.

District and national leaders also benefit when more women engage in a growth pathway. The ICC had long maintained a recommendation that its leaders engage in lifelong learning (see Butcher, 2014; The Foursquare Church, 2020b) but has not offered a standardized pathway for the development of women to engage in leadership development toward more senior roles (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19. 2025; C. Jenkins, personal communication, April 23, 2025). This initial policy of continuing education that supports women's leadership development can help the ICC to fulfill its own directive to take "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes, and the means to ensure ongoing accountability" for advancing women within the ICC as proposed in the 2002 ICC initiative (see Schell, 2007, p. 72). In addition, the viability of the ICC as a denomination might be bolstered, as the ICC engages its priority of "together on mission" by increasing the number of clergy of every ethnicity, age, gender, and stage of life in lifelong learning that supports leadership development (see The Foursquare Church, 2024).The potential for social change and the implications of implementing the project are, at best, an educated guess. However, I am hopeful that this research and project study will bring about the change needed to engage more women in senior and denominational roles in the future, and help to fill the current and longstanding leadership gap.

The Importance of the Project to Stakeholders of the Larger Context

The implementation of this project is also important to stakeholders within the broader context, including the global Christian church, other world religions, and the fields of literature and research. The first group of stakeholders that might benefit from the findings of this study and the project is the broader Christian Church, both nationally and globally. In the United States and throughout the world, many Christian denominations that profess egalitarianism and provide women with access to ordination still report an incongruency between their orthodoxy and orthopraxy to place women in more senior roles (Allured, 2025; Chaves et al., 2021; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2020). Many researchers within these denominations called for organizational policy change to bring equity in leadership among men and women clergy, yet a review of the literature revealed a paucity of recommendations for women's leadership pathways (Fry, 2021a; Kgatle, 2019; Mujinga, 2020; Moores, 2023; Purser & O'Brien, 2020). This project may provide stakeholders in these denominations with a pathway that can be adapted to their particular denominational and cultural contexts.

A wide range of denominational views of women in ministry leadership continues to exist both nationally and globally within the larger Christian church. The breadth of these views is attributed to denominational polity and theology, as well as congregational size, location, and cultural norms (Hackett et al., 2025). Some of these denominations, including the Catholic Church, purport a complementarian view of women in leadership, allowing women to serve in supportive roles without clerical status (Hackett et al., 2025;

McEwan, 2025; Senn & Stolz, 2025). However, some of these denominations were reported to be engaging in discussions to move toward the fuller inclusion of women in clerical roles and re-examining the traditional interpretation of scripture (McEwan, 2025; Senn & Stolz, 2025). Senn and Stolz (2025) recommended that denominations moving toward mutuality in leadership begin by "loosening the rules" around women in ministry leadership and then move toward a change in actual practice (p. 196). This project can provide stakeholders of these denominations with the knowledge, language, and pathway to begin engaging women in leadership.

The movement toward the inclusion of women in leadership is not limited to the Christian Church but has also been a topic of discussion and research among other major world religions (De Napoli, 2023; Ghafournia, 2022). In particular, the discussion of the roles of women in faith and leadership has risen in Islam and Hinduism—two of the world's largest and most male-dominated religions (De Napoli, 2023; Ghafournia, 2022; Hackett et al., 2025). Researchers within these religions reported that both males and females were questioning male religious authorities about the role of women in the faith and leadership, particularly in the United States of America and Europe (De Napoli, 2023; Ghafournia, 2022; Hackett et al., 2025). As more women contest male ownership of religious spaces and teaching, the stakeholders in these religions will need to decide for themselves if the results of this study and the project will be beneficial to their understanding and continued discussion of women's leadership engagement.

Most of the studies of women clergy leadership within the Christian Church provided data as to the paucity of women in leadership within various denominations, the barriers women face when pursing leadership development, and called for organizational change (Fry, 2021a; Kgatle, 2019; Mujinga, 2020; Moores, 2023; Purser & O'Brien, 2020); however, studies that provided an actual plan of implementation were rare and gender-specific leadership pathways proved nonexistent. The importance of this study and the project lies in its potential to contribute to the body of research literature, providing other researchers with knowledge about women's leadership development, preferred ways of learning for women, and serving as an exemplar for gender-specific continuing education pathways for women's leadership development. Whether or not this project study is of value to the stakeholders of the ICC, the larger Christian Church, other world religions, or researchers interested in women clergy leader development is ultimately the call of these stakeholders. In the next section, I discuss my final reflections and conclusions.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this section, I reflect on the project's strengths and limitations, and suggest recommendations for alternative approaches. In addition, I discuss the impact of the scholarship and project development on my learning and growth as a scholar-practitioner. Finally, I reflect on the importance of the work, including its implications and applications, suggest a direction for further research, and conclude with my final thoughts.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project is a position paper and initial policy recommendation that encourages the ICC to adopt and implement a mandatory continuing education policy for its women clergy who desire to engage in more senior roles within the local church and the denomination (see Appendix A). The policy is designed to provide gender-specific opportunities grounded in the recent literature of transformative leadership (TL) and the women's leadership development model (WLD), as well as the findings from my basic exploratory qualitative study (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Krispin, 2020). The design of this project has strengths and limitations.

Strengths of the Project

The project has at least five strengths, three of which are directly related to its goals. First, this project provides the ICC with evidence-based language and rationale for creating and implementing an initial policy for gender-specific continuing education, grounded in TL and Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) WLD model. Employing a TL model

aligns with the language of the Church as the Apostle Paul reminds in Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (*The Holy Bible-ESV*, 2011). Having this language and rationale for the employment of this policy has the potential not only to increase the ICC’s understanding of engaging with the policy and subsequent programs, but also to provide the language and rationale to communicate the need for such a policy to all its stakeholders. The WLD model also provides language and rationale specific to women seeking leadership advancement, including how women engage in leadership differently than their male counterparts and the barriers or resistance that women often face when doing so (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Second, the policy proposal offers a holistic role-specific leadership pathway that has the potential to meet the perceived needs of the women clergy members in various periods of life and ministry by offering a wide range of mentoring and learning opportunities based on the Christian leadership development outcomes framework (CLDOF) and the responses of the participants of my study (see Krispin, 2020). These continuing education offerings have the potential to foster increased individualized capacity, creativity, self-confidence, and self-efficacy through the transformational leadership (TL) tenets of motivation and inspiration (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Karakose et al., 2023; Krispin, 2020; Lewis, 2021; Porter, 2025; Redmond et al., 2017).

Third, the recommended timetable for the incremental implementation of the policy provides ample time for consideration, creation, implementation, and evaluation of the policy. Changing organizational structure and creating an adaptive organizational culture requires time and concerted effort (Longman et al., 2018; Purser & O'Brien, 2021; Zulfqar, 2021). The longitudinal evaluation plan also provides the ICC with formative and summative information to inform the restructuring of the policy and subsequent programs for maximum impact (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Fourth, the longitudinal evaluation plan provides a rigorous tool for assessing the effectiveness of the policy. This evaluation plan is constructed as an objectives-based approach employing both formative and summative forms of evaluation to collect the necessary data to measure whether the policy and subsequent programs met the desired outcomes, allowing the ICC leadership team to make decisions and adjustments as needed (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Regoli, 2019; Spaulding, 2014).

The fifth strength of the project is that it is not the work of a singular individual, but draws upon the knowledge, expertise, skills, and support of a wide range of stakeholders within the ICC at the local, district, and national levels. When proposing policy change, most studies emphasize the importance of engaging all organizational stakeholders in an honest assessment of the barriers to change, current policy, and potential resources, as well as an evaluation of the current policy (Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Schwartz, 2023). The ICC's stakeholders include a multitude of skilled practitioners, knowledgeable scholars, and scholar-practitioners who can be deployed to

bring about organizational change by creating this recommended pathway for women clergy growth and development. Although the strengths of this project hold potential for its success, the project also has some limitations.

Limitations of the Project

Every project has potential limitations that can hinder its desired outcomes. Although it is not possible to anticipate all limitations, I foresee three potential limitations that may hinder the project's acceptance, implementation, and success. The potential limitations include resistance from some male clergy members, limited resources and time constraints, and difficulty establishing a positive correlation between implementation and the number of women who engage in more senior leadership roles.

The first potential limitation to the successful implementation of this policy is resistance by some male clergy members to support a growth pathway specific to women clergy members. Although the ICC purports to have an egalitarian approach to women clergy members at all levels of leadership, a cultural perception persists among the participants in this study that the ICC remains male-dominated and oriented. One senior leader (SC4) shared that, although she felt women were more accepted in leadership roles within the denomination, some stereotypical expectations remained and needed to be addressed, allowing them to be processed out with both men and women leaders present. As over 80% of ICC's senior clergy members are men, the potential for resistance to change and to engage in the development of gender specific training for women clergy members remained (see The Foursquare Church, 2024, pp. 7-8). However, Fry (2021a)

insisted that the pursuit of equitable power for women need not impede the maintenance of unity among all of an organization's members.

The second potential limitation of this project is that implementing such an endeavor can draw upon limited resources and potentially face time constraints. To effectively implement policy and promote this change, the ICC must assess the human and financial resources needed, as well as the existing organizational supports and structures, and provide solutions to potential barriers (see Zulfqar et al., 2021). However, two situations would make the relegation of the appropriate resources challenging. The first is the enormity and longevity of the project, as it will require a long-term commitment to financial, human, and technological resources. The second situation might be the larger hindrance. The ICC has four priorities with aligned goals (see The Foursquare Church, 2024). Each of these priorities draws upon the same pool of limited financial, technological, and human resources, and the ICC leadership must decide if and how many of those resources will be allotted to this initiative.

The third potential limitation of the project is the difficulty in establishing a positive correlation between the implementation of the gender-specific continuing education policy and the actual number of women who would engage in more senior roles within the ICC. A positive correlation suggests that two or more factors move in the same direction and exhibit a relationship to one another (Sreekumar, 2024). Other factors beyond engaging in continuing education may impact a woman's pursuit of more senior clergy roles within the ICC, such as encouragement from a sponsor or a perceived need in

the community (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). However, more precise data about the policy's effectiveness in engaging more women can be gathered by employing mixed methods, as recommended in the evaluation plan. Although this project has its limitations, I believe that the strengths of this project, along with the potential to engage more women in senior roles through a gender-specific growth pathway, will help to fill the current ICC leadership gap.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The local problem within the International Christian Church (ICC) is the limited understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy members as leaders, which might help fill the current leadership gap. Although the project provides the ICC with an understanding of a holistic approach to mentoring and learning as perceived by the women clergy in this study, alternative approaches should be considered. In this section, I discuss an alternative approach to defining the local problem and provide alternative solutions to address it.

An Alternative Definition of the Local Problem

Before offering alternative approaches to resolve the local problem, I offer an alternative definition of the local problem based on the work of this study as follows: The local problem within the ICC is the lack of a flexible gender-specific leadership development pathway for women who aspire to more senior roles within the denomination that could potentially fill the current leadership gap. In this study, more than 68% of the participants had already served in senior clergy and denominational

roles, and another 10% were considering more senior roles within the ICC. Many participants expressed a desire to engage in training-specific leadership advancement, but perceived that the availability of learning opportunities was limited. Many sought an educational pathway with varied mentoring/ learning opportunities as well as a community component to meet their learning needs for advanced roles. As such, the potential for addressing the original or alternative definition of the problem with alternative approaches for the project study must be considered.

Alternative Approaches to Address the Local Problem

One such approach would be to modify the current project in terms of its breadth and depth of implementation. Instead of enacting a denominationally wide initiative as a formal policy, a pilot initiative can be conducted voluntarily at the district level among the women clergy members in the original site of this study. Scaling down the initial project to a smaller region can alleviate the strain on the ICC's resources, decrease the amount of time for the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the project, and allow the ICC to evaluate the impact of the more local project on the engagement of women clergy members in more senior roles.

Another alternative approach could be to design a one-year cohort experience for women leaders interested in advancing to the role of senior pastor. This would be similar to the WIML cohort, in which some participants in this study engaged outside of the ICC and found it beneficial. The design is similar to Walden's project option for a curriculum plan in that it would include purpose, scope, and sequence, detailed lessons, materials to

be employed, and an evaluation plan (Walden, n.d.). Participants could meet monthly via Zoom and then gather for a three-day summit experience at the end of the year. Although this is a targeted approach to engage women clergy members in senior pastor roles, it may not reach those who are still uncertain about their calling or those who are hesitant to take on more senior roles (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). It is responsible to consider alternative approaches to address the local problem. However, I feel that the project has the potential for more engagement by women clergy members, as multiple options for continuing education do not limit access to those women with limited time and finances.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Walden University desires to produce doctoral graduates who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to understand and develop themselves, "the organizations in which they work, and society at large" (Walden University, 2021, p. 2). In this section, I describe what I have learned about the processes specific to the research and development of the project. In addition, I engage in a reflective analysis of my personal learning and growth as a project developer, scholar, leader, and change agent.

Growth Through Project Development

In my lifetime, I have served as a primary project developer in several professions, including nursing administration, Christian K-12 education, Christian higher education, and church planting. I possess the skills and abilities to be a visionary, to engage others collaboratively, and to develop plans and projects through thoughtful reflection and thorough research. Yet, developing this project has required an expansion

of each of these skills, as my previous projects only impacted a local hospital, school, or church, rather than a national denomination. Perhaps the two most incredible things I learned were the importance of choosing the right project to resolve a local problem and the importance of including all stakeholders in the potential success of a project. To engage in the project development process, I needed to learn the intricacies of the ICC's organizational structure, identify all stakeholders and their potential contributions to the project, and assess the magnitude of resources required.

Although this was daunting, creating a policy where none existed before was even more challenging because most continuing education policies designed for clergy development did not specifically address the needs of women or how they learn. This required that I return to the literature for evidence-based best practices that would address the needs of women clergy members seeking a leadership pathway. However, my best source of insight was the participants in my own research, who provided me with rich descriptions of what they perceived as beneficial for their personal and professional growth. Their responses not only provided me with a wealth of information about their experiences, but also caused me to reflect upon my own personal and professional growth as a woman clergy member- what challenges had I experienced? What experiences propelled me forward? What would I consider important to my leadership development?

The most challenging aspect of this project was developing a comprehensive evaluation plan. In the past, I had only employed standardized evaluations or conducted surveys to assess end-user satisfaction. This aspect of my personal learning was most

challenging, but I found that my self-efficacy and confidence have grown sufficiently so that I intend to offer myself as a key part of the project task force and as an evaluator of the project in the long term. I am grateful for what I learned about the processes of project development, but I have found that the insights I gained about myself as a scholar, leader, and change agent have been most formative.

Growth Through Scholarship

My engagement in the processes specific to the development of this project has been a challenging experience, adding to my knowledge and understanding of the depth and breadth of the challenges women face in the workplace, the Church, and society at large regarding leadership advancement. I found the paucity of research and scholarship that addressed this problem from the Church's perspective both disappointing and challenging. I found this disappointing because much of the scholarship on women in leadership has focused on the barriers women face, without offering any real solutions to the problem. I consider myself a scholar-practitioner, one who not only seeks to acquire knowledge and understanding through critical analysis for myself but also one who interprets and informs others of current scholarship for the greater good. Engaging in the processes of my research and the development of this project has greatly enhanced my desire to increase my scholarship and to be "a voice" who brings understanding to others around the complexities of leadership, cultural context, and women's leadership pathways. I am now also curious about how to engage men and women of different ethnicities in a transformative leadership pathway and may pursue this in the future.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing I learned through scholarship is the power and the passion to know the "why" of a situation and to engage others in a conversation that brings about change.

Leadership and the Power for Change

The process of developing this project has prompted me to examine my own style of leadership and my potential as an agent of change. I serve not only as a woman clergy member in a local church, but as a speaker to women's groups, and as a mentor to dozens of Christian women. I have noticed improvements in three areas: my ability to teach, self-awareness of my personal biases, and my practice as a mentor and leader. I have always defined teaching as the ability to convey complex information in a way that makes it easily understood by the learner. I am passionate about giving women the opportunity to advance in their leadership development, providing them with the language, a voice, and a place at the table as I am able.

As a woman clergy member and an Evangelical feminist, I have become very aware of my own bias on the matter of women in ministry. I hold an egalitarian view of women in the Church and at home. However, I realize that many of my colleagues hold either an egalitarian view of women in ministry and a complementarian view at home, or a complementarian view of women in both arenas. Being mindful of my own biases allows me to hear the views of others while holding to my own. Perhaps the most significant practical change for me has been in how I approach mentoring several women leaders. The participants' perceptions of what makes a good mentor have directly

improved my prayer life, inspired me to be on time for appointments, and to be more relational rather than transactional, as well as improved my follow-up after meetings. I have identified changes in my personal leadership style, and I have also begun to take to heart the idea that I really can bring about social change in a larger context.

Lewis (2021) purported that women were often seen as the moral authority within a community who were able to bring about social change. Truly leadership and social change go hand-in-hand, however, leadership must operate with intentionality to bring about any real change. Perkins and Shortland (2024) purported that authority is a concept central to leadership because it is the underpinning of the leader's ability to direct, motivate, and shape the behavior of others. Although I know this to be true, I have struggled with the idea that I carried enough authority to influence others beyond the current audiences that I serve.

Engaging in the development of this project has increased my self-awareness of my insecurities around putting myself forward. My self-efficacy has also grown as a result of this process. I find myself becoming hopeful that I can fulfill what God has destined for me as I become the "catalytic environment changer" that was prophesized over me several years ago. I now have the confidence to engage in opportunities that may bring about social change within the ICC and the larger Christian Church, and contribute to the broader body of knowledge on women, both within and outside the Church, through research, scholarship, and mentoring.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

This basic qualitative study addresses the local problem by examining the perceptions of existing women clergy members in the ICC's most eastern district regarding holistic formal and informal mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that may lead to the development of more women clergy within the religious organization. Seven themes emerged from the data analysis: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents.

Upon reflection, this study is important for at least four reasons. First, as an exploratory study into the perceptions of ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentoring strategies, this initial study provides the ICC with evidence-based insights into what these women observed and desired for personal and professional growth, thereby engaging a leadership development pathway. The ICC has not conducted any research examining what it would take to advance its leadership and fill the leadership gap, relying instead on anecdotal information and industry best practices to move initiatives forward. The results of this project study can inform the ICC on the design and implementation of a gender-specific pathway for leader development that meets the perceived needs of women clergy, providing mentoring and learning opportunities that advance their personal and professional growth, potentially filling the leadership gap.

Second, this project study is important because little scholarship exists in the ICC, as the denomination does not create or endorse research beyond gathering statistical data and anecdotal data from its churches as reported in the national church reports (see Dunahoo, 2015). The ICC encourages those clergy members conducting research for their institutions of higher education by serving as a gatekeeper, providing scholar-practitioners with access to clergy member contact data, archival data, and statistical data. However, the implementation of this project study can help initiate ICC-endorsed research and engage the Foursquare Scholars Fellowship as a resident research group, providing the ICC with evidence-based research for future initiatives.

Third, suppose this project is implemented and the evaluation plan is carried out as planned. In that case, the ICC can explore the impact of the policy and its subsequent programs, and determine their impact on the number of women clergy members engaging in a leadership pathway toward more senior roles. The acceptance and implementation of a policy that supports women's leadership development could help the ICC to fulfill its own directive to take "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes, and the means to ensure ongoing accountability" as proposed in 2002 (see Schell, 2007, p. 72).

Finally, this project study is important because it provides a platform for participants to express their perceptions of holistic mentoring, their sense of calling, and their leadership development needs. When seeking participants, I sent invitations to 43 women clergy members and obtained a response rate of over 50%. Each interviewee was eager to share her experiences, insights, concerns, and suggestions for women's

leadership development. When conversing with others within the ICC who did not participate in my study, many expressed the need for such a study and excitement to learn about the findings. Patton (2015) stated that the "researcher becomes the instrument for collecting data" (p.48); however, I felt that this study has allowed me the privilege to do so much more. I can give an underrepresented people group the opportunity to have a voice and then share their voice with those in power, which was a tremendous responsibility and honor.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Research conducted solely for the sake of knowledge acquisition does not lead to social change. According to the Higher Education Research Institute (1996), the goals of the social change model were to enhance self-awareness, develop leadership competencies, and facilitate positive social change for individuals, groups, and communities. In this section, I discuss the implications of social change within both local and broader contexts. Additionally, I outline the theoretical implications and provide recommendations for future research.

Implications for Social Change

This project study has the potential to bring about change among the clergy members of the ICC, to the ICC as a denomination, and to the broader context of that part of the Church that affirms the right of women to serve at more senior levels. A core value of social change is that individuals develop self-awareness of their values, beliefs, and leadership potential (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). I believe that the results

of this basic qualitative study, along with the implementation of this project, can benefit all ICC clergy members. All ICC clergy, men and women alike, can increase their understanding of how women engage in leadership development, their gender-specific ways of knowing, and the barriers that women face when participating in leadership development. Increased self-awareness among these women may enhance their self-efficacy and provide them with the motivation to pursue leadership advancement (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Male clergy members could examine their values and beliefs around women in senior ministry roles and determine if their values are congruent with the egalitarian stance of the ICC and determine for themselves how they might champion and support women's leadership development in their own context. The potential social change within the hearts and minds of these individuals can result in social change within the ICC as a denomination.

When all of the ICC clergy members of the ICC collaborate toward the common purpose of engaging women in more senior roles within the ICC, mutuality can be established that does not elevate or diminish one gender over the other and the ICC could benefit at both the local church and denominational level (see Fry, 2021a; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Another beneficial change would be the potential for the ICC's perceived male-dominated and patriarchal culture to become one where equitable power in leadership becomes a reality for women clergy members (see Fry, 2021a). Lewis (2021) purported that women were often seen as the moral authority within a community, able to bring about social change. As more women engage in senior and denominational roles,

the potential exists for more women, both now and in the future, to respond to their calling and create a pipeline of women clergy to fill the leadership gap, moving toward greater gender parity for generations.

Effective social change also occurs at the societal or community level. Clear pathways to women's leadership development within an organization are not always evident (Redmond et al., 2017). Many of the research studies done by those who are involved in denominations that professed an egalitarian approach to women in leadership within the Church reported an incongruency between their orthodoxy and orthopraxy and called for organizational policy change to bring equity in religious leadership among men and women (Allured, 2025; Chaves et al., 2021; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2020). I believe that the results from this study and the project have the potential to provide other denominations within the global Christian Church with evidence-based knowledge and a policy model to create a women's leadership development pathway for themselves. Whether or not these projected social changes occur depends not on one individual but on the collaborative efforts of everyone who desires to see more women clergy within Church leadership.

Theoretical Implications

When I began this basic qualitative study, I found a paucity of research literature addressing women's leadership development within the Church. Those studies that did exist discussed the underrepresentation of women within senior roles, the resistance to change within the patriarchal culture, the barriers to engagement women experience, the

lack of a pathway to leadership development, and a call for organizational change (see Allured, 2025; Chaves et al., 2021; The Foursquare Church, 2024; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2020). However, few, if any, of these articles provided a women's leadership model or a policy to address the underrepresentation of women in Church leadership; however, I found research in Christian higher education that provided evidence that women in CHE struggled with many of the same issues as women clergy.

Dahlvig and Longman (2014) proposed a staged model of WLD that I employed as the conceptual model for this study as the participants of both studies shared some commonalities including a sense of calling, the motivation to engage leadership, and the pursuit of leadership development through mentoring strategies (see Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Though I found the WLD model helpful as a foundational paradigm, at the conclusion of my data analysis, I suggested an expansion of Dahlvig and at the Longman's (2014) model by highlighting mentoring as one of the motivational reasons women engage a leadership development pathway. Based on the responses of the participants of this study, I expanded the role of calling as an impetus to engagement in leadership to each of the stages of the WLD, as many participants described their calling bringing clarity as they engaged leadership at every stage. I also expanded the model to include all seven of the emergent themes as either elements of validation or resistance. This expanded model describes the perceptions and experiences of these women clergy members more accurately; however, other researchers would need to decide for themselves if this expanded model would serve in their individual contexts.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that qualitative researchers ensure the quality of their research by providing evidence of credibility, dependability, and transferability when promoting action and collaboration (as cited in Lodico et al., 2010). As a scholar-practitioner, I can foresee the results of this study adding to the body of knowledge about women clergy leadership engagement, and other denominations could employ the policy as a model for continuing education to advance women's leadership.

This study was conducted within one district of the ICC. Future research could be conducted in the other five districts to determine if similar results can be obtained, or if the women clergy in the other geographical districts raise different concerns. Other qualitative studies could be conducted to determine if the modified WLD model holds among younger generations or different ethnic groups. Beyond the ICC, I believe that future research could be conducted in other denominations and nations that are struggling to advance women into senior leadership roles. However, the transferability of this study's results will be determined by the reader, who must assess whether the results of this study are applicable in their context.

Conclusion

Despite the inauspicious statistics and projections for the future of women leader advancement in the Church at large, researchers have proposed that denominational and organizational policy must change to support women leadership engagement and advancement in an effort to increase the parity of gender in the Church (see Akerlund &

Smidsrod, 2024; Fry, 2021a; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). The reasons for the lack of development among the ICC's women clergy members are speculative, anecdotal, and unclear. This basic exploratory qualitative study of the perceptions of existing women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that could lead to the development of more women clergy within the ICC resulted in a modified model of WLD and a continuing education policy that has the potential to engage more women in senior clergy roles. One denominational leader suggested that providing educational pathways with various learning opportunities, as well as a community component, was necessary in the ICC to empower more women in the clergy (DL6).

Lewis (2021) posited that women leaders were often perceived as the moral authority within a community, capable of bringing about social change. Although changing organizational culture can be challenging, I find myself hopeful for the future of the ICC because the women clergy members who participated in this study not only articulated the challenges to their advancement effectively, but they also offered constructive ideas for topics related to a gender-specific leadership pathway. As these women shared their experiences with mentoring and leadership training, I realized that they were knowledgeable, resilient, proud to be part of the ICC family, and willing to serve as senior leaders and mentors to future generations.

The Lord Jesus Christ initiated the Church and brought social change by raising women to the status of disciples, teachers, and apostles. Kwon (2023) declared that "we

cannot divorce the teachings of Jesus and expect the results of Jesus" (p. 67). The deployment of women clergy members and the pursuit of more equitable leadership are not just organizational challenges, but also a biblical mandate. The Apostle Paul brought social change to the early Church by declaring the cultural barriers null and void stating, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (see *The Holy Bible-ESV*, 2011, Galatians 3:28). During this critical period of organizational change and denominational survival, the ICC's history, doctrine, and theology make them uniquely situated as an evangelical denomination to develop women clergy for the next generation and help them not only exist but thrive in the next 100 years as a denomination.

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Appendix A: The Project

Position Paper and Policy Recommendation

The following position paper and subsequent policy recommendations are the result of my recent qualitative research, which was conducted to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members regarding holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that could lead to the development of more women clergy within the International Christian Church (ICC). As a woman clergy member of the ICC for over two decades, I have been and remain interested in the engagement, development, and deployment of future generations of women to more senior roles within the ICC. Concerned about the future of the ICC, I sought to understand and address the local issue within the International Christian Church (ICC), specifically the limited understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy member leaders, which could help fill the current leadership gap. To address this problem, I designed a basic qualitative study to explore the perceptions of existing ICC women clergy members within the most eastern district of the ICC. Seven themes emerged: the importance of calling as a motivator, the presence of inhibitors to leader development, the varied mentoring opportunities, the presence of mentor-protégé antecedents, self-reported growth of the protégé, the importance of holistic mentoring, and the absence of mentor-protégé antecedents. Based upon these themes and the stated desire of ICC leadership to engage more women in senior leadership, I have provided the background of the problem and the existing policy, presented primary evidence from

research literature and my study, and outlined recommendations for women's leadership development to more senior roles for the consideration of the ICC leadership.

Background of the Problem and the Existing Policy

As a denomination, the ICC has purported an egalitarian approach to engage women in leadership at all levels since its inception in 1923 (Kipgen, n.d.; Schell, 2007; Tremper, 2017; Van Cleave, 2024). However, statistics from the ICC's annual reports from 2011 through 2024 still indicate that men still hold the large majority of senior clergy leadership positions and the percentage of women senior clergy members remains around 3% (Dunahoo, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020; The Foursquare Church, 2020b, 2024). To resolve the dissonance between its orthodoxy and orthopraxy around the engagement and advancement of women in ministry leadership, the ICC's national convention body of 2002 passed a resolution to develop a clear position of the ICC's view of women in ministry and to create a plan to engage more women in ICC ministry at all levels (Schell, 2007). Schell (2007) recommended that the ICC leadership adopt "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes" that would support the development and advancement of women to ensure the future of the denomination (p. 72). Although the ICC recommends that all of its clergy members engage in lifelong learning (The Foursquare Church, n.d.), at the time of my study, the ICC did not have any policy around mandatory formal mentoring, continuing education, or leadership development beyond the initial licensing process and chaplaincy training

for any clergy members, men or women (L. Scott, personal communication, March 19. 2025).

Although the ICC remains theologically and doctrinally supportive of women in ministry leadership, it appears that the local problem within the International Christian Church (ICC) is a limited understanding of holistic mentor-protégé mentoring strategies that support the development of women clergy members as leaders, which might help fill the current leadership gap. This apparent lack of understanding of the processes and pathways that women can undertake to advance their leadership remains unclear, and the leadership gap persists. One denominational leader who participated in my study of current women clergy members expressed that she desired a framework from the ICC that was designed to provide "educational pathways and different types of learning opportunities as well as a community component" to support her leadership development both personally and professionally. Although creating a denominational-wide multimodal mentoring network would benefit the women clergy of the ICC, this would be an enormous endeavor as an initial effort to establish a gendered leadership development process. Therefore, I designed an *initial* policy for the continuing education and advancement of women toward more senior roles within the ICC, addressing the perceived needs and preferences of women who choose to engage in women's leadership development, as identified in the current literature and as a result of my study.

Major Evidence From Literature and Research

A review of the current literature on women's leadership development, along with insights drawn from the ICC women clergy members who participated in my research, provided valuable insights into the paucity of women in senior leadership positions and potential solutions for achieving greater gender parity. Many studies have examined the statistical, cultural, theological, and social status of women in senior leadership positions in both secular and sacred realms, proposed a model of women's leadership development, and provided an operational lens through which to view organizational change that has the potential to be lasting.

The Status of Women in Senior Leadership Positions

The underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles is not unique to the ICC as a denomination or the global Church. Women in the workplace, whether in secular or sacred settings, have struggled to secure more senior leadership positions (Catalyst, n.d.; Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022; Munive et al., 2023; Redmond et al., 2017; Teague, 2015). A review of the current research literature of women's leadership revealed a paucity of women in senior leadership positions continued in social studies, business and management, medicine, and higher education (Catalyst, n.d.; Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022; Munive et al., 2023; Redmond et al, 2017; Teague, 2015). Some advancements toward gender parity in the secular world have been made; however, the engagement of women clergy into more senior roles in the global and national Church did not seem to keep pace with secular organizations (Allured, 2025; Chaves et al., 2021; The

Foursquare Church, 2024; Fry, 2021; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). Research studies of women in leadership in mainline Protestant and evangelical denominations throughout the world have indicated that the majority of senior clergy leadership positions continued to be held by aging white males even though women made up the larger percentage of both congregants and clergy members in many local churches (Chaves et al., 2021; Fry, 2021; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021).

Fry (2021) purported that if women were not afforded the opportunities to access leadership development pathways, "there will likely always be a higher proportion of women than men who are unable to fulfill their professional potential within the Church's hierarchy" (p. 2105). Some participants in my study shared this sentiment. One leader, a hospital chaplain, observed that leadership opportunities were more often presented to young men and less frequently given to women in the church setting. One senior leader shared that, although she felt women were more accepted in leadership roles within the denomination, some stereotypical expectations remained and needed to be addressed, allowing them to be processed out with both men and women in leadership present. At the time of my research, a model for women's leadership development did not exist within the ICC.

A Model for Women's Leadership Development

Much of the research on the status of women in senior leadership roles within the Church has described the doctrinal, theological, cultural, and social barriers that women

often encounter as they begin to engage in leadership development (Akerlund & Smidsrod, 2024; Fry, 2021; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). However, the reasons for the lack of development of women in ministry remained speculative, anecdotal, and unclear, and failed to offer a model of leadership development (Brabazon & Schultz, 2020; Carjabal, 2018; Coleman, 2020; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Therefore, I drew upon the research literature from Christian higher education to develop a model of women's leadership development, as the experiences of women clergy in rising to senior roles mirrored those of women professors in Christian higher education institutions.

I employed and expanded Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model of women's leadership development (WLD) as a framework for understanding how women uniquely engaged and progressed in their development as individuals and leaders. The premise of Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model was that women engaged in leadership differently from their male counterparts. Men are more likely to engage in leadership opportunities through assertiveness, competitiveness, and independence. In contrast, women are more likely to pursue a leadership pathway when motivated by a calling, mentoring, or a sense of relational responsibility, often adopting more collaborative and inclusive approaches than their male counterparts (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). This theory recognized that women's leadership development was shaped, influenced, and framed by the intertwining factors of organizational culture/context, and that leaders' self-awareness could be

enhanced or hindered by incidents of resistance or validation (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Based on the data I collected from women clergy members within the ICC, I expanded the model by describing the various forms of resistance or validation at each stage based on the seven emergent themes of my research. Additionally, I expanded on the idea and importance of calling throughout the leadership development process. One participant in my study described her calling as an "unfolding" and shared that she was enjoying the realization of her calling's fulfillment. Employing my expanded model of Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) WLD when developing a policy or program for continuing education specific to women could bring understanding and structure to a policy of continuing education that meets the perceived needs of women clergy members within the ICC who are seeking advanced leadership roles. However, to engage such a model would require that the ICC adopt a different lens with which to view organizational change and leadership.

Adopting A Transformative Leadership Lens for Organizational Change

Despite the inauspicious statistics and projections for the future of women's leadership advancement in the Church, many current researchers proposed that denominational and organizational policy must change to support women in leadership engagement and advancement (Akerlund & Smidsrod, 2024; Fry, 2021; Mujinga, 2020; Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). The current ICC president has shared these sentiments, noting that the inequity in senior leadership remains and

needs to be addressed for the health and future of our denomination (Remington, 2021). However, changing organizational structures and culture is difficult at best and requires a concerted effort by the organizational leadership. Many male-dominated organizations tend toward hierarchical organizational structures and cultures that, perhaps unintentionally, support the advancement of men over women (Allured, 2025; Fry, 2021; Grandy & Mavin, 2020; Mujinga, 2020; Purser & O'Brien, 2021). To overcome the dissonance between the ICC's preferred yet unrealized value of increased gender parity in senior leadership, the ICC would need to engage an appropriate leadership lens to address its ecclesiological and organizational structures, leadership development pathways, and policymaking. I recommend the lens of transformational leadership development to provide direction for this pursuit.

Many organizations in business, human resources, and education had begun to move from a transactional form of leadership toward transformational leadership models that employed a shared and distributed form of leadership that evoked bottom-up participation and fostered increased individualized capacity, creativity, self-confidence and self-efficacy through motivation and inspiration (Burns, 2003; Desai & Desai, 2023; Karakose et al., 2023; Lewis, 2021; Porter, 2025; Redmond et al., 2017). First conceptualized by Burns (1978), transformational leadership (TL) has the potential to enable both leaders and followers to achieve an organization's goals in a collaborative manner that recognizes the potential of all stakeholders and holistically engages followers (Karakose et al., 2023). Transformational leadership is no longer a singular model of

leadership, but rather encompasses models linked to feminist leadership theory, social change models, and others (Karakose et al., 2023; Kwon, 2023; Porter, 2025).

Bass'(1996) model of TL has four tenets: charismatic leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (as cited in Desai & Desai, 2023, p.1449). *Charismatic leadership* is characterized by those behaviors exhibited by the mentor that build trust within the mentee (Desai & Desai, 2023). In my study, the mentor's character emerged as an important subtheme in the mentor-protégé antecedents that participants used to describe whether a mentoring strategy was beneficial or not. One denominational leader summarized this thought well, stating, "My first filter is 'How like Jesus are you?" The second tenet is *inspirational motivation*, which refers to the capacity to provide significance and challenge to protégés through inspiration, encouragement, and challenge (Bass, 1990; Desai & Desai, 2023). The participants of my research concurred with this sentiment, describing a recurring theme of personal and professional growth inspired by mentors who challenged them to grow as individuals and leaders. One assisting minister stated, "God just uses them (mentors) to kind of ping you forward and, you know, water that seed a little bit more." The third tenet of TL is *intellectual stimulation,* which prompts intelligence, problem-solving skills, and rational thought (Bass, 1990; Desai & Desai, 2023). When properly executed, the recipients have the potential to become innovative, creative, and adopt fresh perspectives (Desai & Desai, 2023). In my study, the theme of holistic mentoring strategies included the subtheme of intellectual strategies. When the participants were asked what they would

include in a formal mentoring opportunity, many emphasized the importance of a personal assessment and the incorporation of knowledge and skills that would enhance their personal and professional development, including conflict resolution, problem-solving, and effective communication. The fourth tenet is *individualized consideration* of mentor-protégé needs for the success and development of both individuals and the organization (Desai & Desai, 2023). Those members of an organization engaged in a TL form of leadership are encouraged to move beyond self-interest and consider the needs of both mentor and protégé (Desai & Desai, 2023; Jordan, 1986). The participants of my study often described their mentoring encounters as beneficial because they felt seen, understood, and on equal footing with a more senior leader. One denominational leader portrayed her encounters as follows: “You know, we gave each other such a beautiful, beautiful balance in our lives and just learning to hear from one another, receive from one another, contend for one another.” Each of the tenets of TL reflects the servant-leadership style of Jesus Christ, who transformed the world by training twelve disciples through his words, character, and deeds. This makes TL an excellent lens through which a religious organization can transform its culture and bring about social change in the world's systems. With an appropriate understanding of the status of women in ministry leadership, a model specific to women’s leadership development, and an appropriate lens for organizational change, as well as the theology that supports women in the fullness of ministry, the ICC is well positioned to move forward toward a policy change that will

support the engagement, development, and deployment of more women to senior leadership roles within the ICC.

Recommendations for Educational Pathways for Women Clergy Members

When proposing policy changes, the research literature emphasizes the importance of evidence-based recommendations and best practices, as well as the engagement of all organizational stakeholders in an honest assessment of the barriers to change, current policies, and proposed policies (Fry, 2021; Mujinga, 2020; Schwartz, 2023). The lack of such an intentional plan exposes organizations to impaired internal professional development, disruptions in organizational productivity, power struggles, loss of legacy and knowledge, and a risk of a protracted leadership void (Sanou, 2021; Sielaff et al., 2021). As the ICC has no formal policy for continuing education of either male or female clergy, I recommend that the ICC consider implementing a policy of continuing educational opportunities specifically designed to advance women to more senior roles, based on current research literature and the findings of my study.

Although very few examples of detailed policies for continuing education could be found within the Church, Krispin (2020) proposed a Christian leadership development outcomes framework (CLDOF) based on best practices in secular and sacred organizations, which espoused five measurable areas of leadership development that aligned with the tenets of TL. Krispin (2020) proposed that any organizational program for the development of a Christian leader must address the development of both the leader and their leadership by providing opportunities for growth in Christian formation,

personal formation, relational skills, intellectual skills, and management skills. These areas of leadership development also aligned with many of the elements that participants in my study recommended for developing a holistic leadership strategy that employed both formal and informal mentoring strategies. Below is a policy recommendation for the ICC's consideration.

Recommended Policy of Continuing Education for Women Clergy Members

Introduction. This policy establishes the requirements for continuing education for all women clergy members seeking senior or denominational roles within the ICC. In this rapidly changing world, leaders must be prepared to minister with wisdom and intention. The purpose of the continuing education policy and program is to strengthen the women clergy members as individuals and leaders. We must also recognize that women often lead differently and may experience challenges that their male counterparts do not. The following guidelines for continuing education are grounded in evidence-based research of best practices and the desired competencies as seen through the lens of TL research. This policy recommendation includes a list of recommended categories and competencies for continuing education offerings, the annual continuing education credit (CEU) requirements, recommendations for compliance, and the roles of all stakeholders in supporting this policy.

Categories and Competencies. Table A1 lists the categories and competencies for Christian leadership based on research-based best practices from which women aspiring to or holding senior or denominational roles may choose as options for

completing their continuing education requirements each year (Brady, 2025; Krispin, 2020). This list is not intended to be comprehensive, and clergy members can seek alternative options with the approval of the ICC.

Table A1

Women Clergy Members Continuing Education Options by Category

Growth category	Continuing education option
Spiritual formation	Christ-like character formation
	Spiritual disciplines and practices
	Biblical and theological foundations
Personal formation	Self-awareness
	Learning orientation
	Vocational calling
	Self-management
	Personal leadership
	Ministry/life balance
Intellectual skills	Critical and strategic thinking
	Preaching
	Problem-solving and decision-making
	Leadership models
	Barriers and challenges for women leaders
Relational skills	Conflict management and resolution
	Emotional intelligence and health
	Community engagement and social change
	Mentoring and coaching
	Team building
Management skills	Role-specific knowledge
	Resource management (finances, property, and HRD)
	Staff development

Note. The categories above are based on Krispin's (2020) Christian leadership development outcomes framework. The continuing education options listed under each

category are based on best practices identified in Krispin (2020) and the recommendations of participants in my study (pp. 29-34).

Annual CEU Requirements. In a calendar year, women clergy members must proactively seek and accrue a minimum of 16 clock hours of the recommended continuing education opportunities as listed in Table A1. The continuing education requirement for each credentialed woman may be fulfilled through one or more of the following options:

- Seminars and workshop events awarding formal CEUs
- Degree courses offered by accredited institutions of higher education
- Self-directed study, such as professional reading, correspondence courses, study, or discussion groups (no more than 8 hours can be derived from these sources)
- Attendance in cohorts for senior leader development

Compliance and Record Keeping. The effectiveness of this policy can only be assessed if compliance and record-keeping occur. Although compliance is the sole responsibility of the clergy member, record keeping must be employed at the individual, local church, and national levels. Therefore, the responsibilities of each are outlined below:

- The Board of Directors of the ICC and its designated associates will interpret and implement this policy and assess the compliance of individual clergy

members by accessing data from the Hub at the time of annual license renewal (Foursquare, 2020; International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 2023).

- All clergy members must provide evidence of CEUs in the Hub during their annual licensing renewal process. Clergy members should also keep copies of their CEUs for their own records.
- It is also recommended that records be kept on file at the local church of appointment and in the clergy member's personal records.

ICC Expectations for Local Churches or Districts of the ICC. The local church, district teams, and the denomination benefit by supporting the training of its women clergy members seeking advancement to senior or denominational roles; therefore, the local church council or district council should engage in the following activities that provide support to their pastors for continuing education:

- Allot funds for the leadership training separate from the housing allowance.
- Allot time for the leader to engage in personal training during regular work hours.
- Provide scholarships to those pursuing or newly engaged in more senior roles.
- Provide advanced communication of continuing education opportunities provided by the district or its local congregations.

Responsibilities of the ICC National Church Office in Regards to Continuing Education Policy. The ICC National Church Office (NCO) develops, implements, and

evaluates initiatives within the ICC. The success of any initiative requires organizational support; therefore, the NCO is responsible for:

- Create a task force of leaders and educators for the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy and programs based on research evidence and best practices.
- Assign a program director or educational or program administrator for the oversight of policy compliance.
- Create and conduct appropriate evaluations to measure the success of both policy and programs.
- Assign qualified instructional leaders and mentors who exhibit competence in the subject matter through training, experience, and/or demonstrated knowledge or skill for ICC continuing education offerings.
- Communicate vision, rationale, and opportunities for acquiring CEUs.

Concluding Thoughts

The leadership of the ICC has acknowledged that the denomination must take "specific action steps, new behaviors, new processes, and the means to ensure ongoing accountability" (see Schell, 2007, p. 72). It is time for the ICC to reassess its mission of "better together on mission" and enact a policy change that provides targeted support for women in leadership development, aiming to achieve the ICC's goal of increasing the number of women in senior leadership roles (see Remington, 2021).

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