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**PASTOR SELF-PERCEIVED PREPAREDNESS AND TRAINING TO MODEL AND
LEAD SENSITIVITY IN THEIR CONGREGATIONS AND SPIRITUALLY LEAD
LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PASTORS OF THE POTOMAC
MINISTRY NETWORK OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD**

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Leadership Studies
by

Tina L. Boswell-Stickley

Approved by
Dr. Thomas Hisiro, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Timothy Melvin
Dr. Robert Rubenstein

Marshall University
December 2023

Approval of Dissertation

We, the faculty supervising the work of **Tina L. Boswell-Stickley**, affirm that the dissertation,

Pastor Self-Perceived Preparedness and Training to Model and Lead Sensitivity in their

Congregations and Spiritually Lead LGBTQ Individuals: A Qualitative Study of Pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the EdD Program in Leadership Studies and the College of Education and Professional Development. The work also conforms to the requirements and formatting guidelines of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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Dedication

Faith, Family, & Friends

To God - who first loved me, called me for His purpose, and through whom all things are possible. You have never left nor forsaken me in big decisions like embarking on this endeavor or in little decisions like trying to think *just the right word*. You started this journey in me years ago, and I cannot put into words how wonderful the mentors and pastors (to whom I am also eternally grateful) have been that you put in my life to lead and teach me. To you, I owe everything!

To my family – My kiddos - Mary Ann (Sunshine), Ann “Annie” Marie (Angel Eyes), Ava Monet, Amos “Amosy” Malachi, Maxim “Maxy” Alexey, and Abraham “Abu” Moses, you all are my world. You give my life meaning. My love for each of you goes deeper than you will ever know. My grand – Elijah “Eli” Ryder – you have my heart, and I am so very proud of you! You are so much fun, and watching you grow has been a blessing. Joey, Orca, and Lumiere, who have been by my side from beginning to end. My mom and dad, “Memaw” and “Pop” to everyone who knows them – remember when I was a kid and drove you crazy being insatiable and determined...well, now I’m just bigger and directed it into education. Lol Thank you for cheering me on, and I love you both more than you know.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
Abstract	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose Statement.....	3
Research Question.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
Projected Methods.....	5
Population and Sample	7
Limitations	7
Significance.....	9
Summary	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
LGBTQ Perspective.....	12
Church Perspective	14
Pastoral Perspective	19
Perspective Intersection	25
Summary	27
Chapter 3: Research Methods	29
Research Method.....	29
Research Questions	30

Research Design.....	31
Sample.....	31
Instrumentation	32
Procedures.....	33
Permissions	35
Summary	35
Chapter 4: Results.....	36
Research and Interview Questions.....	36
Population Sample Demographics	38
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question One.....	41
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Two	42
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Three	43
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Four.....	46
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Five	57
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Six	70
Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Seven.....	76
Summary	78
Chapter 5: Discussion	79
Problem Statement	79
Research Questions	79
Discussion of Research Question One	80
Discussion of Research Question Two	82
Discussion of Research Question Three	84

Discussion of Research Question Four	86
Discussion of Research Question Five	94
Discussion of Research Question Six	100
Discussion of Additional Information	104
Limitations	104
Implications for Action	107
Recommendations for Future Research	109
Summary	111
References	112
Appendix A: Office of Research Integrity Approval Letter	120
Appendix B: Amended Office of Research Integrity Approval Letter.....	121
Appendix C: Recruitment Letter.....	121
Appendix D: Communication Log.....	123
Appendix E: Confirmation Email	124
Appendix F: Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study	125
Appendix G: Demographic Questionnaire.....	129
Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interview Questions	130
Appendix I: Final Comment Email	131

List of Tables

Table 1	Participants' Years of Experience	39
Table 2	Average Church Attendance	40
Table 3	Lengths of Interviews	40
Table 4	Formal Training	41
Table 5	Informal Training	42
Table 6	No Training	42
Table 7	Perceived Preparedness	43
Table 8	Positive Responses	45
Table 9	Negative, Neutral, and No Change Responses	46
Table 10	Cultural Changes	48
Table 11	Ministry Opportunities Within the Church	50
Table 12	Ministry Changes Outside of the Church	51
Table 13	Spiritual Confliction	53
Table 14	Secondary Issues	55
Table 15	Relationships	57
Table 16	Relationship – General Approaches	58
Table 17	Relationship – <i>Fruit of the Spirit</i> and Similar Approaches	59
Table 18	Friendship and Discipleship	61
Table 19	Relationship – Effective Approaches Expressed with Negative Terminology	62
Table 20	Scripture	64
Table 21	Scripture – Effective Approaches Expressed with Negative Terminology	65
Table 22	Church Governance – General	68

Table 23	Church Governance – Effective Approaches Expressed with Negative Terminology	69
Table 24	Procedural Responses	71
Table 25	Interpersonal Relationship Responses	73
Table 26	Anticipated Issue Responses	74
Table 27	What the Potomac Ministry Network Can Do Expressed with Negative Terminology	76
Table 28	Additional Comments	78

List of Figures

Figure 1	Geographical Representation.....	38
Figure 2	Age.....	39

Abstract

Pastors are responsible for creating welcoming atmospheres within their church buildings and congregations. Societal changes have raised questions about pastors' preparedness to do so, particularly regarding the LGBTQ community. This qualitative study interviewed lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God regarding their self-perceived preparedness to model sensitivity and minister to the LGBTQ community. It explored pastor training, experiences, perceptions, and needs to serve this population better. Interviews were transcribed, indexed, coded, and analyzed to identify themes and better understand the dynamics regarding this issue. Results are reported, including limitations, discussions, recommendations, and identified needed areas for future study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will provide the context of the study, including a historical reference to how the church's role as a societal entity has changed in America. In doing so, it will identify early perceptions of the church, the pastor's responsibilities, and how the church is perceived by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-questioning (LGBTQ) community. Pastors' roles in spiritually leading congregations regarding sensitivity and their self-perceived preparedness and training will be explored.

This study is not a theological deliberation of whether people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community are sinners. As indicated in the forthcoming literature review, the spirituality of LGBTQ individuals is a controversial subject that has been debated and caused division for decades. This study attempts to put aside the banter, lay down the hate and verbal daggers, and view individuals first as people. A conscious attempt was made to use people-first language to present a foundational element of respect throughout this project. Although people-first language was not always possible, a genuine effort was attempted.

Mainstream Christian churches have traditionally been places of refuge and tranquility where individuals and families could receive spiritual teaching and guidance. Dating to the Greek and Roman empires, churches provided sanctuary for people seeking protection from persecution, often even when they had broken a governmental law. At that time, even guilty criminals identified churches as places of safety and provision. These were a few of the many services churches provided to people in communities.

Throughout history, priests and pastors were trained leaders who led outreach programs to meet community needs, taught Biblical principles and spiritually guided families and individuals.

Although spiritual teaching, guidance, and outreach continue to be the primary function of church leadership, some societal changes have influenced the scope of these responsibilities.

In 2010, the United States Census Bureau reported 646,464 same-sex couple households in America (Census Bureau, 2011). The number of same-sex couple households increased to 980,000 in 2020 (Census Bureau, 2021). The report attributed these changes in household statistics to changes in family units and increased openness about individual sexual identity. The Household Pulse Survey, conducted by the United States Census Bureau, found that the number of adults who now identify as part of the LGBTQ community has doubled to 8% (Powell, 2021).

Positive religious experiences have been associated with psychological health and decreased negative attitudes toward self among LGB adults (Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). In contrast, negative religious experiences are associated with decreased self-esteem (Dahl & Galliher, 2010). Two-thirds of the LGBTQ community report conflict between their sexual identity and their spiritual views (Dahl & Galliher, 2009).

Not all that seek church guidance have positive experiences. The church's association with potentially opposing same-sex marriage, exclusion of LGBTQ as clergy, discrimination, and general accusation of living in overt sin has inhibited the development of an atmosphere of acceptance (Stanford, 2013). One study reported that almost 80% of LGB individuals were not identified to their congregations or leadership as such, and adults felt that Catholic and Evangelical churches were unfriendly to sexual minorities (Barringer, 2020).

Pastors are church leaders. Their responsibilities include leading worship practices, visitations, counseling, teaching, preaching, financial management, and supervising employees (Monahan, 1999). These expectations are monumental. Matching appropriate leadership skills with congregation size and church function is necessary for effective ministry (Nauss, 1995).

Interviews with 19 individuals who self-identify as sexual minorities indicate that churches are now feared to be places that inflict guilt and judgment (Dahl & Galliher, 2012). Interviews conducted with 11 members of the LGBTQ population, all of whom did not see their sexuality and spirituality as separate self-constructs, conferred with Dahl and Galliher's findings and added that churches are hypocritical (Marquardt, 2014). Considering the LGBTQ population multiplied by half in a decade, one must question whether pastors feel prepared to minister to their needs.

Church leaders are burdened with creating welcoming atmospheres within their church buildings and congregations. A study conducted through Liberty University indicates that pastors often accept senior pastor positions without specific preparation for leading pastoral staff (Robinson, 2010). This lack of general pastoral leadership training and the perceptions of the LGBTQ community has brought pastors' self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity and spiritually lead the LGBTQ individuals into question.

Problem Statement

Openness regarding gender and sexual identity is more accepted in American society now than at any other point in history. Despite churches historically being places where vulnerable populations could seek refuge and protection, available data suggest this is not true for those who self-identify as sexual minorities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how lead pastors in the PMN perceive their preparedness and training to model acceptance to the congregations and minister to the LGBTQ individuals who attend their services.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative study aims to contribute to the current body of research and general understanding and to identify potential areas of need regarding pastor preparedness and training

for serving the LGBTQ community. Specifically, this study interviews and reports on the self-preparedness and training of lead pastors within the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God (AG) to model and lead sensitivity of the LGBTQ population as well as their training to lead LGBTQ members and attendees spiritually.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study.

Q1: What preparation have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God received to help with understanding and accepting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q2: How prepared do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God feel they are to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q3: How do attitudes change toward people in church once they are identified as LGBTQ?

Q4: What situations are credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God experiencing regarding the acceptance of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q5: What approaches have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God found that work to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q6: What do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God believe the organization could do to help prepare them to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Definition of Terms

acceptance: choosing but not agreement

AG: Assemblies of God church denomination

LGBTQ: any person identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, non-binary, or gender non-conforming. Portions of this acronym are used as it was appropriate in reporting previous research accurately.

people-first Language (person-first language): a linguistic standard that places importance on the person ahead of a diagnosis or label

PMN: Potomac Ministry Network, which is comprised of 350 churches and more than 1,100 ministers in Maryland, the District of Columbia, most of Virginia, northern West Virginia, and a few churches in Pennsylvania.

preparedness: a sense of readiness

self-perceived: how one views self

“straight”: heterosexual

training: refers to any formal, personal, or individual training unless expressly stated otherwise

Projected Methods

This investigation was a generic qualitative inquiry interviewing 12 lead pastors credentialed through the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God (AG). The semi-structured interviews explored pastors’ self-perceptions of preparedness and training to model and lead in sensitivity of the LGBTQ population. Preparedness and training to spiritually lead LGBTQ members and attendees were also studied.

The researcher developed a letter introducing the project. It described the study and requested voluntary participation from qualified pastors. Qualifications for participation included

being credentialed by the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) and currently working as a lead pastor of an Assembly of God church within the PMN. Potential participants were provided with the researcher's contact information and were informed that follow-up phone calls requesting participation could occur. A list of lead pastors and their email addresses was acquired from the Executive Director of Church Ministries of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) for purposeful selection from the PMN's listserv. Random.com was used to select 25 numbers that were correlated with the lead pastors' email list to identify recipients of the recruitment letter. Within one week after the letter was sent, communication was made to respondents to schedule times for the interviews. This process continued until 12 qualified volunteers committed to participate in the study.

As each volunteer committed to the study and the person was deemed to meet the qualifications, a time was scheduled to meet for an in-person, face-to-face interview. Each participant was presented with an informed consent form and a demographic questionnaire at the meeting, which were completed and collected before starting each interview. The informed consent contained the standard elements, including the fact that participation was voluntary, the actions taken to ensure confidentiality reasonably, and that participation could be discontinued at any time.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant by the same interviewer. Interviews were audio recorded, coded, transcribed, indexed, and disposed of by procedures outlined in the informed consent form. A follow-up email was sent one week after each interview, offering an opportunity for final comments. Upon completion of the study, and as stated in the informed consent, participants were entered into a randomly selected drawing for a \$100 "Thank You" Visa gift card.

Population and Sample

This sample consisted of credentialed lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God, including Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania districts. Participants were determined by the number of qualified volunteers and their availability. Specifics regarding age, gender, ethnicity, geographical descriptions (e.g., state, rural, urban, and suburb), years in credentialed ministry, years in current position, marital status, household income, and average church size of attendance were made available upon completion of the study.

Limitations

Some limitations are intrinsic to generic qualitative inquiry and were unavoidable. Social science agendas, interpersonal dynamics, risks, and desirability of responses can influence the interviewer and interviewee (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The authors also identify five “contingent problems” that are possible transcribing issues: the interviewer not being represented accurately or taken out of context, the lack of including utterances that represent the interaction, how the omission or lack of specificity of analytic observations represents the interview, the clarity of describing the initial greeting and the set-up of the interview, and the culmination of these issues failing to consider the interview as an interaction (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Although actions were taken to curtail these limitations, they are unlikely to be eliminated.

As with any self-report measure, results are limited to individuals’ subjective experiences and perceptions. Anonymity is not possible with interviews, so the participant may, knowingly or unknowingly, answer based on what is perceived to be socially acceptable or favorable. Participants were volunteers whose schedules allowed them to meet and participate in the study.

Interviewer bias is a limitation of generic qualitative inquiry. The researcher could unintentionally display facial expressions or body language that could influence a participant's response. Interpretation error is a general risk in that the researcher could misunderstand or misinterpret information, even when including clarifying measures.

To control for the vast theological differences and denominational practices and to increase practical application, this study focused on pastors of the Assemblies of God (AG). All participants in this study were credentialed through the PMN, which serves Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and West Virginia. Some of the most significant limitations of this study are the leadership positions, denominational restrictions, and geographical representations. The results may not generalize to other church leadership positions, religions, or geographic areas.

There may be factors specific to people who choose the specific AG theology. The AG church was founded in 1914 and within two years, identified 16 foundational truths (General Council, 2023). This original document did not specifically address denominational beliefs regarding the LGBTQ community. The AG church adopted a formal statement in 2014, one hundred years after being founded, declaring four formal positions on homosexuality. They defined marriage as a union between one woman and one man, identified sexual acts outside of marriage as sinful, deemed sexual identity as biologically determined and discouraged any attempt to alter biological gender, and stated that sexual orientation should be limited to opposite genders and same-sex attractions should be resisted (General Council, 2014). By controlling doctrinal fluctuations to increase practical application, the pastors participating in this study would likely concur with the AG doctrinal stance regarding homosexuality, limiting its generalizability.

As with theology, there may be generalizability issues regarding geography. All participants in this study are members of the PMN, which serves Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, and West Virginia. There may be factors specific to people who choose to live in this geographical location, which can also be true for those who live in the Midwestern United States. The results may not generalize to other church leadership positions, religions, or geographical areas.

Gender and age were other limitations to the generalizability of this study. The Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) has male and female credentialed lead pastors, but all twelve participants who responded to the invitation to participate were male. Ten of the twelve participants were between 50 and 69, with one outlier on each of the two ends. The average number of years in credentialed ministry was 26.25, indicating that the timing of their training would have been prior to the cultural shifts that have brought the subject of people who identify as LGBTQ in the church.

Significance

Pastors are expected to be counselors, motivational speakers, corporation CEOs, leaders of leaders, and building contractors (Roberts, 2022). It is unusual to find someone good at those qualities and those who are report being exhausted (Roberts, 2022). An ever-changing society creates further challenges for an already demanding profession. One societal change is the growing openness of the LGBTQ community. This study seeks to add to the current body of literature on this topic by exploring the experiences and training of pastors in the PNC of the AG church to identify themes and areas of a possible need to model sensitivity and minister to the LGBTQ community. There is research addressing the negative church experiences of the LGBTQ community, and there is research identifying the expectations of pastors and their job-

related stress. This is one of the first studies addressing pastors' specific experiences and needs regarding ministering to the LGBTQ community.

Study findings could help pastors identify areas of preparedness and needed preparedness to help model and lead their congregations in sensitivity and help spiritually lead members of the LGBTQ community. Results may provide information to help develop training programs for pastors to help increase their perceived preparedness. Research indicates that members of the LGBTQ community feel churches are judgmental and hypocritical. Findings suggest that the preparedness of pastors to lead their congregations in these issues could help improve the comfort levels of members of the LGBTQ community and help meet their spiritual needs.

Summary

This chapter introduced the problem that, despite churches historically being viewed as places where even known criminals could seek refuge and protection, the LGBTQ population has reported adverse experiences in mainstream Christian churches that leave them feeling unwelcome. Pastors bear the burden of creating welcoming atmospheres among their congregations, but their preparedness and training to model sensitivity and minister to the LGBTQ community have been questioned.

Chapter Two is a literature review that reports the history of the perception of the church, the experiences of members of the LGBTQ population, and the preparedness and training of pastors to model sensitivity and minister to the LGBTQ community. Chapter Three discloses the research methods and procedures used to explore this issue. Chapter Four reports the data analysis obtained by this qualitative study, interprets findings, and suggests areas of further research. Chapter Five discusses the results as they apply to each research question, including the

limitations of the research design, and explores the congruency of the results with current related research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter two is a literature review that provides a historical basis that supports a context for this study that seeks to understand pastors' perceived preparedness to work with the LGBTQ community. The literature review was organized into sections from the perspectives of the LGBTQ community, church, pastor and how those perspectives intersect. The chapter closes with a summary.

LGBTQ Perspective

A consistent theme in the literature is that members of the LGBTQ community feel they must choose between having a sexual or spiritual identity. Michael Burk (1998) conducted an ethnographic study in which he immersed himself in the lives of three members of the LGBTQ community. In retrospect, Grace was a lesbian whose life with her partner centered around the church. The LGBTQ community criticized her for associating with the Christian community due to sexism and patriarchal allegations. She felt this criticism was hypocritical since they did not like her revealing unflattering aspects of the LGBTQ community. She conveyed that both communities have told her one *cannot have it both ways* and that she needs to choose. Both communities have affirming qualities, *abhorrent* aspects, and need reformation (Burk, 1998).

Angel Collie conducted a study that began with a written monologue of her church's reaction to her being a lesbian Christian teenager (Collie, 2022). Socially, she describes being shunned by her friends' parents, not allowing them to socialize with her. Her parents, whom she felt judged her, supported her youth pastor and a police officer taking her in handcuffs for psychological evaluation. Spiritually, she was discouraged from praying at the altar and was referred to as *an abomination* who was going to hell. Despite her experiences with the church and other Christians during this time, she reports maintaining her Christian faith (Collie, 2022).

Grace's and Angel's experiences were congruent with an action research project that included semi-structured group discussions and individual interviews with 11 participants between the ages of 17 and 27 who attend Youth Lounge, a non-profit organization in Chicago that provides a safe space for LGBTQ youth (Marquardt, 2014). All participants in this study indicated that spirituality and sexuality were integral parts of their personhood. Yet, some decided to leave the church to maintain both identities (Marquardt, 2014). Three participants admitted they were conflicted about wanting to be "straight" (Marquardt, 2014). Despite wanting to be heterosexual and in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, both reported being more attracted to people of the same gender (Marquardt, 2014).

The concept of members of the LGBTQ community wishing they were straight is not uncommon and is a second theme prominent in the literature. Monique Walker reports that members of the LGBTQ community are increasingly seeking reorientation therapy from couple and family therapists (Walker, 2013). A comparison study of men and women from the Church of Latter-Day Saints who identify as either homosexual or bisexual indicated that both men and women put extensive effort into changing their sexual orientation, with only 4% reporting any success (Bradshaw, Dehlin, & Galliher, 2022). The findings of Walker and Bradshaw, Dehlin, and Galliher are consistent with a report from Brian Moll, a heterosexual pastor, who describes an interaction during which a church visitor referred to himself as a gay man who has unsuccessfully *prayed the gay away* for 30 years (Moll, 2021).

Christians who identify as LGBTQ desire church involvement, not simply attendance. The desire for participation reflects a third theme emerging from the literature. The desire of LGBTQ Christians to be involved in church was the focus of a study including 16 participants between the ages of 14 and 24 (Dahl & Galliher, 2010). Four individuals identified as part of the LGBTQ

community expressed a desire to participate and explore potential “affirming faith communities” (Dahl & Galliher, 2010).

A study by Mark Yarhouse and Trista Carr found that locating a church where one can worship is important for people who are homosexual or have same-sex attraction (Yarhouse & Carr, 2011). The researchers surveyed 14 churches and determined that each could be assigned to one of three categories. The first was “ministry to brokenness,” which generally approaches homosexuality as needing to pursue healing. The second category was “welcoming but not affirming,” which operated from believing churches should be safe places for everyone while adhering to traditional scriptural understanding. The third was *gay-affirmative*, which believes there is scriptural support for same-sex relationships and integrates those beliefs into their churches. All three categories believed that the church should be a safe place of healing, love, acceptance, and compassion (Yarhouse & Carr, 2011).

Church Perspective

LGBTQ Christians actively involved in the church is an area of great controversy. A survey audit conducted by Breanne Fahs and Eric Swank through the University of Arizona identified seven themes regarding lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (LGBs) being involved in church: 1) explicitly homophobic references to biblical views on sexuality and marriage, 2) welcomed but compared to other antisocial or “deviant” practices/ behaviors, 3) welcomed but lumped in with “all sinners,” 4) welcomed but celibacy and heterosexuality promoted, 5) avoidant or deferred responses, 6) gay and lesbian church members; and 7) welcomed openly and without reservations. Findings revealed negative attitudes regarding the general reception of homosexuals in mainstream Christianity (Fahs & Swank, 2020).

Joshua Stone purports that a foundational issue contributing to the divide between LGBTQ Christians and those who are negative about their inclusion in church is the lack of a universal theological definition of gender that aligns with Biblical principles (Stone, 2022). He *unbundles* terms such as transgenderism and intersex while addressing these issues through moral, ontological, phenomenological, medical, and theological perspectives to establish and implement a definition. Gender is an *ontologically emergent property that arises from sexed bodies, made in the image of God, living in a community* (Stone, 2022).

Like Stone's position, Preston Sprinkle identifies inconsistency and incoherence among the gender non-conforming community and within the church as an issue, and he challenges people to *think more deeply and love more widely* (Sprinkle, 2021). Sprinkle's writings are based on ethnographic-type relationships that he builds with people. The approach that evangelical Christians need to move beyond theory and ideas and focus on individuals is the foundation of his works (Sprinkle, 2021).

Henderson (2022) identifies a vital issue as a society going beyond defining sexuality and defining gender as something beyond one's God-given biological sex (Henderson, 2022). He emphasizes that God has designed and defined gender and sexuality but presents an optimistic perspective that Christians can discuss, counsel, and minister to one another regarding issues surrounding these topics (Henderson, 2022).

Whether homosexuality is a sin is one area of differing opinions within the church. Matthew Bussell identified the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA) and the Southern Baptist Convention as believing heterosexism and complementarianism, the belief that God created man and woman with qualities that complement each other, are the only acceptable perspectives for Christians (Bussell, 2022).

Moore (2022) identified homosexuality as a sin but also explored theologies regarding degrees of sin. He cited Romans 1:26-31 as his Biblical foundation regarding homosexuality being one of the two greatest sins, with “the shedding of innocent blood” being the other. He identified homosexuality, abortion, and assisted suicide as “especially grave.” He did qualify that these two sins are aside from the unforgivable sin of blasphemy.

Modern psychology stresses the effects of internalizing behavior and the importance of viewing behavior separately from the individual (Fan, 2011). Father Vincent Serpa traced this concept to St. Augustine’s Letter 211 (c.424) in a question-and-answer forum. He used the phrase “*Cum dilectione hominum et odio vitiorum,*” which generally translates to “With love for mankind and hatred of sins” (Serpa, 2022). Gandhi (2008) modernized the concept to the better-known translation of “hate the sin and not the sinner,” which has evolved to “love the sinner but hate the sin.” Mainstream Christian churches’ attempts to distinguish between loving the person and hating the behavior have been largely unsuccessful (Bassett, Baldwin, Tammara, Mackmer, Mundig, Wareing, & Tschorke, 2002).

Another obstacle within the church between Christians and the LGBTQ community is differing views on same-sex marriage. A study was conducted by Baker Rogers of Christians from Mississippi, in which six individuals participated in semi-structured interviews regarding how their beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuals changed over time regarding LGBTQ and equality, including the civil rights issue of same-sex marriage (Rogers, 2021). He had invited participants who had participated in a study on the same topic six years prior. Six people agreed to participate and six declined, citing that their views had not changed. Baker explored the specific areas of same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and the influence of social contact with friends and family members who were homosexual. He established four categories along a

continuum: a case for coming out, allies and friends, love the sinner, hate the sin, and homosexuality as an abomination.

Rogers (2021) found that all six participants had progressed toward acceptance in their views of the LGBTQ population. Interestingly, some participants did not realize they were becoming more accepting of homosexual individuals. The findings contradict the six individuals who declined participation, stating their views had not changed. The results indicated that their views may have progressed without them realizing it. Baker concluded that there is hope for progression among Christians for the rights of homosexuals to marry and adopt (Rogers, 2021).

Rogers (2021) was not the only study to address civil rights regarding homosexuals. Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, & Martin (2022) conducted a study to determine if zero-sum beliefs, the belief that granting rights to one group of people restricts or suppresses the rights of another group of people, exist between Christians and homosexuals (Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, & Martin, 2022). This study found that Christians who believed their influence was diminishing and being threatened reported greater conflict with the LGBTQ community. Cisgender and heterosexual individuals were more likely than other groups to report beliefs of Christians and the LGBTQ community being in a zero-sum relationship as an additional finding (Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, & Martin, 2022).

Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, & Martin (2022) addressed another controversy between the church and the LGBTQ community, the ordination of LGBTQ members as clergy. The general conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) conducted a special session to review the rules and standards that govern the practices of the UMC, including the role of sexual minorities in the church and their ordination as clergy. The Traditional Plan, which prohibits same-sex marriage and ordination of people who identify as a sexual minority in the United

Methodist Church, was accepted by a vote of 53% to 47%. The researchers emphasized the small margin of the divide within the denomination (Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, & Martin, 2022).

Similarly, the United Church of Christ is a denomination that has traditionally accepted the LGBTQ community in terms of same-sex marriage and ordination, yet it is not without division. Sarah Welch-Pomerantz writes that despite the United Church of Christ's theological stance of being "open and affirming," the autonomous nature of the individual churches and the absence of covenants to create consistency among practices can lead people into situations that do not meet expectations of acceptance and could result in harm (Welch-Pomerantz, 2022).

The LGBTQ Perspective of this literature review began by referring to Grace's story from an ethnographical study by Michael Burk, during which he embedded himself in the lives of three individuals (Burk, 1998). The other two participants in Burk's study were Will and Hope, two pastors who willingly relinquished their credentials. Hope was a United Methodist pastor who endured a high-profile departure, although she initiated contact with the bishop and the resignation process. Newspaper headlines read "Gay Pastor Resigns," she has been the subject of several news articles. Despite the conflict, Hope maintains that relationships with people and the church are essential (Burk, 1998).

Will was a pastor who considered himself gay and left the ministry. Despite being angry that fundamentalist teachings have prohibited some of his children from having relationships with him, he stated that he had not given up on the church. Will stated that he learned that the congregation's characteristics and the pastor's personality override denominational policy (Burk, 1998).

Pastoral Perspective

Michael Smith produced a study that supported the pastor relationship as the key to the LGBTQ community feeling accepted in church (Smith, 2000). The study focused on why members committed to the church amidst conflict. The hypothesis was, “When a congregation faces serious moral conflict, trusted pastoral leadership is key to whether members leave or stay and to the congregation’s ability to survive the conflict and move toward revitalization (Rogers, 2021).”

Smith’s study resulted when the session of a Presbyterian Church unanimously voted a faithful and well-liked lesbian into the position of elder, violating denominational policy. The attempt of the Session to shift the church “from policy to person” resulted in the church losing 43 members, 12 pledges worth \$15,817, and a decrease in financial mission support and giving. The hypothesis was supported, and trust was inferred from reports given by interviewees. The pastor’s effective counseling, views becoming more acceptable, and response to the conflict by facilitating meetings and showing “deep concern” were reported as reasons for not leaving. It was determined that leadership and trust in the pastor are key for a church to survive conflict and move toward revitalization (Smith, 2000).

A pastor’s job responsibilities extend far beyond managing conflict. Monahan (1999) examined the tasks of pastors and investigated whether clergy shared jurisdiction over such tasks or shared responsibility with lay people. Specific areas examined were leading worship, conducting visitations, counseling, teaching, preaching, managing the church’s finances, and supervising employees. The results indicated that boundaries between pastors and lay people are blurred, and clergy had more jurisdiction in denominational churches. Monahan’s findings suggest that demands on pastors may be extensive and confusing (Monahan, 1999).

Nauss (1995) conducted a study and focused on examining the leadership styles of pastors. He noted that two primary styles, classical and humanistic, do not apply to the ministerial leadership sample. He concluded that a single leadership style for successful ministerial leadership could not be identified, but a pastor needs to be “equally discerning and flexible” when determining a skill set to use in a particular situation. No clear guidance was given to pastors in this study regarding responding to specific church situations, other than identifying skills needing to be matched to circumstances and situational leadership.

Pastor training programs have recognized the diversity of congregations and have grown regarding ministering to minority groups. One area of growth is multicultural training. In response to church attendance decline in Assembly of God churches in the Alabama Ministry Network (AMN), Draughon (2022) developed and conducted a seminar focused on engaging church and culture to fulfill the Great Commission described in the New Testament. Specific ministry areas of focus in the seminar were salvations, water baptisms, and baptisms. Results indicated a greater relationship among the pastors in the Alabama Ministry Network, an urgent need for biblical health, participants needing to prioritize scripture in their lives and ministries, a desire for the 120 churches in the AMN to focus on cultural engagement through the lens of the New Testament Great Commission, and the development of practical tools for encouraging church growth (Draughon, 2022).

McCormack (2022) conducted a longitudinal project regarding learning what makes multicultural churches rare and how to grow a predominantly white congregation into a multicultural church. His study found that church diversity and acceptance grow when leaders are willing to be uncomfortable, address challenging situations, preach the gospel while teaching unity, prioritize relationships, identify pastors who are willing to lead through transitions and

support mono-ethnic churches. The researcher emphasized the importance of leaders being prepared to invest self, time, and longevity to develop a culturally diverse congregation (McCormack, 2022).

Perry (2022) conducted a study on the importance of diversity in the LGBTQ community. The researcher found a correlation between the more racially diverse a congregation, the more accepting they are of interracial dating, marriage, adoption, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and same-sex adoption (Perry, 2022). Specifically, the researcher found that congregations, where 25% to 75% of attendees are of a racial minority, are more likely to support homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and same-sex adoption (Perry, 2022).

Pastor training has grown to minister to individuals' mental and emotional health. Openshaw and Harr (2009) suggest it is not unusual for clergy to be the first to discover someone's mental health issues. They are often primary support, and the care between clergy and mental health professionals can overlap. They conducted a study with 24 clergies, some from referrals and some randomly selected from a phone book. Clergy disclosed that members of their congregations often request help regarding mental health issues, and respond to these requests by helping within the limits of their knowledge and time.

The study found members of congregations seeking guidance regarding gay and lesbian issues from clergy ranked 14th in a list of 20 important issues (Openshaw & Harr, 2009). Findings indicated clergy often refer to mental health professionals based on whom they know and trust. They refer to mental health professionals in rural communities when faith-based assistance is not geographically close. When serving rural communities, they appreciate collaborating with mental health professionals regarding serious mental health issues. Additionally, the study indicated that clergy does not understand the training and licenses of

mental health professionals, despite being able to identify different titles. Overall, the clergy desires collaboration with mental health professionals.

Letizia (2022) conducted a descriptive study of 13 prominent protestant Master of Divinity programs. He distributed a questionnaire to over 100 ministers in Southern Florida. Of 31 questionnaires submitted, 20 responded they did not feel their academic program had prepared them for the concerns parishioners presented, and 15 stated they sought additional education to help them respond to such issues (Letizia, 2022).

Mohling (2021) conducted a study indicating a lack of psychological training and preparedness for pastors and purposed to better prepare pastors from the Church of the Nazarene in their responses to parishioners. He identified pastors as trained theologians whose responses to parishioner needs are often limited to prayer. This superficial response generally leaves the pastor underprepared and the parishioner under-served, frustrating all involved. Mohling gathered background information, conducted open-ended interviews, documented responses, and observations, and developed an outline for his study. Four pastors participated in interviews and received Solution Focused Theory (SFT) training. Results indicated that all pastors said they would still refer to mental health professionals, but the principles learned in the SFT training were resources that improved their ability to counsel parishioners (Mohling, 2021).

Freeman (2022) identified a need for a holistic approach to ministry. The researcher, a pastor and hospital chaplain, identified that healing from the medical and spiritual perspectives was often practiced exclusively by each other. He proposed medical and spiritual healing as an integral process and identified this approach as Biblical. He designed a study that investigated how a mentoring coaching-based teaching program can effectively minister holistic care that

blends natural and supernatural healing. The researcher concluded that both entities welcomed a holistic approach and that there is hope for further integration in the future (Freeman, 2022).

Pastors often develop their resources. Robinson (2010) performed a literature review, conducted interviews with senior pastors, and developed a manual to help senior pastors lead their staff. Despite the growing population of LGBTQ people in congregations, the manual offered no information or guidance to help pastors or pastoral staff respond to their needs.

The lack of direction for pastors is not surprising when considering a study by Olson and Cadge (2002). They interviewed 62 mainline protestant clergies from across the United States, which yielded three primary points of view. The first point of reference was the issue of homosexuality not being essential, and there would be no benefit to studying it. Some clergies argued that addressing homosexuality in the church would take attention from other important issues and argued that homosexuality in the church is not an important issue at all. The second point of view recognized the subject's importance and acknowledged better understanding would lead to greater awareness of the issue. The third frame of reference was the difficulty pastors feel discussing the issue, even among one another. A study summary indicated that pastors focused on churches and denominations rather than individual congregations and society (Olson & Cadge, 2002).

Cadge and Wildeman (2008) interviewed 30 pastors from the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran denominations who had recently addressed homosexuality as a topic in their churches. A Presbyterian minister reported that he tries to present materials to his church as a ministry. A Methodist minister noted that he challenged congregants to cause them to *wrestle* and *journey* to their own determinations. At the request of national leaders, a Lutheran minister reported having specific Bible studies regarding the topic. Consistent among all denominations was the presence

of fear; fear of the unknown, fear of sexuality, fear of lesbian and gay people, and fear of misinterpreting scripture (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008).

Gary Stidham identifies theological issues of a general decline in confidence in the Biblical Doctrine of Humanity and the ability of Christians to communicate compassionately and knowledgeably about such issues (Stidham, 2022). He defines the theological components of being human as personhood, identity, purpose, destiny, the nature of the soul, the image of God, embodiment, dignity, race and ethnicity, gender, marriage, and sexuality. He identified Christians' hesitation to engage in spiritual conversations due to possible topics arising and not knowing how to respond, concerns they would not respond compassionately, not knowing how to disagree gently, and concerns regarding a lack of Biblical knowledge (Stidham, 2022).

Stidham's study included participants from the University of Texas Arlington Baptist Student Ministry. He delivered a sermon series on the image of God, conducted a six-week apologetics course that included the topics of sexuality and marriage, homosexuality, transgenderism, human dignity, race, and justice. Stidham measured the improvement of understanding of these subject areas. The results indicated improvement in participants feeling better equipped to engage in conversations regarding all topics studied, with the greatest improvement being transgenderism. Despite the improvement, students stated they would benefit from further guidance about a conversation involving sexuality (Stidham, 2022).

Pippen identified a need for evangelical pastors to develop a theology around issues to support people who are LGBTQ in churches. She determined that the church struggles to establish a relationship with the LGBTQ population, partially due to contrasting values within the LGBTQ community and partly because of conflicting core theological values. Additional theological challenges between the church and members of the LGBTQ community are the

contrast in values regarding moral, social, cultural, and traditional family values (Pippen, 2021). This project developed a program to help pastors develop a theology around these differences to help pastors minister to this population (Pippen, 2021).

Bucher (2016) found that youth pastors were also short on resources to help minister to teenagers regarding their sexual identity. She conducted a mixed methods study, reviewing archival data and interviewing 62 protestant youth pastors. Findings indicated youth often confide their sexual identity to youth pastors, regardless of the comfort level of the youth pastor with the topic. The researcher stated being most surprised by not having any youth pastors report negative experiences with sexual minorities, and they said that they enjoyed that population. They indicated a desire to know proper language to communicate respectfully with their youth who are sexual minorities. Bucher was concerned about the effects on the child in response to youth pastors not differentiating between attraction and behavior and encouraging the youth to be cautious. The general opinion among youth pastors was homosexuality is sinful and greeting sin with the truth should be done with an emphasis on gentleness and love (Bucher, 2016).

Perspective Intersections

A general intersection of all Christians, regardless of sexual preference or denomination, is the belief in moral superiority (Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010). Regardless of sexual orientation, religious people purport all individuals should be valued (Bassett, Baldwin, Tammara, Mackmer, Mundig, Wareing, & Tschorke, 2002). Frustration arises for both pastors and parishioners when pastors lack preparedness and training to guide in situations pertinent to the lives of those in their congregations who seek their counsel (Mohling, 2021).

The topic of church and LGBTQ attendees seems to trigger division, regardless of position. A research team from Baylor University conducted 97 interviews from 20 congregations and

found that when considering official roles and practices, irrespective of their positions, people found the conversations difficult (Harris, Yancey, Cole, Cressy, Smith, Herridge, Ziegler, West, & Wills, 2021). The interviewees spoke with pain about grief and loss, lost relationships, and people being emotionally damaged by the conversations within the churches. Key topics that concerned all involved, including those opposing LGBTQ membership and those choosing not to have an official standard, included concerns regarding social justice, civil rights, and the mental health of the people who identify as and are close to sexual minorities. This study united all participants in tough conversations about their faith's resilience (Harris, Yancey, Cole, Cressy, Smith, Herridge, Ziegler, West, & Wills, 2021).

Resiliency, as it relates to pastors, was also a significant finding in a study by Roberts (2022). He studied 17 pastor graduates from the United States Rhema Bible College in the Ozark Region. This mixed methods study consisted of a survey of questions from Scazzero's Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Personal Assessment and interviews. There were six significant findings of this study. None of the pastors felt they were adequately disciplined and trained for ministry. They felt pressure to be successful and used Biblical scriptures to gauge professional effectiveness. Their families had suffered due to ministry demands. Although most pastors realized that revitalization is necessary for health and mental health in ministry, they did so later than they preferred. Pastors need to be secure in their calling. Unexpected findings included the depth that pastors felt unprepared, recognized that the church needed restructuring. Still, they did not know how to bring about change, and they showed resiliency despite the crisis (Roberts, 2022).

Contrasting research indicates members of the LGBTQ attendees and pastors are at risk of "walking away." Roberts begins his study with a personal testimony of feelings of failure,

mediocrity, and isolation, as well as stories of co-workers' moral and marital failure, burnout, and pastors leaving the ministry (Roberts, 2022). Age and number of years in ministry do not influence pastor burnout or exhaustion and pastors who take breaks and are servant leaders are less likely to leave the church due to burnout (Lyte, 2021).

Cummerlander (2016) conducted an online study of participants who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Participants were divided into two groups based on their method of responding to the questionnaire. The first group consisted of 11 participants who posted their answers and stories in an online forum. The second group consisted of 13 participants who simply posted their responses to the questionnaire to the researcher. Consistent among all respondents was each of them experienced a change in their faith, whether it was regarding the church, denomination, or abandoning faith altogether. Those who could not individualize their religion could not forgive Christians who hurt them, and those who could not compartmentalize their identities were indicated to be at high risk of abandoning their faith (Cummerlander, 2016).

Summary

The literature offers information from the perspectives of members of the LGBTQ community, the church, and pastors. There is no shortage of testimonies from homosexual or gender non-conforming people who have been hurt by individuals in self-professed safe places and areas of healing and health. Churches are conflicted between not knowing how to accept people of different sexual orientations without compromising their beliefs and spiritual conviction. Pastors struggle to counsel and lead from their limited knowledge base of responding to interpersonal, social, and mental health issues and lacking resources.

General educational opportunities, aids, and tools are scarce in providing support for pastors to help meet the needs of the rapidly growing population of LGBTQ folks. Another potential complication is how denominational theologies influence pastors' ministry to their congregations, yet seminaries do not seem to stay current with this need. According to College Factual, the top three AG universities are Northwestern University, North Central University, and the Vanguard University of Central California. Despite being top universities within the denomination, none have added courses to help prepare aspiring pastors to minister to the LGBTQ community (College Factual, 2022). This leads one to question AG. pastors' perceived preparedness to model and lead sensitivity toward the LGBTQ community and their perceived preparedness to lead members of the LGBTQ community spiritually.

Ironically, despite church attendees who are members of the LGBTQ community and pastors often being on opposite polarities of church issues, they experience the same problems and reactions to those stressful situations. This literature indicates they both value individuals, become frustrated with the lack of resources and preparedness of pastors, and experience stress and negative impacts on their mental health to the extent of changes in their church attendance and faiths.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Chapter three includes descriptions of the research methods, the research questions, the research design, the sample, the instrumentation, the procedures, the permissions, and a summary. This chapter references the Internal Review Board letter, the initial emailed letter distributed by the Executive Director of Church Ministries of the PMN to pastors, the communication log, the email confirmation, the informed consent used with participants, the demographic questionnaire, and the list of semi-structured interview questions.

Research Method

Churches have historically been identified as places of protection. Empirical evidence identifies that members of the LGBTQ community are not separate from their spiritual beliefs (Burk, 1998, Marquardt, 2014). Despite this belief, they report that their experiences with the mainstream Christian community have left the former feeling aversion and unwelcome at church (Stanford, 2013, Barringer, 2020, Collie, 2022, Smith, 2000).

Pastors bear the burden of a various job responsibilities, including modeling behavior and spiritually leading their congregations (Monahan, 1999; Nauss, 1995; Roberts, 2022). Research indicates a trend that pastors do not feel adequately prepared or trained for their positions (Bucher, 2022; Cadge & Wildeman, 2008; Letiza, 2022; Mohling, 2021; Olson & Cadge, 2002; Openshaw & Harr, 2009; Pippen, 2021; Robinson, 2010). Research also indicates unfavorable situations for pastors who perceive themselves as being under-prepared or not being properly trained and for the parishioners they serve and despite seeming polar opposite, who share the same general values and experiences (Bassett, Baldwin, Tammaro, Mackmer, Mundig, Wareing, & Tschorke, 2002; Cummerlander, 2016; Harris, Yancey, Cole, Cressy, Smith, Herridge, Ziegler, West, & Wills, 2021; Lyte, 2021; Roberts, 2022).

Pastor training, preparedness, experiences, and areas of need to address church issues regarding the LGBTQ community have not been specifically explored in educational research. This study was designed to explore the experiences and training of pastors in the PMN of the AG church in terms of their self-perceived preparedness to model sensitivity and minister to people in the LGBTQ community who attend their churches.

Research Questions

The general question that serves as the foundation for this study is how pastors in the PMN perceive their preparedness and training to model sensitivity to their congregations and minister to the LGBTQ individuals who attend their services. The following research questions offer insight into specifics regarding this overarching question.

- Q1: What preparation have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God received to help with understanding and accepting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?
- Q2: How prepared do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God feel they are to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?
- Q3: How do attitudes change toward people in church once they are identified as LGBTQ?
- Q4: What situations are credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God experiencing regarding the acceptance of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?
- Q5: What approaches have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God found that work to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q6: What do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God believe the organization could do to help prepare them to lead those spiritually who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Research Design

This investigation is a generic qualitative inquiry that interviewed 12 lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God (AG) denomination. The interviews explored pastors' self-perceptions of preparedness and training to lead congregations, including LGBTQ members and attendees, spiritually.

The researcher carefully considered and orchestrated the research design. Effort was made to streamline the interview process for each participant regarding initial contacts, completion of the Informed Consent form and the Demographic Questionnaire, and initial greetings at the beginning of each interview. Interview questions were open-ended and worded neutrally to help control for any researcher bias.

Sample

James McMillan states that purposeful sampling in qualitative research can be an effective way to obtain *information-rich* cases that produce an *in-depth understanding* of the topic under exploration (McMillan, 2016). This qualitative study used purposeful criterion sampling to understand a specific culture's experiences, beliefs, and needs.

The sample of this study consisted of lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God. The Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) district includes Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, and West Virginia. The number of participants was determined by the number of qualified volunteers and their schedule availability. Specifics regarding age, gender, ethnicity, geographical descriptions (e.g., state, rural, urban, and suburb),

years in credentialed ministry, years in current position, marital status, household income, and average church size of attendance were available upon completion of the data collection phase of the study. Due to the pastors being in a network, some participants may have resulted from snowball sampling. No interviews were conducted unless the numbers that correlated with their names were randomly selected.

Instrumentation

Prior to the distribution of any instrumentation, approval letters from the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity were obtained. An original letter of approval can be viewed in Appendix A. Some minor changes were made to the originally planned procedure and the sample population was narrowed, initiating the need for filing an amendment with the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity. The letter approving the amendments can be found in Appendix B.

Upon receipt of these letters from the university, the researcher obtained a name and email list of lead pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God from the Executive Director of Church Ministries. The researcher emailed a recruitment letter requesting participation to a select number of lead pastors from the listserv. A copy of the letter is located in Appendix C.

As potential participants responded, the researcher recorded all communication in the Communication Log. A copy of this log is in Appendix D. The day before the scheduled meeting, the researcher sent a Confirmation Email as noted in Appendix E. All participants received and signed an Informed Consent form and completed a Demographic Questionnaire. To protect the participant's confidentiality, the Informed Consent Form assigned a number instead

of a name to each participant. A copy can be viewed in Appendix F. The Demographic Questionnaire is in Appendix G.

Once all forms were completed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The researcher developed a list of questions based on the six research questions. A seventh question was offered to add an opportunity for participants to disclose additional information. Those questions are located in Appendix H.

Procedures

The researcher developed a letter to introduce the project. The letter contained a brief description of the study, requested voluntary participation from qualified pastors, and specified that eligible participants had to have completed the formal credentialing process as outlined by the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) and be currently working as a pastor of an Assembly of God church within the PMN, stated that a follow-up phone call requesting participation could occur, and provided recipients with the researcher's contact information. A copy of this letter can be viewed in Appendix C.

Upon completion of all Marshall University permissions, the letter was submitted to the Executive Director of Church Ministries of the PMN of the AG church. The Executive Director of Church Ministries of the PMN of the AG church reviewed the letter and provided the research team with a list of names and email addresses of the lead pastors in the PMN of the AG church. The pastors on the list, which were not alphabetical, were numbered. Random.com was then used to select 25 numbers to identify recipients of the recruitment letter. The letter was sent via email to the 25 recipients. This process was repeated every three days until 25 qualified lead pastors volunteered to participate in the research project.

Communication was made within one week of each volunteer responding to the email. As each volunteer committed to the study and was determined as qualified to participate, a time was scheduled for the interview. The researcher maintained a communication log, of which a sample is located in Appendix D. One day before the meeting, the researcher sent an email confirmation of the time and place of the interview. A sample of the confirmation email can be seen in Appendix E.

Each participant was presented with an Informed Consent Form and a Demographic Questionnaire at the meeting. The informed consent contained the standard elements, including the fact that participation was voluntary, the actions taken to ensure confidentiality reasonably, and that participation could be discontinued at any time. These forms also assigned a number to the participant to protect against identifiability and to guard confidentiality. Both forms were completed and collected prior to the start of each interview. A copy of the Informed Consent Form can be found in Appendix F, and a copy of the Demographic Questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix G.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant by the same interviewer. A list of semi-structured interview questions that were used to provide a loose framework for interviews can be found in Appendix H. Interviews were audio recorded using the Dolby On Application (Dolby, 2023) and transcribed using the online transcribe feature of Microsoft Word Office 365 (Microsoft, 2022). Transcriptions were coded and indexed according to the research questions. The index was used to identify common themes.

A follow-up Final Comment Email was sent one week after each interview, offering an opportunity for additional comments. A copy of the Final Comment Email is in Appendix I.

Once the transcripts and the final comments were compiled, data was indexed, coded, and disposed of in accordance with procedures outlined in the informed consent form.

Upon completion and in compliance with the informed consent agreement, all results were emailed to each participant, and each volunteer was entered into a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card. RANDOM.ORG was used to select the winner, and the gift card was mailed to the pastor's church.

Permissions

The researcher completed the approval process as required by Marshall University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before contact with pastors from the PMN of the AG church. The PMN of the AG church was contacted by the researcher before gaining IRB approval to determine if their organization required any additional permissions. Their organization required nothing additional, and they agreed to provide the names and email addresses to the lead pastor listserv upon arriving at that point of the research process. A copy of the Approval Letter from the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity can be viewed in Appendix A and the amendment letter in Appendix B.

Summary

Chapter Three consisted of an introduction, research questions, research design, sample, instrumentation, procedures, permissions, and a chapter summary. Copies of the permissions, introductory email to pastors, the informed consent release, the demographic information questionnaire, and semi-structured interview questions, and communication tracking tools were included in the Appendix section.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter four presents the study's results, which examine the self-perceived preparedness and training of lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God church to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals. Data was collected through 12 individual in-person face-to-face interviews. This chapter is organized by population sample demographics, specific results of interview questions, and a general summary.

Research and Interview Questions

Pastors have demanding positions with various expectations from congregations, denominational leaders, and society. Staying current in a changing society is challenging. Societal changes include a larger reported number of LGBTQ community members than in any historical period. Although churches have traditionally been places of acceptance and protection, there is an indication that despite seeing themselves as spiritual beings, many people who identify as LGBTQ do not feel welcome or accepted in church. These issues bring into question the self-perceived preparedness of pastors to minister to the LGBTQ community and lead their congregations in sensitivity to that population.

The researcher developed the following six research questions to help give insight into this issue.

Q1: What preparation have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God received to help with understanding and accepting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q2: How prepared do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God feel they are to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q3: How do attitudes change toward people in church once they are identified as LGBTQ?

Q4: What situations are credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God experiencing regarding the acceptance of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q5: What approaches have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God found that work to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q6: What do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God believe the organization could do to help prepare them to lead those spiritually who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

These research questions served as the foundation for the following semi-structured interview questions.

Q1: What training have you received to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?

Q2: How prepared do you feel to spiritually lead people who identify as LGBTQ?

Q3: How do you feel attitudes change toward a person in church once identified as LGBTQ?

Q4: What situations have you experienced in your church regarding acceptance of people from the LGBTQ community?

Q5: What approaches have worked to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as LGBTQ?

Q6: What do you believe the Potomac Ministry Network could do to help prepare pastors to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?

Q7: Do you have anything that you would like to add regarding this topic?

It is worth noting that a seventh question was added to allow participants to contribute additional information they believed to be pertinent to the subject.

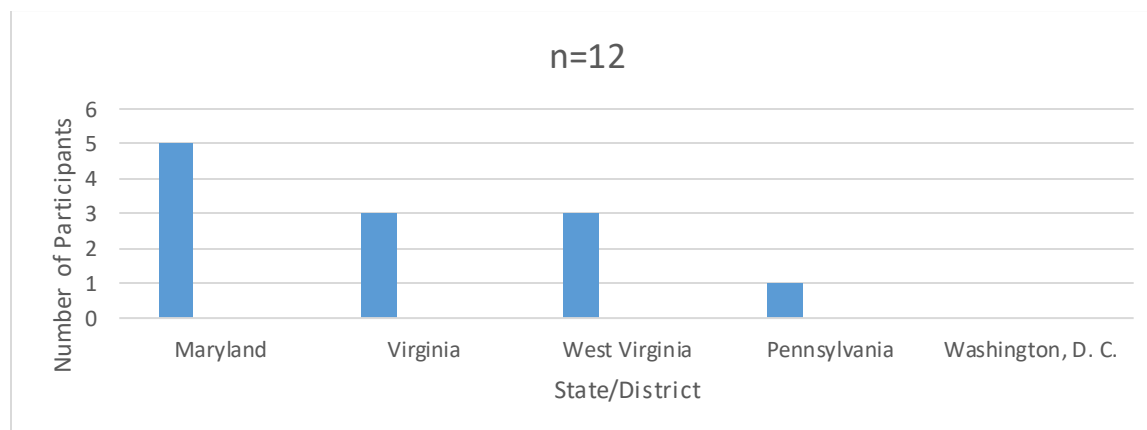
Population Sample Demographics

Potential participants voluntarily responded to a recruitment email and were entered into the study once the researcher deemed them qualified to participate. The researcher sent 25 emails every three days until 12 qualified participants were obtained for the study. A total of 304 emails were sent, with eight returning as undeliverable, for 296 recruitment letters being distributed.

The study consisted of 12 males and was monocultural since each participant identified as Caucasian. Of the 12 participants, ten were married, and two were divorced. All participants were lead pastors in the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God church, which includes Maryland, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania. There were five participants from Maryland, three from Virginia, three from West Virginia, one from Pennsylvania, and none from Washington, D.C. A table depicting geographical representation can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

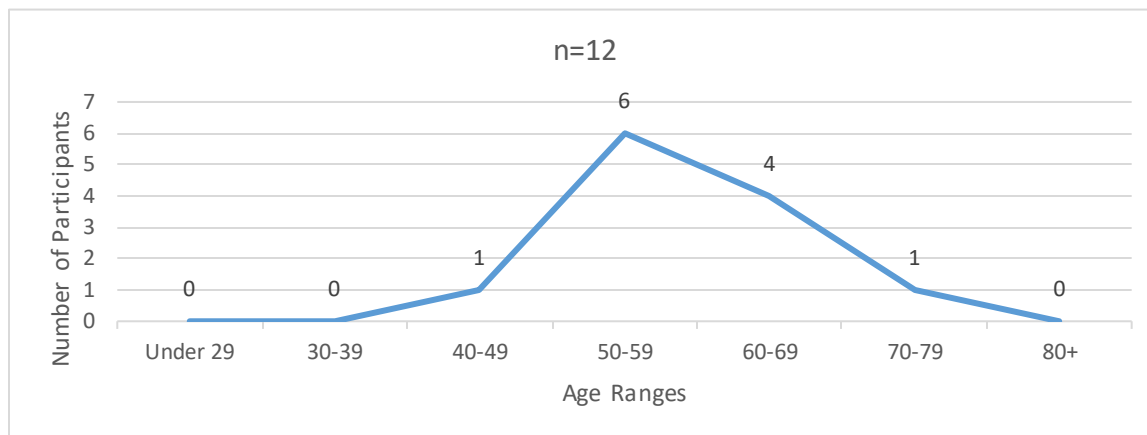
Geographical Representation



Ages were reported in range categories of under 29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and over 80. One participant reported being 40-49, six reported being 50-59, four reported being 60-69, and one reported being 70-79. No participants reported being under 29, 30-39, or over 80. This age data forms a slightly positively skewed distribution, which can be viewed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Age Demographics



Data was collected regarding the participants' years of experience. The lead pastors who participated in the study had a mean of 26.25 years in credentialed ministry, with a median of 26.5 and bimodal values of 32 and 35. They reported their years in their current positions having a mean of 17, a median of 13.75, and a mode of 7. This can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Years of Experience

EXPERIENCE	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
Credentialed Experience	26.25	26.5	32 and 35
Current Position	17	13.75	7

Data regarding church location and average attendance was collected. Within the geographical representation, seven participants reported being rurally located, five reported as suburban, and

zero reported being from an urban area. Church average attendance size ranged from 20 to 660, with a mean of 170, a median of 95, and bimodal values of 40 and 90. Specific average attendance figures were 20, 40, 40, 50, 90, 90, 100, 150, 200, 250, 350, and 660. These figures can be viewed in Table 2.

Table 2

Average Church Attendance

Participant Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Average Church Attendance	150	200	40	90	100	350	250	50	40	660	90	20
TOTAL = 2040	MEAN = 170				MEDIAN = 95				MODES = 49 and 90			

Interviews were scheduled to be approximately 30 minutes. Actual interview times ranged from 31:23 minutes to 67:37 minutes, with an average time of 49:24. The researcher did not limit response times for the seven questions and allowed participants to take as much time as they deemed necessary to answer questions satisfactorily since interviews were semi-structured. A complete list of interview lengths can be located in Table 3.

Table 3

Lengths of Interviews

INTERVIEW NUMBER	INTERVIEW LENGTH	
1	31:23	
2	58:50	
3	67:37	
4	47:59	
5	45:17	
6	42:59	
7	53:05	
8	51:11	
9	44:33	
10	65:13	
11	44:57	
12	40:24	
TOTAL	590.88	Mean = 49:24

Thematic Analysis of Interview Question One

The first interview question stated, “What training have you received to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?” Every participant answered this question. Three categories emerged from participant responses: formal, informal, and none.

Ten participants reported that they received formal training. Three participants reported they received training during college and Bible courses, four participants reported attending seminars, two reported that they received training in college and had attended seminars, and one reported that he received *sensitivity training* in a previous career and had attended seminars since becoming a lead pastor. These results can be viewed in Table 4.

Table 4

Formal Training

n=12	College	Seminars	College and Seminars	<i>Sensitivity Training</i> and Seminars	No Formal Training Reported
Number of Participants	3	4	2	1	2

Ten participants reported they received informal training. One pastor reported reading articles, two reported reading books, one reported listening to podcasts, two reported learning through conversations with colleagues, and one reported learning through personal life experience. One pastor reported informal training by reading articles, reading books, listening to podcasts, and through personal life experience. One pastor reported learning through reading books and listening to podcasts, and one reported learning through reading books, listening to podcasts, and life experiences. This data is reported in Table 5.

Table 5*Informal Training*

n=12	Articles	Books	Podcasts	Colleagues	Life Experience	Articles, Books, Podcasts, and Life Experience	Books and Podcasts	Books, Podcasts, and Life Experience	No Informal Training Reported
Number of Participants	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2

Seven pastors initially reported they did not receive training, with two stating it was *not on the radar back then*. As each interview progressed, five pastors, including the two who commented, remembered that they had received formal and informal training. The remaining two pastors realized that they had received informal training. This result indicated that all 12 pastors had received either formal or informal training or had received formal and informal training. This data is reported in Table 6.

Table 6*No Training*

n=12	Initially Reported No Training	Realized had Formal and Informal Training	Realized had Informal Training	Reported Training
Number of Participants	7 (including comment)	5 (including comment)	2	5

Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Two

The second interview question stated, “How prepared do you feel to spiritually lead people who identify as LGBTQ?” All 12 pastors answered this question. Responses generated four themes: prepared, unprepared, insecure, and unnecessary.

Three pastors reported feeling prepared, one feeling unprepared, one feeling insecure, and three feeling that specialized training is unnecessary. Two pastors reported feeling prepared and

insecure, one prepared but unnecessary, and one unprepared, insecure, and that specialized training is unnecessary. These results of perceived preparedness are depicted in Table 7.

Table 7

Perceived Preparedness

n=12	Prepared	Unprepared	Insecure	Unnecessary	Prepared and Insecure	Prepared and Unnecessary	Unprepared, Insecure, and Unnecessary
Number of Participants	3	1	1	3	2	1	1

Comments made by pastors who reported feeling prepared included having *ample training*, *being fully equipped*, *pretty prepared*, and *being willing to take a stand*. Comments made by pastors who felt insecure included *imperfect*, *inadequate*, *unsure*, and pastors saying they know they are called but unsure they are the *best choice*. Comments made by pastors who reported feeling unprepared included *trying to figure out answers*, *outliers*, and *flying blind and figuring it out*. Comments made by pastors who reported that specialized training was unnecessary included being *no more or less prepared than to minister to anyone* and that there needs to be a *bigger discussion*, referring to the shortage of pastors despite relaxing the qualifications.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Three

The third interview question stated, “How do you feel attitudes change toward a person in church once identified as LGBTQ?” All 12 participants answered this question, with some giving more than one response based on different experiences they have encountered within their congregations. Four categories and one sub-category emerged from the participants’ answers: positive, negative, neutral, and no difference.

The positive category had a subcategory of answers that were positive in content but were written in negative terms by including the word *not*. Nine pastors answered the question

positively, two negatively, five neutrally, and three pastors reported no change in their congregations' attitudes.

Nine participants answered the question positively. Four pastors answered using positive language, two positively but used negative language, and three used positive and negative terminology. Responses that used only positive language included one pastor reporting that his congregation was accepting and loving, one said that his church was accepting and used Jesus as their example. Another pastor stated his church was accepting and wanted the member of the LGBTQ community to thrive, and one reported that his congregation was respectful and wanted to protect and defend members of that community.

Positive participant responses that used both positive and negative language included one reporting that his congregation was accepting and not offensive, one stated his congregation was accepting and not mean, and one referenced that his congregation was accepting, not offensive, and not aggressive.

Positive responses that used only negative terminology included one pastor saying that his congregation did not convict the person of the LGBTQ community. One pastor reported that his congregation did not isolate the person and did not want the individual to leave. Variations of the root word *accept* were used six times, and variations of *not offend* were used twice. This information can be reviewed in Table 8.

Table 8*Positive Responses*

Number of Participants	Positive Language	Positive and Negative Language	Negative Language
1	Accepting, Loving		
1	Accepting, Jesus as Example		
1	Accepting, Wanting Person to Thrive		
1	Respectful, Protect, Defend		
1	Accepting	Not Offensive	
1	Accepting	Not Mean	
1	Accepting	Not Offensive Not Aggressive	
1			Not Convict
1			Not Isolate Them Not Want Them to Leave

Three pastors reported negative responses to finding out that a person in the congregation was a member of the LGBTQ community. One pastor reported that his congregation became cautious and hesitant, and another stated that members of his congregation used judgmental language that perpetuated stigma. One pastor used negative language and stated that the congregation did not agree with the lifestyle.

Five pastors reported neutral changes in attitudes once a person at church was identified as a member of the LGBTQ community. One pastor stated that some of his congregation prayed differently once a person was found to be part of the LGBTQ community and that their attitudes changed, but he did not specify whether those changes were positive or negative. This is true with another pastor who stated that attitudes in his congregation changed and added that they were shocked. One participant stated his congregation was cordial and then questioned the pastor later. Another pastor stated that his congregation seemed unaffected in the sense that it was

inevitable that people were going to become aware of the people who identify as LGBTQ in their congregations. One pastor stated that he did not know if attitudes changed once it became known that a person was part of the LGBTQ community.

Three pastors reported no change in attitudes. One pastor answered positively only, leaving 11 pastors that had reported negative, neutral, or no change in attitudes once the church became aware that a person identified as LGBTQ. This data can be reviewed in Table 9.

Table 9

Negative, Neutral, and No Change Responses

Negative (3 reports)	Neutral (5 reports)	No Change (3 reports)
Cautious Hesitant	Pray Differently Unspecified Change	No Change
Judgmental Perpetuate Stigma	Unspecified Change Shock	No Change
Not in Agreement	Cordial Question Pastor Later	No Change
	Inevitable	
	Do Not Know if Change	

Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Four

Interview question four stated, “What situations have you experienced in your church regarding acceptance of people from the LGBTQ community?” All 12 participants responded to this question, with some giving multiple answers based on different situations they experienced in their congregations.

Pastors answered this question from one of two different perspectives. One perspective was from what they have experienced in their current church building, and the other was what they have experienced in their ministry. This data generated five themes: situations from cultural

changes, providing ministry opportunities, spiritual conflict, secondary issues, and regarding relationships. Some themes contained subcategories.

Pastors reported having experienced situations caused by cultural changes. Two pastors stated that they had originally addressed homosexuality in the churches due to sexual abuse. One said that this perspective had to shift as openness became more acceptable and people started telling life stories. He specifically spoke of a family of two brothers who were raised in the same environment, neither of them abused, and said that one became a member of the LGBTQ community and the other was heterosexual. In his words, the *crushed the narrative* and required him to reconsider the abuse factor. The other pastor stated that society, including the church, had to *change its philosophy to match the new information*, and thus, the idea of being *born this way* became an issue in ministry.

Another pastor reported that a political agenda being promoted by Hollywood and in sports has portrayed the church as *mean, stupid, and lacking understanding of society*. Two pastors reported that stigma continues to be an issue regarding the LGBTQ community in churches. Five pastors expressed dealing with the popularity of being a member of the LGBTQ community. Terms used included *hot, trendy, fashionable, and vogue*. One pastor reported this being used to *recruit* members into the LGBTQ community. Another pastor reported struggling against messages that feminine males must be gay and masculine girls must be lesbians, causing him to have to address confusion, particularly with his church's children and youth ministries. This information can be reviewed in Table 10.

Table 10*Cultural Changes*

SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED – CULTURAL CHANGES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Originally the Result of Sexual Abuse but Changed Philosophy	2
<i>Born this Way</i>	1 out of the previous two
Political Agendas in Hollywood and sports – Christians as <i>mean, stupid, and lacking understanding</i> of society and stigma about LGBTQ community	1
Identifying with the LGBTQ community is <i>hot, trendy, fashionable, and vogue</i> .	5
Messages that feminine males are gay and masculine females are lesbian, particularly in children and youth ministries.	1 out of the previous 5

A second theme that arose from the question regarding situations that pastors have experienced regarding the acceptance of people from the LGBTQ community in their churches was that ministry opportunities have presented themselves. Pastors identified ministry opportunities within the church and ministries apart from the church. Nine pastors reported opportunities to minister to church attendees who were members of the LGBTQ community, including four men who were transitioning to women. One pastor reported an unreciprocated same-sex attraction of a parishioner to one of the church leaders. Another pastor reported a situation in her congregation in which a man in a heterosexual marriage identified as bisexual.

Three pastors stated that identity was an area of ministry opportunity within their churches. One pastor said that he has had to address the fact that the LGBTQ community is perceived as being more accepting and less judgmental than the church. Another pastor says that he has delivered counsel that being primarily identified by sexual orientation is *selling oneself short*. He stated that there were many wonderful qualities about the person and that he was sad that the individual was focused on sexual orientation to the exclusion of the other attributes.

Seven participants identified sin as an area of ministry opportunity regarding spiritually leading people in their churches who are members of the LGBTQ community. Three pastors

compared homosexuality to Biblically identified sins, including lying, stealing, adultery, and abuse. One pastor stated that hiding those sins is more difficult than hiding being part of the LGBTQ community. Two pastors identified homosexuality as a sin against one's body and flesh. One of those two pastors, along with an additional pastor, stated that it is crucial that all people, regardless of sin, should feel comfortable in church.

Six pastors reported ministering to their congregations regarding accepting people where they are spiritually. Two pastors stated that they had led their congregations by teaching that conviction and freedom from wrong beliefs usually do not happen instantaneously. Another pastor said he has taught that patience regarding such situations is important, as well as needing to give people time to change. One pastor stated that he demonstrates accepting people where they are spiritually to his congregation by allowing interruptions during his services. This data can be located in Table 11.

Table 11*Ministry Opportunities Within the Church*

SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED – MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE CHURCH	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Opportunities to Minister to Church Attendees Who Were Members of the LGBTQ Community	9
Transsexual Men Who Were Transitioning to Women	4 of the previous 8
Unreciprocated Same-Sex Attraction to a Church Leader	1
Man in a Heterosexual Marriage Who Identifies as Bisexual	1 of the previous 8
Identity	3
LGBTQ Community Being More Accepting and Less Judgmental than Church	1
<i>Selling Self Short</i>	1
Sin	7
Compared Homosexuality to Biblically Identified Sins of Lying, Stealing, Adultery, and Being Abusive	3
Hiding Lying, Stealing, Stealing, Adultery, and Being Abusive is Easier than Hiding Being Part of the LGBTQ Community	1
Homosexuality as a Sin Against Own Body and Flesh	2
Crucial for All to Feel Comfortable in Church	2
Accept People Where They Are Spiritually	2
Conviction and Freedom from Wrong Beliefs Usually Do Not Happen Instantaneously	2
Patience and Allow Time to Change	1
Model Acceptance by Allowing Interruptions	1

Participants reported that they lead in acceptance and minister to the LGBTQ community outside of their typical church congregations. Seven pastors reported ministering to people who are not their parishioners. Four pastors reported operating outreach ministries, including Christian schools, after-school programs, Easter egg hunts, and Trunk-or-Treats. They said they have ministered to parents and students who are not necessarily a part of their church membership but participate in the outreach ministries. One pastor reported providing outreach

ministry to a server and a convenience store employee. Another pastor disclosed that there was a scandal when he was attending Bible college in which two professors who were each in heterosexual marriages were caught in a same-sex relationship with each other.

Four pastors reported that the primary opportunity they have to minister more than any other area is to colleagues with children who identify with the LGBTQ community. Three pastors stated that it is a hard situation, and one said that he has ministered to his fellow-pastor friends' *broken hearts*. A figure of ministry opportunities can be found in Table 12.

Table 12

Ministry Opportunities Outside of Church Congregations

SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED – MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE THE CHURCH	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Total From Outside of Church Congregations	7
Outreach Ministries Including Schools, After School Programs, Egg-Hunts, Trunk-or Treats	4
Regular Contact with Waiter and Convenience Store Employee	1
Bible College Scandal	1
Colleagues Who Are Parents of the LGBTQ Community	4
<i>Hard Situation</i>	3 of the previous 4
Ministered to His Colleague's <i>Broken Heart</i>	1 of the previous 4

The third theme that emerged from the question of situations that pastors experience in their churches regarding the acceptance of people from the LGBTQ community is spiritual conflict. Pastors reported situations in their churches regarding disagreement in Christian beliefs and members of the LGBTQ community. Three pastors reported an *inevitable clash* in beliefs. One pastor reported grave concern due to a belief that members of the LGBTQ community have *abandoned God*. This conflicts with another pastor's report that there are *bigger issues* that the church should focus on since homosexuality was practiced during the Biblical era but was not

listed in the Ten Commandments. One pastor said that he has dealt with judgmental elders, and another reported having dealt with judgmental parishioners. Two additional pastors stated that they have dealt with the conflict that those who need to be in church the most feel the least accepted in that environment.

Participants reported conflict regarding church operational procedures. Four pastors reported conflict in their churches for disallowing members of the LGBTQ community to serve in leadership positions. Two of those pastors reported conflict for disallowing church membership. One of those two pastors reported conflict regarding same-sex attraction not being a disqualifying factor but acting on the *temptation* does prevent membership and serving in leadership. Six pastors said they have had to address the concept of *predisposition* and *born this way* in their churches.

Pastors reported an issue of contending with churches that not only accept the LGBTQ community but agree with the lifestyle. Five pastors reported situations where churches have compromised their theology and become *liberal churches* and that the concessions have impacted their effectiveness of ministering to the LGBTQ community. One pastor reported that Pelagianism still exists. One pastor stated disagreement with *liberal churches* and said that they are *unprepared people who do not know the Word, do not study, and do not preach it*. Two pastors expressed disagreement with churches that give Christians a *bad name*. These findings can be viewed in Table 13.

Table 13*Spiritual Confliction*

SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED – SPIRITUAL CONFLICTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
<i>Inevitable Clash</i>	3
<i>Abandoned God</i>	1
<i>Bigger Issues</i> Since Not Part of the 10 Commandments	1
Judgmental Elders	1
Judgmental Parishioners	1
Those Who Need to Be in Church the Most Feel the Least Welcomed There	2
Disallowing Members of the LGBTQ Community to Serve in Leadership	4
Disallowing Members of the LGBTQ Community Church Membership	2 of the previous 4
Difference Between Same-Sex Attraction and Acting on the <i>Temptation</i>	1 of the previous 4
Predisposition and <i>Born This Way</i>	6
Liberal Churches	5
Pelagianism	1
Unprepared People Who Do Not Know the Word, Study, or Preach It	1
Christians Being Given a <i>Bad Name</i>	2

Secondary Issues was a theme that resulted when pastors were asked about the situations they have experienced in their churches regarding accepting people from the LGBTQ community. Three subcategories emerged from this data: Mental Health, Abuse, and Potential Dangerousness.

Five pastors reported experiencing situations in their churches where a person from the LGBTQ community was dealing with mental health issues. One pastor reported the mental health issue as addiction, another stated trauma, and a third identified gender dysphoria. One of

the five participants identified helping with the lack of a support system, broken relationships, adjustment, and homelessness due to being members of the LGBTQ community.

Abuse was another subcategory that was identified from data collected from pastors regarding the situations they have experienced in terms of accepting members of the LGBTQ in their churches. Four pastors reported dealing with abusive situations relating to the people in the LGBTQ community. One pastor spoke of abuse in general but did not give details. Another pastor reported counseling abuse in a same-sex relationship within the church and found that the abuser was also a victim of previous sexual abuse. Two pastors disclosed they had experienced situations involving same-sex *grooming* of a vulnerable person within their years of ministry.

When asked about situations experienced in their churches regarding the acceptance of members of the LGBTQ community, nine pastors reported potentially dangerous situations. One pastor reported physical danger as an issue. Another pastor reported feeling that his church was being *set up* by being asked if his church was *LGBTQ-friendly*. A third pastor reported dealing with *ulterior motives* but did not provide specifics.

Three pastors expressed having experienced *radical* situations, and another reported dealing with a “they are out to get us – fortress mentality” within his congregation. One pastor reported disruptive behavior but then defended the person saying, but *that’s what they feel that’s what they should do* to defend their rights. Three pastors expressed concern regarding how *militant* the LGBTQ community will become in the future, and another pastor stated that the last five *mass shootings* were committed by people who were transgender. These findings can be reviewed in Table 14.

Table 14*Secondary Issues*

SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED – SECONDARY ISSUES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Mental Health Issues	5
Addiction	1 of the previous 5
Trauma	1 of the previous 5
Gender Dysphoria	1 of the previous 5
Broken Relationships, Lacking a Support System, Adjustment, Homelessness	1 of the previous 5
Abuse	4
General Abuse	1 of the previous 4
Same-Sex Abuse Within the Church (multiple instances), Abuser as a Victim	1 of the previous 4
Same-Sex Grooming of a Vulnerable Person	2 of the previous 4
Potential Dangerousness	9
Physical Dangerousness	1
<i>Set Up</i> by Being Asked if His Church was <i>LGBTQ Friendly</i>	1
<i>Ulterior Motives</i>	1
<i>Radical</i>	3
<i>Fortress Mentality</i>	1
Disruptive	1
Militant	3
<i>Mass Shootings</i>	1

A fifth theme that was identified in the data collected for question four was relationships. Seven pastors reported being concerned about their relationships with people in their churches who identify as members of the LGBTQ community. Two pastors reported having friends who are members of the LGBTQ community.

Two pastors stated that they did not know what to say due to the changing terminology. Five pastors reported not wanting to appear *unkind, unloving, intolerant, haters, homophobic, transphobic, not understanding, or not listening*. One pastor reported feeling guarded and two pastors admitted to avoiding the topic rather than risking offending someone in the congregation. One pastor said he wants to be popular but not at the expense of compromising, and another said that he does not want to be hated for speaking the truth.

Four pastors reported that they do not have many situations, and one pastor added that there is no history of multiple generations of identified members of the LGBTQ community being part of their congregations. One of those participants stated that the progression of identified members of the LGBTQ community in church is *unchartered territory*, and another stated that he *lacks exposure* but will do better with experience. Two pastors reported that they trust God to get them *through the moment*. A summary of these findings can be located in Table 15.

Table 15*Relationships*

SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED – RELATIONSHIPS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Relationships	7
Friends Who Are Members of the LGBTQ Community	2
Do Not Know What to Say – Changing Terminology	2
Do Not Want to Appear <i>Unkind, Unloving, Intolerant, Haters, Homophobic, Transphobic, Not Understanding, Not Listening</i>	5
Guarded	1
Avoid Topic Rather Than Risking Offending	2
Popular But Not Compromising	1
Does Not Want to Be Hated for Speaking Truth	1
Not Many Situations	4
Not a History of Multiple Generations of Members of the LGBTQ Community in Their Congregations	1
<i>Uncharted Territory</i>	1
<i>Lacks Exposure but Will Do Better With Experience</i>	1
Trust God to <i>Get Through the Moment</i>	2

Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Five

Interview question five stated, “What approaches have worked to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as LGBTQ?” All 12 participants provided multiple answers to this question. The data collected from this question generated three themes, each with subthemes. Themes included relationships, scripture, and church governance.

All 12 participants reported that focusing on relationships has worked for them in leading toward acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ. One pastor stated that everyone is honorable, two pastors said that they appreciate people who identify as LGBTQ and come to church, and one pastor stated that he *celebrates everyone*. Four participants stated that accepting

the person is crucial even when disagreeing with the lifestyle, and four, including two who said acceptance was crucial, said that respecting the person is important, even when disagreeing with the lifestyle. Two participants stated they strive to *be like Jesus* in their interactions, and two reported trying to see others *through God's eyes*. Seven pastors reported being welcoming as important in conveying acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ. These results are compiled in Table 16.

Table 16

Relationship – General Approaches

GENERAL RELATIONSHIP APPROACHES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Relationships	12
Honorable	1
Appreciate	2
<i>Celebrate Everyone</i>	1
Accept the Person Even When Disagreeing with the Lifestyle	4
Respect the Person Even When Disagreeing with the Lifestyle	4, including 2 of the previous 4
Behave Like Jesus	2
<i>See Through God's Eyes</i>	2
Welcoming	7

Eleven participants reported loving people and approaching people who identify as LGBTQ in love. One pastor reported loving God, and four reported wanting to be an example of the love of God. One participant stated that he tries to show people how to love God; another pastor stated that he teaches that it is important to love those who mistreat the LGBTQ community. Three participants reported that they approach those who identify as LGBTQ with kindness, and two reported the *Fruit of the Spirit* but did not specify the attributes.

Other participants reported approaches like the *Fruit of the Spirit* as effective. Two pastors reported that they provide comfort, three said they approach caringly, two reported being encouraging, one showing compassion, two showing patience, four being respectful, one sensitivity, and two reported simply being nice.

Five participants reported the importance of speaking truth, four reported *honesty*, and two stated being genuine and authentic as effective approaches. Grace was reported as necessary to be effective by five pastors, with one specifying that grace is needed for the person identifying as LGBTQ and all who may be negatively affected by the topic. These results can be reviewed in Table 17.

Table 17

Relationship – Fruit of the Spirit and Similar Approaches

<i>FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT AND SIMILAR APPROACHES</i>	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Love People	11
Love God	1 of the previous 11
Love of God	4 of the previous 11
People Love God	1 of the previous 11
Love People Who Mistreat the LGBTQ Community	1 of the previous 11
Kindness	3 of the previous 11
<i>Fruit of the Spirit</i>	1 of the previous 11
Nice	2 of the previous 11
Truth	5
Honesty	4
Genuine and Authentic	2
Grace for Those Who Identify as LGBTQ and Those Affected	5

Three pastors stated that communication and building friendships are key to being effective with those who identify as LGBTQ. Three pastors stated that they listen, and one participant stated that he tries to find ways to serve the person who identifies as LGBTQ. Two pastors identified understanding as important, and one said he has a community consultant to help build an understanding of the community. One pastor stated that he advocates for people, and two said that they feel that it is their responsibility to protect those of that community.

Two participants identified discipleship as an effective approach to fostering acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ. Two pastors said that they try to find ways to *fit in*, two said they encourage them to participate, and one said that he encourages an inclusive environment within his congregation.

Four participants expressed concern to the person regarding their destructive lifestyle, and one pastor said that he genuinely and caringly asks, “How do you think God feels about you being gay?” One pastor said that he conveys concern about the person’s health, and another said he tries to help “untangle” what has led them to the current points in their lives. One pastor said that effectiveness is contingent upon learning from mistakes. These findings are reported in Table 18.

Table 18*Relationship – Friendship and Discipleship*

RELATIONSHIP APPROACHES OF FRIENDSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Communication and Friendship	3
Listen	3
Serve	1
Understanding	2
Community Consultant	1
Advocate	1
Protect	2
Discipleship	2
<i>Fit In</i>	2
Participate	2
Inclusive Environment	1
Concern About Destructive Lifestyle	4
“How do you think God feels about you being gay?”	1
Concern About Health	1
“Untangle”	1
Effectiveness Contingent Upon Learning from Mistakes	1

Seven participants reported their approaches using negative terminology, three having multiple responses. Three pastors reported that it was important to not hurt or offend people in their congregations, two of whom added that it was important not to be mean. Five participants said it was important to not label people in their congregations, and two said that it was important to not reject people who identify as LGBTQ. One pastor said it was not okay to attack

the person in any way, and another said *it's not what goes in the mouth that is important, but what comes out*. This data is reported in Table 19.

Table 19

Relationship – Effective Approaches Expressed with Negative Terminology

EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP APPROACHES EXPRESSED WITH NEGATIVE TERMINOLOGY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Pastors Who Used Negative Terminology	7
Multiple Responses	3
Not Hurt or Offend	3
Not Be Mean	2 of the previous 3
Not Label	5
Not Reject	2
Not Attack	1
It's Not What Goes in the Mouth That is Important but What Comes Out	1

A second theme that emerged from the question asking pastors what strategies they have found to be effective in fostering acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ is scripture. Four participants reported that they could only be effective by holding to a Biblical Standard. Two participants emphasized that scripture does not change, and one stated that he relies on the wisdom of God. One pastor said that he defends the trinity, and two said they remind their congregations that Jesus died for everyone.

Two pastors said that they approach everyone, including members of the LGBTQ community, with the attitude that all people have a *sinful nature*. One of those two pastors stated that people cannot dictate how their sinful nature manifests, and the other pastor said that all sin is an abomination. Three pastors stated that people are spiritual beings, and two referenced it is important that everyone remembers that they are redeemable.

Two pastors stated that they approach people with the hope that they receive *salvation* and become *born again*. One pastor stated that a person is a *triune self*, therefore, is only one-third born again, and it takes time for the other parts of the self to change. One pastor said that change only occurs through God, and four stated that only the Holy Spirit can change a person. Two participants said that *old things pass away* and a person becomes new, and one participant said that he offers people who identify as LGBTQ an opportunity to *live a different story*.

One participant said that they approach people who identify as LGBTQ as if they *belong to the Lord*, and eight participants stated that it is important to give people room to work and walk out their salvation. One participant said he encourages people to stay focused on the gospel, holiness, and the kingdom. Two pastors said they emphasize the importance of studying the Word, one pastor stated that he prays with the person, and one pastor reported he makes the person a priority. These findings are reported in Table 20.

Table 20*Scripture - General*

APPROACHES FROM SCRIPTURE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Biblical Standard	4
Scripture Does Not Change	2
Wisdom of God	1
Defend Trinity	1
Jesus Died for Everyone	2
Everyone has a Sinful Nature – Cannot Choose How it Manifests and is an <i>Abomination</i>	2
Spiritual Beings	3
Redeemable	2
Hope of Salvation and Born Again	2
Triune Self	1
God Creates Change	1
Change by the Holy Spirit	4
Old Things Pass Away	2
Live a <i>Different Story</i>	1
<i>Belong to the Lord</i>	1
Work and Walk Out Salvation	8
Focus on Gospel, Holiness, and Kingdom	1
Study the Word	2
Pray with the Person	1
Makes the Person a Priority	1

Nine pastors reported effective approaches using scripture in negative terminology. Six said they do not identify people by their mistake, another reported that he does not call anyone a *sinner*, and an additional stated that he does not try to *pray the gay away*. Four pastors stated that

judging is not permissible, and two said there are no *second-class citizens*. One pastor said that when talking to people who identify as LGBTQ, he does not ignore the scriptures that he does not like. Six pastors reported they do not separate sins into levels, making one sin worse. One participant stated that he, as Jesus, is not out to *win the world* but to *win souls*. This information can be viewed in Table 21.

Table 21

Scripture – Effective Approaches Expressed With Negative Terminology

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES EXPRESSED WITH NEGATIVE TERMINOLOGY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Pastors Who Used Negative Terminology	9
Not Identify People by Their Mistakes	6
Not Call Anyone a “Sinner”	1
Not <i>Pray the Gay Away</i>	1
Not Judge	4
No Second-Class Citizens	1
Not Ignore Scripture That Is Liked	1
Not Separate Sins Into Levels, Making One Worse Than Another	6
Not <i>Win the World</i> but <i>Win Souls</i>	1

The third theme that resulted from the data collected when pastors were asked what approaches they have found to be effective in helping foster acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ was church governance. One pastor stated that he approaches the church as if he has a *golden opportunity* to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ, and another stated that he views the church as a spiritual hospital. Two pastors said that they have ministered to confused parishioners. One pastor said that he feels obligated to be prophetic to the church and the community, and to support fellow pastors as they encounter situations.

Three pastors reported cultural awareness as crucial, including one who specified the importance of *cultural IQ*, another stating that God is *counterculture*, and one who said that he leads his congregation in *maintaining perspective*. Three pastors said that they have found it important to ask questions about how they became aware of the church and what brought them there. One of three pastors added that providing a *safe place* for them to tell their stories is important.

Five pastors stated that they are responsible for giving people an environment where they feel free to *explore spirituality* and give opportunities to *experience Jesus* and the Holy Spirit. Another pastor stated that he is optimistic when it comes to souls but pessimistic when it comes to the world.

One pastor reported that their church modified their bylaws to ensure that usage of their property and church practices would be consistent and not conflict with their belief system. One pastor disclosed that as soon as this became a topic, he immediately instituted a standard of conduct that included no gay jokes and an intolerance of anyone not welcoming people who identify as LGBTQ. Two pastors reported that they welcome and desire people who identify as LGBTQ to attend their churches and that they can be baptized however, they cannot become members or serve in leadership positions while actively living that lifestyle. Another pastor stated that as the level of responsibility increases in the church, so does the level of requirements and said that they have instituted a background check policy for anyone in leadership positions.

One pastor stated that leading the current culture is not easy. Another participant stated that to be effective in ministry, particularly regarding people who identify as LGBTQ, pastoral confidentiality must be a priority. This same pastor reported that pastors need to get comfortable with having *targets on their backs*. Two pastors reported the importance of a *unified truth*, and

another stated that transparency has been effective. Two pastors reported that despite policies, peoples' stories differ, and decisions should be made on an individualized basis. These results are reported in Table 22.

Table 22*Church Governance – General*

CHURCH GOVERNANCE APPROACHES – GENERAL	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
<i>Golden Opportunity</i>	1
<i>Spiritual Hospital</i>	1
Confused Parishioners	2
Obligation to Be Prophetic to Church and Community, Support Pastors	1
Cultural Surroundings	3
<i>Maintain Perspective</i>	1
Ask Questions About What Led Them to Church	3
<i>Safe Place</i> to Share Their Stories	1
Opportunity for Spiritual Experiences, Jesus, Holy Spirit	5
Optimistic About Souls, Pessimistic about World	1
Modified Bylaws	1
Standard of Conduct	1
Standard of Conduct	1
Baptized but Not Serve In Leadership	2
As Level of Responsibility Increases, Level of Requirements Increase	1
Background Checks	1
Not Easy to Lead	1
Pastoral Confidentiality, Targets on Backs	1
Unified Truth	2
Transparency	1
Individualized Decisions	1

Ten participants responded to this question using negative terminology. Five pastors reported not embracing or condoning the lifestyle, and two said that preaching to the crowd was not effective. One stated that wasting time with unreasonable people is ineffective. That same pastor said it is ineffective to hope that nobody from the LGBTQ community attends church. This pastor stated that it is not effective to use common phrases like *love the sinner but hate the sin* or *pray the gay away*.

Two participants said it is not effective to *beat anyone over the head with the Bible*, and another said that *cleaning a fish before it is caught is not effective*. Two participants reported that the church should not allow membership or leadership. One participant stated it is ineffective to discriminate, and another said churches should avoid legalism. Table 23 depicts these results.

Table 23

Church Governance – Effective Approaches Expressed With Negative Terminology

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES EXPRESSED WITH NEGATIVE TERMINOLOGY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Negative Terminology	10
Not Embrace or Condone	5
Not Preach to the Crowd	2
Not Waste Time with Unreasonable People	1
Not Hope Nobody Comes or Use Common Phrases	1
Not <i>Beat Over the Head with the Bible</i>	2
Not Clean the Fish Before it is Caught	1
Not Permit Membership or Leadership	2
Not Discriminate	1
Not Legalistic	1

Thematic Analysis of Interview Question Six

Question six stated, “What do you believe the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) could do to help prepare pastors to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?” All 12 pastors answered this question, some providing multiple answers. Themes that emerged from the data collected when pastors were asked this question were divided into four categories: procedural responses, interpersonal relationship responses, anticipated issue responses, and responses using negative language. Communication was a topic that surfaced in the procedural responses and the interpersonal relationship responses.

Two pastors said it would be beneficial for the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) to question pastors within the network to identify which beliefs are consistent and differ within the denomination. Three other pastors reported that a stated theology, including a central truth, would be beneficial. Five pastors stated that they wanted a stated Biblical standard, and three additional pastors said they desired direction from the PMN based on *God’s perspective*.

One pastor said a formal statement disallowing some sins from leadership but not others would be beneficial to help preserve relationships with people who identify as LGBTQ. Another pastor said he would like the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) to make a formal statement regarding same-sex marriage, and another said that he wants a formal statement that people who identify as LGBTQ are welcome.

Two participants stated that pastors are lifelong learners and desire information regarding ministering to people who identify as LGBTQ. One pastor recommended raising credentialing standards to ensure a solid theology. Nine participants expressed interest in the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) offering training, three of whom said including speakers who tell their stories and recommend approaches would be beneficial. One pastor recommended establishing

resources, including online resources. Another suggested encouraging doctoral students to publish works on the topic, and one pastor requested podcasts. Two pastors requested the development of *how-to* guides, including topics of grace, love, truth, and communication. These findings are compiled in Table 24.

Table 24

Procedural Responses

PROCEDURAL RESPONSES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Question Which Beliefs are Consistent and Which Beliefs Differ Within the Denomination	2
Stated Theology, Including a Central Truth	3
Biblical Standard	5
Direction Based on <i>God's Perspective</i>	3
Explanation of Disallowing Some Sins and Not Others	1
Formal Statement Regarding Same-Sex Marriage	1
Formal Statement that People Who Identify as LGBTQ are Welcome	1
Pastors are Lifelong Learners	2
Raise Credentialing Standards to Ensure a Solid Theology	1
Trainings	9
Speakers Who Tell Their Stories and Recommend Approaches	3 of the previous 9
Resources and Online Resources	1
Encourage Doctoral Publications	1
<i>How To</i> Guides on Grace, Love, Truth, and Communication	2

Eight pastors responded to question number six with responses that fit into the interpersonal relationship category. Five pastors reported that communication from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) needs improvement. Four pastors desired the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) to foster a safe environment to explore truth, not fear conflict, and establish

intrad denominational and interdenominational collaboration opportunities. Three pastors said they wished the network leaders listened to those at the *ground* and *grass roots levels*. One of those three pastors stated that there is a clash with the network in that they think leadership goes from the *top down*, but it really should go from the *bottom up*. Two pastors disclosed a systemic flaw in that by the time pastors advance to the position of Superintendent, they have been out of church ministry for 10-15 years, and one of those pastors said *you cannot lead where you are not*.

Two pastors expressed frustration with the lack of availability and response from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN), and one of those two suggested that they stagger breaks and days off. Another pastor said he would like the establishment of discipleship groups, and one said he would prefer more direct communication from the network.

One pastor said he would like to know that the network leaders seek God for pastors. Four pastors said they would appreciate more affirmation and encouragement. Two stated they believe pastors would appreciate acknowledgement and compassion that they are broken and need healing; one said that he feels the network could be more loving. These findings can be reviewed in Table 25.

Table 25*Interpersonal Relationship Responses*

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP RESPONSES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Interpersonal Relationship Responses	8
Communication	5
Safe Environment to Explore Truth, Not Fear Conflict, and Establish Intrad denominational and Interdenominational Collaboration Opportunities	4 of the previous 5
Listen to Those at <i>Grass Roots Level</i> and <i>Ground Level</i>	3
Leadership Happens from <i>Bottom Up</i> , Not <i>Top Down</i>	1 of the previous 3
Superintendents Out of Church Ministry for 10-15 years	2
<i>Cannot Lead Where You Are Not</i>	1 of the previous 2
Frustrated Over Lack of Availability and Response	2
Discipleship Groups	1
More Direct Communication	1
Know that Leaders are Seeking God for Pastors	1
Affirmation and Encouragement	4
Compassion that Pastors are Broken and in Need of Healing	2
More Loving	1

Five pastors stated that they would benefit from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) addressing anticipated future issues. Three participants said that they fear issues such as same-sex marriage and same-sex weddings will divide the denomination, as it has other denominations. One participant stated he fears *backlash* for transformation testimonies that do not *fit the narrative*. One pastor said that a day is coming when it will be impossible to say nothing, and another said leaders need to talk about potential issues because the opposition is talking. Another pastor stated he feels the church is unprepared for what is coming.

Six pastors reported they would like the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) to develop a plan to prepare them for anticipated issues. One of those participants stated that it should be reviewed and revised often.

Two pastors said they would like the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) to lead in the fight for public schools and lead them to revival. One pastor said that the network is doing well with communication regarding regional issues, but he would like for them to be more communicative about global issues and what is being done *behind the scenes*. One participant stated that he knows something is needed but is unsure what will be effective. These results can be viewed in Table 26.

Table 26

Anticipated Issue Responses

ANTICIPATED ISSUE RESPONSES	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Number of Pastors Who Would Benefit from Discussions Regarding Anticipated Issues	5
Fear Same-Sex Marriage and Wedding Issues Will Divide the Church	3
Fears <i>backlash</i> for Transformation Testimonies that do not Fit the Narrative	1
Day is Coming Where it will be Impossible to Say Nothing	1
Need to Be Talking Because the Opposition is Talking	1
Not Ready for What is Coming	1
Plan so Prepared for Anticipated Issues	6
Reviewed and Revised Often	1 of the previous 6
Fight for Public Schools and Lead in Revival	2
Compliment About Regional Issue Communication but Want More About Global Issues and <i>Behind the Scenes</i> Actions	1
Need Something but Unsure What Would Be Effective	1

Ten participants answered question six using negative terminology. One pastor stated that the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) should not be afraid to address anticipated issues, and another said they should not do what is popular. Four pastors reported that the network should not waiver in truth or diminish the standard. One participant stressed that the network should not create a creed and that it cannot dictate righteousness. Another participant said that LGBTQ should not be *lumped together* since *attraction is not the same as action*.

One pastor reported that the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) should not be hypocritical and should not be legalistic. Four participants stated that the network should not *kickback* or *de-credential* and that pastors should not *lose face* for consulting and discussing their beliefs with colleagues.

One pastor stated that the network should not separate sins by level. Another participant stated that the network should not develop relationship ministry groups about accepting people who identify as LGBTQ because they did not work in the past regarding other topics. Two participants stated that the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) should not be reactionary. These results are presented in Table 27.

Table 27

What the Potomac Ministry Network Can Do, Expressed with Negative Terminology

What the Potomac Ministry Network Can Do, Expressed with Negative Terminology	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Negative Terminology	10
Not Be Afraid to Address Anticipated Issues	1
Not Do what is Popular	1
Not Waiver in Truth or Diminish Standard	4
Not Create a Creed or Dictate Righteousness	1
Not Lump All LGBTQ Together Since Attraction is not Action	1
Not be Hypocritical or Legalistic	1
Not <i>kickback, De-credential, or Lose Face</i>	4
Not Separate Sins by Levels	1
Not Develop Relational Ministry Groups	1
Not Be Reactionary	2

Analysis of Interview Question Seven

The seventh interview question stated, “Do you have anything that you would like to add regarding this topic?” All 12 participants answered this question, with some contributing multiple answers.

Three pastors stated that this is the number one issue in the church, and two of these individuals, along with another, said we have to *answer the questions*. One pastor stated that this is *unchartered territory* in that previous civil rights movements, such as for women’s rights and rights for minorities, have not caused this amount of *ruckus* and that the church supported the other civil rights issues.

One pastor complimented the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) by saying that they have historically done well with offering leadership training. Another participant identified that the network had done better in the past five years than in the past fifty regarding not creating good churches but rather good and healthy leaders, and pastor care. Another pastor stated that the network is good about not pressuring pastors to make public statements and declarations regarding people who identify as LGBTQ.

Each pastor thanked the researcher for exploring this topic. One pastor added that scripture says if it is difficult for the righteous to be saved, it will be harder for those who do not have a relationship with God. These results are reported in Table 28.

Table 28*Additional Comments*

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Pastors Who Made Additional Comments	12
Number One Issue	3
<i>Unchartered Territory</i> and a First Time the Church Does Not Support the Civil Rights Issues	1
We Have to <i>Answer the Questions</i>	2 of the previous 3 plus 1 additional
Compliment for Leadership Trainings	1
Better in the Past Five Years Than in the Past Fifty Regarding Not Creating Good Churches, but Good and Healthy Pastors, and Pastor Care	1
Not Pressuring Pastors to Make Public Statements and Declarations	1
Thanked Researcher	12

Summary

Chapter Four consisted of the study's results, which examined the self-perceived preparedness and training of lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God church to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals. The chapter began with an introduction, followed by a section stating the research and interview questions. The succeeding section described the population sample demographics, included a narrative description, and used tables to clearly depict the data. The researcher conducted a detailed thematic analysis on the seven interview questions and reported findings using narrative descriptions. Data was compiled into Figures to simplify to consolidate the information. This chapter concluded with a summary.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter five discusses the study's results, which examined the self-perceived preparedness and training of lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God church to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals. Data was collected through 12 individual in-person face-to-face interviews that consisted of seven questions. This chapter restates the problem statement, relists the research questions, and discusses each research question in terms of how the findings relate to the literature, discussion of additional information, limitations of the study, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and a general summary.

Problem Statement

Openness regarding gender and sexual identity is more accepted in American society now than at any other point in history. Despite churches historically being places where vulnerable populations could seek refuge and protection, available data suggest this is not true for those who self-identify as sexual minorities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how lead pastors in the PMN perceive their preparedness and training to model acceptance to the congregations and minister to the LGBTQ individuals who attend their services.

Research Questions

Pastors have demanding positions with a plethora of expectations from congregations, denominational leaders, and society. Societal changes include a larger reported number of LGBTQ community members than any other historical period, and staying current is challenging. Despite traditionally being places of acceptance and protection, many people; who identify as LGBTQ do not feel welcome or accepted in the church. These issues bring into

question the self-perceived preparedness of pastors to minister to the LGBTQ community and lead their congregations in sensitivity to that population.

The researcher developed the following six research questions to help give insight into this issue.

Q1: What preparation have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God received to help with understanding and accepting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q2: How prepared do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God feel they are to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q3: How do attitudes change toward people in church once they are identified as LGBTQ?

Q4: What situations are credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God experiencing regarding the acceptance of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q5: What approaches have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God found that work to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Q6: What do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God believe the organization could do to help prepare them to lead those spiritually who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?

Discussion of Research Question One

The first research question stated, “What preparation has credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God received to help with understanding and

accepting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?” It was adapted into an interview question that read “What training have you received to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?”

Over half of the participants initially responded that they had not received formal training. All but three of the current study’s participants said that their academic programs did not include specific training to minister to the LGBTQ community. This initial response was consistent with findings from the Southern Florida study, where 20 out of 31 respondents said they did not feel that their academic programs had prepared them to minister to parishioner concerns (Letizia, 2022).

Considering most of the participants in the current study were 50-59 years of age and the average length of ministry was over 26 years, most participants had received their training early in adulthood. This would have been prior to the changes in family demographics as reported by the United States Census Bureau (2011, 2021), and it appears logical that their training would have been prior to academic programs identifying a need to include specialized training regarding the ministry needs of those who identify as LGBTQ into their programs. A possible explanation for the lack of training may be attributed to the timing of participants’ formal training and the cultural issues of that era.

Interestingly, as conversations progressed with the participants in the current study, they each remembered having received some formal training regarding ministering to people who identify as LGBTQ. Pastors reported attending break-out sessions at conferences sponsored by the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN). This indicates that pastors were aware that they needed further training in this area. The scheduling of these training opportunities indicates that the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) leadership was aware of pastors’ needs in this area.

Ten pastors reported seeking informal training opportunities such as books, podcasts, and life experiences. This is consistent with the literature review conducted by Robinson (2010), who found that, despite the growing population of LGBTQ people in congregations, resources are lacking or nonexistent. Pastors and pastoral organizations have to create their resources and learning experiences.

In summary, pastors reported little to no formal training in their academic programs regarding ministering to people who identify as LGBTQ. This is possibly due to the timing of their training and LGBTQ situations not being a primary cultural issue at that time. Pastors reported that they have self-initiated attending training, bringing the number of pastors who received formal training to over half of the participants. All twelve pastors reported initiating informal training through reading publications, listening to podcasts, and through life experience.

Discussion of Research Question Two

The second research question stated, “How prepared do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God feel they are to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?” It was adapted into an interview question that read “How prepared do you feel to spiritually lead people who identify as LGBTQ?”

Pastors answered this question from two different perspectives. One perspective was specific to LGBTQ issues. The second was a more general perspective in that ministering to people who identify as LGBTQ is no different than ministering to anyone else struggling with sin. Five of the twelve participants in the current study stated that they, at least in part, felt that specialized training to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ was unnecessary.

These pastoral responses are consistent with a theme found in a survey audit conducted through the University of Arizona by Breanne Fahs and Eric Swank (Fahs & Swank, 2020). The third theme, out of seven, was that people who identify as LGBTQ and who attend church tend to be welcome but lumped in with *all sinners* (Fahs & Swank, 2020).

Six pastors reported feeling at least partially prepared to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ. Two of those six reported that their church structure is partially responsible for why they feel secure in their ministry. They specified that direction and support help them feel secure in their ministry.

Two pastors expressed that they feel inadequate to minister. Both stated that they know God has called them into the ministry, but they question His choice. One said that he feels that he is not the best choice. The other pastor talked of how Jesus is the omniscient example of how to do ministry and that they are *big shoes to fill*. Another pastor used this same example but interpreted it from the opposite perspective. He was thankful that God had given Jesus' life as such a perfect example of how to do ministry.

Pastors feeling unprepared to minister was an unexpected finding in a study from the United States Rhema Bible College in the Ozark Region (Roberts, 2022). The researcher stated that pastors need to be secure in their calling but was surprised by the depth that pastors felt unprepared. This study indicated that pastors are resilient despite crisis (Roberts, 2022).

One noticeable trend in all twelve interviews was that ministering to people who identify as LGBTQ is a small part of a *bigger discussion*. Each of the interviewees expressed concern about societal changes regarding how the inability to disagree has led to increased violence and concerns about the general nature of cancel culture. Those who reported feeling unprepared said they were simply trying to figure out answers. Zero-sum and relationships honoring the rights of

one infringes on the rights of another (Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, & Martin, 2022), are evident between churches and the LGBTQ community and are a primary concern for pastors.

The overall mixed responses from pastors in this study are consistent with the findings of a study conducted in 2002 where 62 protestant pastors were interviewed. The results generated three points, one of which was that homosexuality was not an essential issue and that addressing it would take attention away from more important issues in the church. The other group of pastors generated in this study included pastors who felt that better understanding would lead to greater awareness of issues surrounding the issue (Olson & Cadge, 2002).

In summary, pastors answered the question of how prepared they feel they are to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ from two perspectives. One perspective was specific to the LGBTQ community, and the other was more generic regarding leading people out of sin. Responses ranged from feeling *fully equipped* to pastors questioning why God chose them for ministry. Key terms included *inadequate*, *imperfect*, *outlier*, *lifelong learner*, and ministering to individuals who identify as LGBTQ needs to be part of a *bigger discussion*.

Discussion of Research Question Three

The third research question stated, “How do attitudes change toward people in church once they are identified as LGBTQ?” This research question was adapted into an interview question that read, “How do you feel attitudes change toward a person in church once identified as LGBTQ?”

Overall, nine participants reported that their congregations would respond positively, neutrally, or have no change in their attitudes toward a person who identifies as LGBTQ. Half of the participants reported having a progressive and accepting church community. Acceptance was

a common attribute, along with healing, love, and compassion, that was identified in the three categories of “ministry to brokenness,” “welcoming but not affirming,” and “gay-affirmative” in a study conducted by Mark Yarhouse and Trista Carr (2011).

Churches welcoming people of the LGBTQ community in church may be partially because pastors teach not to judge, that everyone is a sinner, and that sinners should feel welcome in church. Although the results of this study have brought the phrase into question, churches have taught variations of Ghandi’s (2008) modernized concept of “hate the sin and not the sinner.” The essence of this phrase may be another contributing factor as to why congregations would not think differently once a person is identified as a member of the LGBTQ community.

Pastors reported teaching the *Fruit of the Spirit* found in Galatians 5:22-26 (Bible, 1971/2020). The *Fruit of the Spirit* consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Bible, 1971/2020). These traits clash with judgment and hate so from this perspective, it is not surprising that over half of the participants reported being accepting of people who identify as LGBTQ. Pastors may attribute the lack of controversy over people who identify as LGBTQ within their churches to having taught the traits in this scripture. This could be true for their positive reports of being loving, respectful, protective, wanting all people to thrive, and using Jesus as their example.

Three pastors reported that some people in their congregations have responded negatively regarding people who identify as LGBTQ. One pastor stated that his congregation does not agree with the lifestyle. Another pastor reported a situation where someone responded based on the negative stigma of those in the homosexual community. The third pastor reported hate speech to him about people of that community. He attributed their attitudes to their generation and added that, although not okay, they were comfortable expressing themselves to him. This level of

comfort with him allowed him to address attitudes and he said that it was unlikely that anyone would speak hatefully to other members of the congregation.

In summary, nine participants responded positively when asked how attitudes change toward a person in church once identified as LGBTQ. Positive responses included both positive and negative language. This is possibly due to fundamental Christian teachings that include the *Fruit of the Spirit*, that everyone is a sinner, and that sinners should feel welcome in church. Three pastors reported negative responses, including the absence of agreement, stigma regarding the LGBTQ community, and hate speech. These responses may be due to generational differences and may not translate into the person who identifies as LGBTQ being treated poorly.

Discussion of Research Question Four

The fourth research question stated, “What situations are credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God experiencing regarding acceptance of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?” This research question was adapted into an interview question that read, “What situation have you experienced in our church regarding acceptance of people from the LGBTQ community?” Five themes that emerged from this question were cultural changes, ministry opportunities within and outside of the church, situations of spiritual conflict, situations of secondary issues, and situations regarding relationships.

Cultural changes were the first theme that was identified from asking pastors about what situations they have encountered in their churches regarding acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ. Two pastors reported originally thinking that society believed homosexuality resulted from abuse. One pastor spoke of a Christian family where two brothers were raised in a loving home and had similar experiences. As adults, one brother continued in church

involvement, and the other identified as LGBTQ. As society became more accepting of alternative lifestyles and people became more comfortable telling their stories, the belief that homosexuality resulted from abuse had to be revisited. This is consistent with Preston Sprinkle's works, which declare that Christians need to *think more deeply and love more widely*, move beyond theory and ideas, and focus on individuals (Sprinkle, 2021).

Identifying with the LGBTQ now seeming *hot, trendy, fashionable, and vogue* was another issue that five pastors reported facing. Although this seems plausible, research indicated that men and women in the Church of Latter-Day Saints, who identify as either homosexual or bisexual indicated both men and women put extensive effort into changing their sexual orientation and only had a 4% success rate (Bradshaw, Dehlin, & Galliher, 2022). Whether a person is *born this way*, chosen because it is popular, confused by Hollywood and sports propaganda, or due to received societal messages because they are a masculine female, or a feminine male is questionable. The results of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, as the study indicates that changing one's sexual identity may involve more than a decision and effort (Bradshaw, Dehlin, & Galliher, 2022).

Ministry opportunities were the second theme that resulted from the question of what situations pastors are experiencing in the congregations regarding people who identify as LGBTQ. Nine participants reported opportunities to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ within their congregations. Situations included transsexual men transitioning to women, unreciprocated same-sex attraction toward a church leader, identity issues, sin issues, and leading in fostering a church atmosphere of comfort. Pastors stated that they strive for the latter by accepting people where they are spiritually, showing patience and allowing time for conviction and change, while allowing interruptions during services.

Discussions with pastors during the interviews revealed concerns for people who identify as LGBTQ. Seven participants reported dealing with homosexuality as a sin within their congregations, and three compared it to other Biblical sins, such as lying, stealing, adultery, and being abusive. One major difference between homosexuality and other sins is that lying and stealing are impulse actions and most people who engage in those behaviors do not desire to be liars or thieves. Although people who commit adultery may desire the other person, they generally do not desire to be adulterers. Being LGBTQ is a primary part of a person's identity, and they desire acceptance and approval.

Another insight that occurred while conducting the interviews was that there is a difference between leaving a LGBTQ lifestyle and giving up sins like lying and stealing. One does not necessarily affect a person's emotions, like a change in sexuality would likely result. It is reasonable to think that a change in sexual identity could involve fear, relationship changes, and potentially affect every area of the person's life.

Seven pastors reported ministry opportunities outside of the church congregation when questioned about situations they have encountered regarding the acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ. Pastors reported opportunities such as ministering to waiters and convenience store employees. Four pastors reported ministry opportunities in church-sponsored outreach ministries such as Christian schools, egg hunts, trunk-or-treats, and after-school programs. Pastors stated that these ministries have been successful activities to allow people who identify as LGBTQ and do not feel comfortable attending church services, to have contact with the Christian community.

Taking a child to a party-type activity at church is less intimidating than attending a church service. Such activities can help alleviate the issue described in a study by Michael Burk (1998)

where a participant reported being told that she had to choose between the spiritual community and the LGBTQ community and that she could not have it both ways. Another study indicated that spirituality and sexuality were integral parts of personhood, and people have had to leave the church to maintain both identities (Marquardt, 2014). Cumberlander (2016) found that those who could not individualize their religion could not forgive Christians who hurt them, and those who could not compartmentalize their identities were indicated to be at high risk of abandoning their faith. Outreach activities, apart from the typical church congregational meetings, can bridge the gap so that people do not have to choose between their sexual and spiritual identities.

Another primary situation participants reported was ministering to colleagues who have a son or daughter who identifies as LGBTQ. The pastors said that they have had to learn to minister to their friends and colleagues through *hard situations* and *broken heartedness*. This is consistent with a researcher who states that he is optimistic that Christians can discuss, counsel, and minister to one another regarding this issue (Henderson, 2022).

The third theme that emerged from asking pastors what situations they have experienced in their churches regarding the acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ is spiritual conflict. Pastors reported more than any other spiritual issue regarding people who identify as LGBTQ, predisposition, and being *born this way*. This topic arose during several interview questions, as previously discussed regarding the cultural shift away from homosexuality being the result of abuse. As a spiritual issue, the doctrine of the Assemblies of God purports that the conviction and recognition of the need for change comes through the Holy Spirit and that true spiritual change cannot occur apart from God.

The idea of change creates a dilemma that pastors reported when asked what issues they have experienced regarding the acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ. Three pastors reported

an *inevitable clash* between traditional church doctrine and people who identify as LGBTQ being involved in church. Pippen (2021) attributed the dissension to core conflicting theological values and the contrast in values regarding moral, social, cultural, and traditional family values.

It is difficult for pastors to care about people spiritually and convey the joy and freedom that comes with Biblical truth when other churches offer what appears to be theologically sound teachings that purport an easier path that often does not involve change. One pastor referred to the leaders of those churches as *unprepared people who do not know, study, or preach the Word of God*.

Some pastors succumb to the pressure and compromise their foundational beliefs, as reported by five pastors who said they know of traditional Pentecostal churches that have compromised their doctrine and become *liberal churches*. Other pastors reported experiencing conflict with judgmental elders and parishioners, or having to combat the image portrayed by radical Christians that give Christianity a *bad name*. These reports are consistent with Monohan's (1999) findings that demands on pastors are extensive and confusing.

Churches compromising foundational beliefs is concerning due to the indication in research that such actions are ineffective long-term and tend to create operational issues. Michael Smith (2000) explored the results of a Presbyterian church that violated denominational policy and voted to instate a well-liked lesbian into the position of elder. The result was that 43 members left the church, the church lost 12 pledges worth \$15,817, and decreased in financial mission support and giving was noted.

A major distinction was made throughout the interviews of the current study. Participants emphasized the difference between same-sex attraction and acting on the temptation. Pastors reported believing that temptation was without consequence, but acting on those temptations

would be sinful. This is consistent with the study by Bucher (2016), who differentiated between attraction and behavior, reported homosexuality as sinful, and emphasized that issues should be approached with truth, gentleness, and love (Bucher, 2016).

The deliberation of temptation and action is important because it could determine the involvement a person who identifies as LGBTQ can have in the church. Four pastors reported disallowing people who identify as LGBTQ to serve in leadership positions in the church, and two of those four pastors reported disallowing membership. One pastor referenced that leadership and membership were permissible if a person was not actively pursuing or engaging in a same-sex relationship.

When questioned about situations pastors have experienced in their churches regarding the acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ, participants identified secondary issues that they have experienced concerning ministering to this population. These issues could be categorized as mental health issues, abuse, and potential dangerousness.

Five pastors reported dealing with mental health issues, including gender dysphoria, addiction, trauma, and relationship issues because of their sexual identity. Regarding the latter, pastors reported that they have counseled people who have suffered broken family relationships because they are part of the LGBTQ community. Pastors reported that it is common for them to counsel people who lack a support system, suffer adjustment issues, and experience homelessness.

These reports are consistent with research indicating pastor training has grown to ministering to individuals' mental and emotional health. Openshaw and Harr (2009) found that clergy are often the first to be made aware of mental health issues. The primary support for those struggling with mental health issues and are often the liaison between people who identify as

LGBTQ and the human service system. Clergy disclosed that members of their congregations often request help regarding mental health issues and attempt to help within the limits of their knowledge (Openshaw & Harr, 2009).

Abuse was another secondary issue that pastors identified counseling as part of their ministries. Although abuse is not viewed as the cause of homosexuality, pastors revealed abuse related to same-sex relationships as an issue in their congregations. Two pastors spoke in detail of church leaders *grooming* same-sex people who were significantly younger. The pastors spoke of leading their churches through trying situations while attempting to prioritize everyone's best spiritual interest. One pastor reported that investigating the situation revealed the abuser as a victim.

Other secondary issues disclosed when pastors were asked about situations they have experienced in their churches regarding accepting people who identify as LGBTQ include concerns regarding potential danger. Nine pastors expressed concern about the safety of their churches. Three pastors expressed concern about *radical* behavior, and three pastors expressed concern about militant behavior of the LGBTQ community. Pastors are concerned about *radical extremists* and how militant and influential they will become. One pastor stated that LGBTQ organizations are highly funded and could be highly funded and could threaten churches' current freedoms.

To a lesser degree, participants expressed concern about *ulterior motives* and being *set up*. One pastor reported his technical team was asked if his church was *LGBTQ-friendly*. Stories in the media of lawsuits against Christians for not providing services that conflict with their beliefs have reportedly perpetuated concerns in the church. Several pastors who expressed concern

acknowledged that some people *live life* and want to *love whom they love*; they are of no concern in terms of safety.

The fifth theme that was identified when pastors were asked about their experiences in their churches in terms of acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ was relationships. Seven pastors reported that protecting their relationships was of utmost importance. Five pastors expressed concern that they did not want to appear *unkind, unloving, intolerant, hateful, homophobic, transphobic, not understanding*, or as *not listening*. One pastor reported being guarded about the subject, and two pastors reported that they do not know what to say so they do not say anything. One pastor reported not wanting to be hated for speaking truths, and another stated that he wants to be popular but not compromise.

This is congruent with research by Joshua Stone (2022), who *unbundles* terms and identifies a lack of universal theological definitions, specifically regarding gender, as it aligns with Biblical principles. Another study found conversations about roles and practices difficult (Harris, Yancey, Cole, Cressy, Smith, Herridge, Ziegler, West & Wills, 2021). Bucher (2016) conducted a study with youth pastors and found that they desire to know a proper language to communicate respectfully.

One pastor stated that the church is in *unchartered territory*. He talked of historical civil rights movements and stated that there has never been a level of violence in society now and that the church supported previous civil rights issues. Another pastor stated that there are not multiple generations of people who identify as LGBTQ in the church, so even though pastors have experienced some situations, there are not many. A third pastor stated that the church *lacks exposure* and *will do better with experience*. Two pastors said that they trust God to get them *through the moment*.

Discussion of Research Question Five

The fifth research question stated, “What approaches have credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God found that work to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)?” This research question was adapted into an interview question that read “What approaches have worked to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as LGBTQ?” Three themes that emerged from this question were relationships, scripture, and church governance, each with subcategories.

The first theme that was identified from the responses to this interview question was relationships. Pastors described general approaches, *Fruit of the Spirit* and similar approaches, relationship approaches of friendship and discipleship, and effective relationship approaches expressed with negative terminology. All twelve participants identified protecting relationships as an effective approach with people in the church who identify as LGBTQ. Accepting and respecting the person despite their lifestyle, appreciating and celebrating everyone, treating everyone honorably and welcoming, behaving like Jesus, and seeing people *through God’s eyes* were all general relationship approaches that pastors identified as effective when interacting with people who identify as LGBTQ. These traits are consistent with Bassett, Baldwin, Tammara, Mackmer, Mundig, Wareing and Tschorke (2002) research that indicates all individuals should be valued regardless of sexual orientation.

Grace, kindness, niceness, truth, honesty, genuine and authentic, *Fruit of the Spirit*, and love were all approaches identified as being important components of building effective relationships with people who identify as LGBTQ in the church. Eleven participants responded with answers that referred to loving people, loving God, the love of God, people loving God, and

love for people who mistreat those who identify as LGBTQ. It is understandable that pastors, having gone through Bible school, would identify love as a key approach in relationships since it is one of the *Fruit of the Spirit* and I Corinthians 13:13 talks of faith, hope and love and states “the greatest of these is love” (Bible, 1971/2020).

Building relationships through friendship and discipleship was another approach that participants reported to be effective. Pastors identified typical qualities in friendships, such as communication, listening, serving, and attempting to understand one another. Michael Smith (2000) determined that their relationships with their pastors are key to the LGBTQ community feeling accepted in church.

Five participants identified that helping the person who identifies as LGBTQ to *fit in*, participate, and establish an inclusive environment was important. This is consistent with research that indicates Christians who identify as LGBTQ desire church involvement and not just attendance. In a study of 16 participants whose ages were between 14 and 23, four reported wanting to explore “affirming faith communities” (Dahl & Galliher, 2010). Hope, a participant in the study by Michael Burk (1998), had experienced conflict within the church yet maintained that relationships with people and the church were essential.

Four participants reported establishing relationships strong enough to express concern about the destructive lifestyle to those who identify as LGBTQ as being effective. Participants reported concerns regarding physical health, have helped *untangle* how they determined their sexuality, and asked how they think God feels about their lifestyle. One pastor disclosed that his effectiveness was contingent upon learning from his mistakes.

Three participants stated that they have realized that it is important to protect and advocate for people at church who identify as LGBTQ. Two pastors disclosed that they identified a need

to have attendants in their church parking lots to protect people from hurtful comments and physical danger. Another pastor said that he publicly announced that he has advocated for the right of people who identify as LGBTQ to be in church. This pastor's actions are consistent with a study's findings that leadership and trust are key for a church to survive conflict (Smith, 2000).

The second theme that emerged from this interview question was approaches from scripture. Eight pastors reported that an effective approach was to help people who identify as LGBTQ to *work and walk out their salvation*. This is consistent with the findings of Cadge and Wildeman (2008), who interviewed 30 pastors from the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran denominations. A Methodist minister noted he challenged congregants to *wrestle* and *journey* to their determinations.

Two pastors spoke of everyone having a *sinful nature* and sin being an *abomination*. Angel Collie (2022) wrote a monologue at the beginning of her study and reported being referred to as an *abomination* going to hell. The term abomination is used throughout scripture in reference to sin (Bible, 1971/2020), but the use of the term in reference to a person was unfounded. The idea of sin being an abomination but the sinner not being an abomination does lend support to the concept of loving the sinner but not the sin, even though research reports that church attempts to distinguish between loving the person and hating the behavior have been largely unsuccessful (Bassett, Baldwin, Tammara, Mackmer, Mundig, Wareing, & Tschorke, 2002).

Eleven pastors spoke of the hope that people who identify as LGBTQ in their churches would *receive salvation* and *be born again*. They stated that *Jesus died for everyone*, everyone *belongs to the Lord*, is *redeemable*, and are *spiritual beings*. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Marquardt (2014), where all participants were part of the LGBTQ community and reported both sexuality and spirituality being integral parts of their personhood.

One pastor specified that he defended the trinity and identified that people are a *triune self*. He said that as God is a trinity of *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, people are a triune of spirit, soul, and body. This pastor explained that when a person receives salvation, their spirit is immediately transformed, but the transformation of the soul and body takes a lifetime. Five pastors reported that true life change only happens through God and the Holy Spirit, and four pastors stated that focusing on the gospel, holiness, the kingdom, studying the Bible, and praying with people who identify as LGBTQ are effective ways to maintain relationships. Two pastors identified that through relationships, pastors can offer for *old things to pass away*, and one pastor expressed the responsibility to provide opportunities to *live a different story*.

Nine pastors used negative terminology, including six pastors who reported that it is not beneficial to identify people by their mistakes, and four pastors said not to judge. Six pastors said that sins should not be separated into levels, making one worse than another, while one pastor identified that scripture separates sin into levels. He cited John 19:11 as saying, "...he who delivered me to you has the greater sin" (Bible, 1971/2020). Moore (2022) identified homosexuality as a sin but also explored theologies regarding degrees of sin.

Other negative language reports of effectiveness included one pastor stating that it is not effective to call anyone a sinner, another participant said that it is not effective to *pray the gay away*, and a third pastor emphasized that there are *no second-class citizens*. One pastor stressed that it is not acceptable to ignore the parts of scripture that are not to one's liking. Another pastor stated that one should not try to *win the world*, but rather *win souls* to be effective.

The third theme that was identified from responses of pastors when asked what approaches they have found to be effective with leading in the acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ is church governance. One pastor reported that as the level of responsibility increases, so do the

requirements, and another pastor reported implementing background checks for all leaders. Two pastors reported modifying bylaws and establishing a standard of conduct to convey expectations and consistency across situations. One of the two pastors stated that he had it written in their bylaws that he would only perform wedding ceremonies for members of the church and that the church premises and property could only be rented by members. Since his church does not allow people who identify as LGBTQ to be formal members, this eliminates the issue of same-sex marriage for him.

When considering responses to each interview question, all participants reported not allowing people who identify as LGBTQ to become church members or serve in leadership positions. For this specific question, two participants reported disallowing membership and leadership of those who identify as LGBTQ, and two pastors reported allowing baptism. Not allowing church membership and not having an official standard were included in concerns regarding social justice, civil rights, and mental health that were reported in conversations during a study conducted by Harris, Yancey, Cole, Cressy, Smith, Herridge, Ziegler, West, and Willis (2021).

Three pastors reported asking questions about what led them to church, and one pastor said that the church needs to maintain perspective in that the LGBTQ community is not trying to prohibit churches from meeting. The conundrum is that people who identify as LGBTQ want to be more involved than just church attendance, as reported by Dahl and Galliher (2010), and pastors are able to lead their churches within the parameters of their spiritual beliefs without the potential of being accused of discrimination. Wilkins, Wellman, Toosi, Miller, Lisnek, and Martin (2022) called this a “zero-sum relationship.” They reported that cisgender and

heterosexual individuals were more likely than other groups to report believing that Christians and LGBTQ community were in a zero-sum relationship.

Five participants reported that they give opportunities for people who identify as LGBTQ to *experience Jesus* and the *Holy Spirit*. One participant said that he views church as a *spiritual hospital*, and another reported church as a *golden opportunity*. Participants stated that pastors are responsible for being prophetic to the church and community and to support pastors. Two pastors said that they had led confused parishioners to clarity, and one pastor stated that the church needs to be a safe place for people to share their stories.

Pastors reported that it is not easy to lead the church through such controversial situations as people who identify as LGBTQ in the church. Two pastors said that a *unified truth* is crucial, and one pastor reported that transparency helps to build the trust necessary to be effective in church leadership. Another pastor stated that there is no way pastors can survive ministry if they do not maintain confidentiality and get used to having *targets on their backs*. One pastor identified that the most difficult part is making individualized decisions.

The general findings of effective approaches to leading people who identify as LGBTQ were consistent with the research. Nauss (1995) indicated a pastor must be “equally discerning and flexible” when determining skill sets for specific situations. He concluded that skills need to be matched to circumstances (Nauss, 1995). McCormack (2022) conducted a longitudinal project and determined that diversity and acceptance grow when leaders are willing to be uncomfortable, address challenging situations, preach the gospel while teaching unity, prioritize relationships, and identify pastors who are willing to lead through transitions.

One pastor reported that he attended a seminar where the speaker recommended not using common phrases such as *love the sinner, hate the sin*. He stated that the presenter said that

people who are LGBTQ internalize these phrases. Other reports of common phrases included *not cleaning the fish before it is caught* and *not beating people over the head with the Bible*.

One pastor reported not hoping that nobody would come. The participant's intended message was that pastors should not hope to avoid the situation. Stidham (2022) found that Christians hesitate to engage in spiritual conversations out of fear of not knowing how to respond, concerns that they may not respond compassionately, not knowing how to disagree gently, and concerns of lacking knowledge to respond Biblically. He found that these fears were improved, and they felt better equipped to engage in conversations regarding sexuality and marriage, homosexuality, transgenderism, human dignity, race, and justice (Stidham, 2022).

Other findings of this current study that generated results using negative terminology included not embracing or condoning the lifestyle, not compromising and preaching to the crowd, and not wasting time with unreasonable people or being legalistic. Each of these findings have been discussed in previous sections of this report.

Discussion of Research Question Six

The sixth research question stated, "What do credentialed pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God believe the organization could do to help prepare them to spiritually lead those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer?" It was adapted into an interview question that read, "What do you believe the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) could do to help prepare pastors to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?" All twelve participants answered this question, with several offering multiple answers. The answers generated four themes, including procedural responses, interpersonal relationship responses, anticipated issue responses, and what the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) can do expressed with negative terminology.

A couple of pastors expressed concern that they are not confident that beliefs regarding people who identify as LGBTQ in the church are consistent among the network. Overall, pastors indicated that they desire a stated theology, including a central truth that is based on *God's perspective* and a Biblical standard. They want a formal statement regarding same-sex marriage and a formal statement that People who identify as LGBTQ are welcome.

Nine participants requested trainings, three of whom desired speakers who can tell their stories and recommend respectful and effective ways of approaching situations involving people who identify as LGBTQ. In relation to the Bible college training that pastors reported, this is congruent with Revelation 12:11 that states that people overcome by Jesus' blood and their testimonies (Bible, 1971/2020).

Two people requested "how-to" guides on grace, love, truth, and communication when approaching people who identify as LGBTQ. Other pastors suggested resource compilations and online resources, and one pastor suggested that the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) encourage doctoral publications. One pastor suggested the PMN raise credentialing standards to ensure a solid theology, and another suggested establishing discipleship groups.

The second theme that emerged when pastors were asked what the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) could do involved personal relationship responses. Eight pastors contributed suggestions in this area. Five pastors expressed a need for improvement in interpersonal communication, including four who expressed a desire for a safe place to explore truth without fearing conflict. One pastor suggested interdenominational and intradenominational collaboration opportunities. He said that he believes there would be less of a threat of retribution if pastors could have safe conversations with pastors from districts other than their own.

Listening was another area of communication in which pastors suggested the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) could help. A couple of pastors identified that by the time a person progresses to the point of superintendent, that person has been out of church ministry for 10-15 years. Pastors said that leadership happens from the *bottom up* and not the *top down* and that they need to listen to those at the *grassroots and ground levels*.

A couple of participants stated that they wished the network was more encouraging and affirming. One pastor said that avoiding lawsuits and, in this society, staying out of social media scrutiny is worth acknowledging. Two identified that pastors are broken people in need of healing and compassion, and one pastor said that it would be nice to know that the PMN leaders are praying for them and seeking God on their behalf. One pastor said that he wished that they were more loving.

Other pastors desired more direct communication from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN). Two pastors expressed frustration at the lack of availability and unresponsiveness to emails and phone calls. One pastor suggested staggering days off, breaks, and daily hours to make human contact more likely when pastors reach out to the PMN.

The third theme that was identified from pastor responses to the question asking what the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) could do to help prepare pastors to lead churches and minister to people who identify as LGBTQ included concerns regarding anticipated issues. Pastors reported that they do not feel ready for what is coming, that there will be a day when it will be impossible to say nothing, and that they need to be talking because *the opposition* is talking.

One pastor reported that the network needs something but does not know what that would be. Five participants reported they would benefit from discussions regarding anticipated issues,

and half of them suggested that the PMN develop a plan. One pastor emphasized that considering the speed of changes in society, it is imperative that the plan be reviewed and revised often.

One pastor complimented the PMN for their communication regarding regional issues and wanted more communication regarding global issues and actions happening behind the scenes. Another pastor suggested that the PMN fight to protect public schools and lead in revival, and one pastor expressed fear of *backlash* for testimonies of life transformation that do not *fit the narrative*.

A quarter of the participants feared that same-sex marriage and wedding issues would divide the church. Pastors anticipate a time when they will have to respond to same-sex legally married couples in the church, and they question how network and denominational leaders will want them to respond. What do they do if a same-sex couple becomes spiritually convicted for their lifestyle? Do they recommend the couple to live married but celibate? Do they recommend legal divorce? Does the denomination not recognize the legal marriage as valid since their doctrine states that marriage is between one man and one woman?

Pastors are looking for direction from the PMN regarding how to respond to these situations. Two pastors expressed concern that they will not have direction from the PMN when needed, yet their credentials could be in jeopardy. They fear unintentionally responding to situations in a manner contrary to the preferences of the network and *losing face* or losing their credentials. According to Mohling (2021), these concerns seemed warranted, and found that superficial responses leave pastors underprepared and parishioners under-served, which resulted in frustration for all involved.

Ten pastors responded using negative terminology. Recommendations included not doing what is popular, not being afraid to address anticipated issues, and not wavering in truth or

diminishing the standard. Four pastors said not to *kickback*, *de-credential*, or allow pastors to *lose face* when trying to navigating issues; one participant said to not be *hypocritical* or *legalistic*. One pastor said not to develop relationship ministry groups because they did not work in the past. Another pastor discouraged developing a creed and said that nobody can *dictate righteousness*. Two pastors do not want the network to be *reactionary*.

An area where there seems to be disagreement among pastors in the PMN involves sin. Most pastors reported that *sin is sin* and that one type is no worse than another. Another pastor disputed that there are levels of sin and cited John 19:11 as saying, "...he who delivered me to you has the greater sin" (Bible, 1971/2020) as the justification for his belief.

Discussion of Additional Information

The final interview question, "Do you have anything that you would like to add regarding this topic?" was asked. All 12 participants offered additional comments.

Three pastors complimented the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) for their leadership training and for not pressuring pastors to make public statements and declarations. One pastor said that the PMN has been better in the past five than the previous fifty years by not focusing on *creating good churches*, but rather on *pastor care* and *creating good and healthy leaders*.

One pastor stated that this being uncharted territory and being the first time that the church did not support the civil rights movement, the pastors and leaders need to work together to be proactive and not reactionary. All 12 participants thanked the researcher and commented that *we have to answer the questions*, and three pastors reported that this is the *number one issue*.

Limitations

Some limitations are intrinsic to generic qualitative inquiry and were unavoidable. Social science agendas, interpersonal dynamics, risks, and desirability of responses can influence the

interviewer and interviewee (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The authors also identify five “contingent problems” that are possible transcribing issues: the interviewer not being represented accurately or taken out of context, the lack of including utterances that represent the interaction, how the omission or lack of specificity of analytic observations represents the interview, the clarity of describing the initial greeting and the set-up of the interview, and the culmination of these issues failing to consider the interview as an interaction (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Although actions were taken to curtail these limitations, they are unlikely to be eliminated.

As with any self-report measure, results are limited to individuals’ subjective experiences and perceptions. Anonymity is not possible with interviews, so the participant may, knowingly or unknowingly, answer based on what is perceived to be socially acceptable or favorable.

Participants were volunteers whose schedules allowed them to meet and participate in the study.

Interviewer bias is a limitation of generic qualitative inquiry. The researcher could unintentionally display facial expressions or body language that could influence a participant’s response. Interpretation error is a general risk in that the researcher could misunderstand or misinterpret information, even when including clarifying measures.

To control for the vast theological differences and denominational practices and to increase practical application, this study focused on pastors of the Assemblies of God (AG). All participants in this study were credentialed through the PMN, which serves Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and parts of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Some of the most significant limitations of this study are the leadership positions, denominational restrictions, and geographical representations. The results may not generalize to other church leadership positions, religions, or geographic areas.

There may be factors specific to people who choose the specific AG theology. The AG church was founded in 1914 and, within two years, identified 16 foundational truths (General Council, 2023). This original document did not specifically address denominational beliefs regarding the LGBTQ community. The AG church adopted a formal statement in 2014, one hundred years after being founded, declaring four formal positions on homosexuality. They defined marriage as a union between a woman and man, identified sexual acts outside of marriage as sinful, deemed sexual identity as biologically determined and discouraged any attempt to alter biological gender, and stated that sexual orientation should be limited to opposite genders and same-sex attractions should be resisted (General Council, 2014). By controlling doctrinal fluctuations to increase practical application, the pastors participating in this study would likely concur with the AG doctrinal stance regarding homosexuality, limiting its generalizability.

As with theology, there may be generalizability issues regarding geography. All participants in this study are members of the PMN, which serves Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and West Virginia. There may be factors specific to people who choose to live in this geographical location, which can also be true for those who live in the Midwestern United States. The results may not be generalizable to other church leadership positions, religions, or geographical areas.

Gender and age were other limitations to the generalizability of this study. The Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) has male and female credentialed lead pastors, but all twelve participants who responded to the invitation were male. Regarding ages, ten of the twelve participants were between 50 and 69, with one outlier on each of the two ends. The participants' average number of years in credentialed ministry was 26.25, indicating that the timing of their

training would have been prior to the cultural shifts that have brought the subject of people who identify as LGBTQ in the church to the attention of denominational leadership.

Implications for Action

The findings of this study should contribute information to the current research and knowledge of the self-perceived preparedness of pastors in the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God church to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals.

Pastors have governing power and opportunities to lead their congregations in sensitivity and spiritually lead people who identify as LGBTQ. The Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) has the opportunity to lead, support, and provide resources for the pastors in their district. The researcher agrees with current research that churches should be a safe place of healing, love, acceptance, and compassion (Yarhouse & Carr, 2011). The following recommendations are offered to lead pastors and Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) administrators, leaders, and policymakers:

1. Communicate. If leadership goes from the *bottom up* and pastors want their governing organizations to know the issues at the *ground level*, they have a responsibility to keep their governing organizations current. The governing organizations, too, bear the responsibility of staying current, listening to the needs and issues of their pastors, and supporting them through encouragement, prayer, and resources. Newsletters, mass emails, notifications of global issues and *behind-the-scenes* actions, and increased availability for individualized communication should be considered.

2. Plan. PMN leaders need to have difficult discussions amongst themselves and with their pastors. Pastors need to have difficult discussions with their boards and in their congregations. The more discussions occur, and expectations are clarified, the more secure and effective everyone's ministry will be. Develop formal statements that everyone is welcome and address anticipated issues, as well as governmental standards and qualifications for church positions. Network and church plans should be reviewed regularly to keep current with the ever-changing society. The autonomous nature of individual churches and the absence of covenants to create consistency among practices can lead people into situations that do not meet expectations of acceptance and could result in harm (Welch-Pomerantz, 2022).
3. Training. The Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) coordinates multiple conferences, seminars, retreats, and other learning opportunities that could host speakers to tell their stories, recommend approaches, and help develop resources. Pastors can do the same at the church level.
4. Resources. The Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) leaders and lead pastors should work together to establish *hard copy* and online resources for use and consultation. It would be beneficial to collaborate with individuals who have experienced life transformation and can tell their stories and recommend approaches. Encourage pastors, as lifelong learners, to focus on this area of ministry for their publications.
5. Theology. Establish a stated theology with a central truth. Maintain a Biblical standard that is based on God's perspective without *preaching to the crowd* and without compromise.

6. Love. Love each other. Love each other through difficult discussions, differing opinions, and poor decisions. Do not forget to convey that love to each other. The greatest of all the *Fruit of the Spirit* is love (Bible, 1971/2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher believes that the related literature and the results of the current study indicate that further research is warranted. his research study has laid a foundation for future inquiries into how to best care for pastors and minister to people in the church who identify as LGBTQ. Although pastors, district leaders, and people who identify as LGBTQ each have their perspectives, beliefs, and experiences, working together proactively to establish standards and practices would help clarify rationales, expectations, and effectiveness. Based on research findings, recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. Transformation Testimonials. Data generated by people from the LGBTQ community regarding their stories, what was effective, ineffective, and recommended approaches would benefit pastors, district leaders, and those who determine denominational policies and practices. Direct information from people with experience as part of the LGBTQ community would give the best guidance to communicate respectfully and effectively. Testimonials would be beneficial for direction on effective approaches to take during the process between church involvement and spiritual conviction.
2. Culture. Although research including people's stories of their church experiences exists, this is an ever-changing society. Research of people's experiences will need to continue to stay current regarding societal progression and provide information for continued church and individual growth. Rogers (2021) conducted a study in which participants did

not realize that their opinions were changing and that they were becoming more accepting of homosexual individuals.

3. Sin. There were differing opinions regarding whether there are levels of sin. There were varying *born this way* and *sin nature* perspectives, too. Further exploration of pastoral beliefs within specific districts and denominations would help establish a unified standard or at least bring awareness to the differences to increase understanding amongst one another. Studying the concepts of sexual attraction and sexual action could be enlightening regarding coping mechanisms and lifestyle changes.
4. Zero-Sum. The concept that granting one group of people's rights robs another group of their rights is tricky to navigate. Further research, particularly regarding how this applies to the church and people who identify as LGBTQ, could produce results that clarify perspectives and provide a foundation for mutual understanding.
5. Terminology. There may be some significance between opinions and approaches used to lead to sensitivity toward people who identify as LGBTQ and the use of positive and negative terminology. Exploring terminology and opinions could identify discrepancies and correlations between what one says and purports to believe.
6. Narratives. Research regarding media influences and societal messages, particularly regarding masculine females and feminine males, may disclose how individuals and society are affected. This information could be valuable for helping to clarify confusion about gender identity and sexuality.
7. Identity. It seems common for someone who identifies as LGBTQ, that is their primary identity. In contrast, people who are heterosexual seem to identify multiple personality traits and interests as their primary identifying qualities. If these perceptions are true and

people from the heterosexual community lose one of their top identifying features, they have only lost one part of their identity. If a person who identifies as LGBTQ loses their primary identity, they seem to have lost more than the heterosexual person. Exploring this concept could be influential regarding the differences between ministering to people who identify as heterosexual and those who identify as LGBTQ.

Summary

Chapter Five consisted of a discussion of the results of the study, which was to examine the self-perceived preparedness and training of lead pastors from the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN) of the Assemblies of God church to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals.

The chapter began with an introduction, followed by a section stating the problem statement, a section stating the research questions, a discussion section for each interview question, limitations, implications for action, and recommendations for future research. The researcher elaborated on the data generated by the current study and compared the data to existing research. This chapter concluded with a summary.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



www.marshall.edu

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

February 7, 2023

Tom Hisiro, EdD
Leadership Studies Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 2012708-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Hisiro:

Protocol Title: [2012708-1] Pastor self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God

Site Location: MU

Submission Type: New Project APPROVED

Review Type: Expedited Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.110(a)(6)&(7), the above study was granted Expedited approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair. An annual update will be required on February 7, 2024 for administrative review and approval. The update must include the Annual Update Form and current educational certificates for all investigators involved in the study. All amendments must be submitted for approval by the IRB Chair prior to implementation and a closure request is required upon completion of the study.

This study is for student Tina L. Boswell-Stickley.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/ Behavioral) Coordinator Lindsey Taylor at (304) 696-6322 or l.taylor@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bruce F. Day'.

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B: Amended IRB Approval Letter



www.marshall.edu

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

February 23, 2023

Tom Hisiro, EdD
Leadership Studies Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 2012708-2

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Hisiro:

Protocol Title: [2012708-2] Pastor self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God

Site Location: MU

Submission Type: Amendment/Modification APPROVED

Review Type: Expedited Review

The amendment to the above listed study was approved today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair. This amendment is a change in the recruitment method, a change in the target participant pool, and a minor change in the wording of the procedures in the Abstract.

This study is for student Tina L. Boswell-Stickley.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Lindsey Taylor at (304) 696-6322 or l.taylor@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Dear Pastors and Youth Pastors of the PMN:

You are invited to participate in a study titled Pastor self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors and youth pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God. The study is being conducted by Tom Hisiro and Tina Boswell-Stickley from Marshall University and has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirements for Tina Boswell-Stickley. You are receiving this email because you are on the PMN listserv and so are believed to meet the qualifications of being at least 18 years of age, an ordained pastor, and are currently a pastor or youth pastor of a church in the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God. Interested participants will be asked to share their perceptions, experiences, opinions, and needs in a 30-minute semi-structured interview. Interviews will be conducted in person and will happen at an agreed upon time and place. Interviews will be coded to protect participants' identities, audio recorded, transcribed, and included in a final dissertation report. Each audio recording will be erased once it is transcribed. A copy of the results will be emailed to you upon completion of the research project. Upon conclusion of the study, all participants will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card.

There are no foreseeable risks aside from possible discomfort from recalling negative experiences. Participation is strictly voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by simply notifying the researcher.

If you have any questions regarding the study, you may contact Tom Hisiro at (304) 746-2516, or Tina Stickley at (301) 268-9737.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

If you choose to participate, please email your preferred communication and available times for the interview to the password protected email of Tina Boswell-Stickley at stickley2023@gmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tina Boswell-Stickley

Appendix D: Communication Log

COMMUNICATION LOG

[illegible]

Appendix E: Confirmation Email

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Dear _____:

I am writing to confirm our interview tomorrow at (time) at (location) regarding the study titled Pastor self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God.

Please let me know if this is no longer possible. Thank you for your participation and I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Tina Boswell-Stickley

/

**Appendix F: Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study Pastor self-perceived
preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and**

spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors of

the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God

Tom Hisiro, Ed.D., Principal Investigator

Tina L. Boswell-Stickley, Doctoral Candidate

Approved on:	02/07/23
Study number:	2012708



Marshall University IRB

Key Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. Research studies are designed to gain scientific knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Possible benefits include, but are not limited to, positive emotions from recalling life experiences and for furthering knowledge by participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision and ask your research investigator or research staff to explain any words or information that you do not understand. The following is a short summary to help you decide why you may or may not want to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later in this form.

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the current body of research regarding pastor preparedness and training for serving the LGBTQ community. As a pastor at the Assemblies of God (AG) church within the Potomac Ministry Network (PMN), the study will examine your self-perceptions regarding your preparedness and training to : (a) model sensitivity to the LGBTQ population and (b) spiritually lead members of your congregation and church attendees. You will be asked to complete a short Demographic Questionnaire and then participate in a semi-structured, audio- recorded interview that will last approximately 30 minutes.

The audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed for analysis. After transcription, audio-recorded interviews will be erased.

The primary risk of participation is possible discomfort from recalling negative experiences. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by simply notifying the researcher.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

About 10-20 people will take part in this study. A total of 20 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study.

What Is Involved In This Research Study?

After providing Informed Consent, you will be asked to complete a short Demographic Questionnaire. Your Informed Consent document and your Demographic Questionnaire will be collected by the researcher and assigned a numeric code (participant number) to protect you against identifiability and to maintain confidentiality. You will then be asked to participate in a semistructured interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed on a password protected device. Once transcribed, all audio recordings will be erased. Participation in the study is voluntary and your participation in the study can be discontinued at any time.

One week after your interview, you will be sent a follow-up Final Comment email which will offer you an opportunity to provide additional comments regarding the study or interview questions. Once the interview transcripts and the Final Comments are compiled, data will be coded, analyzed, and stored in a secure manner to maintain confidentiality and all audio recordings will be erased.

Upon completion of the study, you will receive an email providing you with a summary of the results of the study and, to show appreciation for your participation, your participant number will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card. RANDOM.ORG will be used to select the winner of the drawing."

What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?

You may choose not to take part, or you may leave the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study, we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

The Principal Investigator or Doctoral Candidate may stop you from taking part in this study at any time if he/she believes it is in your best interest; if you do not follow the study rules; or if the study is stopped.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep our study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If

we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the study costs, including any study tests, supplies and procedures related directly to the study, will be paid for by the study.

Will You Be Paid For Participating?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study. Upon completion of the study, to show appreciation for your participation, your participant number will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card. One gift card will be selected by random.com and the recipient will receive it in the mail via the United States Postal Service.

What About Identifiable Private Information?

Identifiers will be removed from the identifiable private information, and after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional consent from you.

Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the Principal Investigator, Tom Hisiro at his office (304)746-2516 or on his cell at (304)964-5539. You should also call the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research. ○ The research staff cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURES

You agree to take part in this study and confirm that you are 18 years of age or older. You have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered. By signing this consent form, you are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled.

Subject Name (Printed)

Subject Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date

Appendix G: Demographic Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Pastor self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God

Participant #: _____ Position: _____

Years in Current Position: _____ Total years of credentialed ministry: _____

Age (circle one): Under 29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89

Gender:

_____ Male _____ Female _____ Nonbinary

Ethnicity:

_____ Caucasian
_____ African American
_____ Asian
_____ Middle Eastern
_____ Hispanic
_____ Other - _____

Marital Status:

_____ Married
_____ Divorced/Separated
_____ Widowed
_____ Single

Please check your current State/District of Employment:

_____ Maryland
_____ Virginia
_____ West Virginia
_____ Washington DC

Please check the one that most closely describes your church's geographical area:

_____Urban
_____Suburban
_____Rural

Church Average Sunday Attendance:_____

Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Q1: What training have you received to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?
- Q2: How prepared do you feel to spiritually lead people who identify as LGBTQ?
- Q3: How do you feel attitudes change toward a person in church once identified as LGBTQ?
- Q4: What situations have you experienced in your church regarding acceptance of people from the LGBTQ community?
- Q5: What approaches have worked to foster an atmosphere of acceptance toward people who identify as LGBTQ?
- Q6: What do you believe the Potomac Ministry Network could do to help prepare pastors to minister to people who identify as LGBTQ?
- Q7: Do you have anything that you would like to add regarding this topic?

Appendix I: Final Comment Email

Dear_____:

Thank you for participating in the study titled Pastor self-perceived preparedness and training to model and lead sensitivity in their congregations and spiritually lead LGBTQ individuals: A qualitative study of pastors of the Potomac Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God.

Data will be collected until completion of the final interview. Please feel free to email any additional information that you believe would be helpful.

Thank you, again!

Sincerely,

Tina Boswell-Stickley