

PhD thesis

A Pentecostal perspective on church leadership: a study on church leadership conversion among young Pentecostal Latinos/as, in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God

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**A Pentecostal Perspective on Church Leadership: A Study on Church Leadership
Conversion Among Young Pentecostal Latinos/as,
in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God**

Saturnino Gonzalez

PhD Stage

Abstract

This thesis focuses on young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials who are members of the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God. The aim of this study is to describe, analyse, evaluate and understand Pentecostal leadership by highlighting factors that led 30 of these youths to become church leaders by obtaining credentials as ministers with the Assemblies of God. The research seeks to uncover the distinctive aspects of the Pentecostal Ethos that captivated these young people, motivating them to pursue church leadership. While there is substantial research on church leadership, there is a gap in studying it from the perspective of young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials. Therefore, what factors contribute to church leadership conversion among YPLM in the FMD of the A/G?

The methodology employed in this research was qualitative, utilising an inductive investigative path. The researcher spent a year conducting interviews and taking notes. An interpretative approach was used to accumulate descriptions that formed the basis for reflecting on and analysing the experiences of these young people in their decision-making regarding leadership.

The factors contributing to the leadership conversion among young Pentecostal Latino/a millennials in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God include their spiritual experience with God the Holy Spirit, which led to an awareness of being called by God (Supernatural Experience). Their belief in God's on-going involvement in human affairs and the idea that individuals can experience God in a manner similar to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, highlights the impact of Pentecostal teachings and doctrines (Theological Formation Experience). Additionally, the learned experiences, expressions and frustrations within the Pentecostal community reflect the influence of church traditions (Church Traditions Experience). Finally, navigating a diverse social and cultural context while listening and obeying God to fulfil their divine purpose (The Social Impact Experience) plays a significant role.

The main contribution of this research is in Practical Theology/Pentecostal leadership, proposing a Spiritual Leadership Conversion as a form of conversion experience: offering an explanation of leadership conversion among Young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God. These findings have significant implications for the future of the church and presents substantial opportunities for younger generations.

A Pentecostal Perspective on Church Leadership:
A Study on Church Leadership Conversion
Among Young Pentecostal Latinos/as
in The Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God

By
Saturnino Gonzalez
PhD Stage

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of
PhD
In Middlesex University

January 15 2025
Oxford Centre for Missions Studies

DECLARATION

This work has not been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in any candidature for any degree.

Signed  _____ (Candidate)

Date 15-01-2025

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where corrections services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if approved, to be available for photocopying by the British Library, and for Inter – Library Loan, for open access to the Electronic Theses Online Service (EthoS) linked to the British Library, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this work to several people, but first and foremost to my wife Abigail, who was always by my side, encouraging me and believing that this research was worth pursuing. To my entire family who were supportive during these past years, Kevin, Tiffany, Rebeca, Isaiah, Nanette, Sammy, Sienna, and Penelope, I love you, Thank you. This project is also dedicated to the group of young individuals; the cohort who graciously devoted their time to be interviewed. In them, I observed a generation wholeheartedly committed to the mission of God.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God, to the Executive Committee and the District Presbytery, who, from the moment I shared with them the idea and the challenge of embracing this project with a future-oriented perspective, always approved and supported me financially throughout the journey. Thank you.

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I cannot overlook my daughter Nanette, who helped me review the chapters of this thesis, checking my grammar and writing. Finally, I appreciate Victoria S. for reviewing the final manuscript and ensuring that it complied with academic guidelines.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Church leadership within Pentecostal communities is unique. While not the sole criterion, it is based on personal experiences with the Holy Spirit, such as the baptism in the Holy Spirit, sensing “God’s calling” for ministerial service and other spiritual encounters. Such experiences often lead individuals to make lifelong commitments, including embracing a vocational path towards pastoral ordination within the church. It is akin to experiencing a conversion toward leadership within one’s own faith and church community. Although there is substantial research on Pentecostal leadership, there is a gap in studying church leadership dynamics among young Pentecostal Latino millennials. This research aims to identify and assess the multiple factors influencing the decision-making process of young Pentecostal Latino/a millennials (YPLM) pursuing ordination as ministers within the Florida Multicultural District (FMD) of Assemblies of God (AOG).

The thesis builds on Lewis R. Rambo’s concept of conversion, as presented in his work *Understanding Religious Conversion*, where he examines the conversion experience through a religious lens. Expanding on Rambo’s ideas, this study shifts the focus to the process of conversion within the context of Pentecostal leadership among Young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials (YPLM). The primary goal is to analyse the role of conversion as a catalyst in the journey toward religious leadership. By exploring the dynamics within Pentecostal communities, this research demonstrates how conversion not only transforms personal faith but also paves the way for individuals to assume significant leadership roles within the church.

To build on this foundation this chapter is structured to enhance the clarity and comprehension of the thesis project. Firstly, it offers an overview of the study's background, including information about the cohort of YPLM. It delves into the ecclesiastical, theological, and leadership theories prevalent within this group. Secondly, the chapter delineates the problem and identifies the gap that the research aims to address. Thirdly, it presents the research's objectives, along with the central research question and subsidiary questions. Moreover, the chapter emphasises the significance of the study, highlighting its importance for the academic community. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study. Finally, it provides an overview of the thesis structure, offering concise comments on each chapter. Additionally, it includes the theoretical framework of the thesis, and a section dedicated to defining key terms.

1.1 Background to the Study

The narratives from the cohort consistently intertwine their leadership conversion with spiritual encounters related to God's calling. They frequently share how they believed God had guided them through difficult times and obstacles, ultimately revealing His purpose for their lives. Their testimonies emphasise the deep, individual relationship they each has with God. The YPLM leaders in this group believe that God has called the church to emphasise leadership development (Gushiken, 2016). In a Pentecostal setting this must come with a supernatural experience with God, carrying significant weight in determining ministerial opportunities within the fellowship.

Demonstrating this dynamic, one hundred YPLM decided to become credentialed ministers with the AOG based on their individual spiritual experiences thus becoming church leaders within the denomination. They felt a sense of calling. Guinness suggests that a sense of calling fills our lives with unparalleled inspiration and dynamism, shaping them into an enterprise beyond comparison (Guinness, 2003:119). Church leadership

provides individuals unique gifts to bestow upon the world, opportunities to amplify their true selves, and a means to articulate and enrich what they were meant to offer (Benator, 2021:1).

To examine this further the research cohort comprises thirty individuals from the one hundred credentialed YPLM, all under the age of forty. Twenty-eight of them are credentialed, and two in the process of being credentialed.¹ Young Latinos/as between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four make up thirty-three per cent of the total adherence in the fellowship, which is approximately 40,000. However, the percentage of Young Latinos/as applicants in the FMD has never exceeded twenty per cent of the total applicants. Given the regularity of FMD's credential application processes, this research aims to understand the factors influencing these trends.

As members of the Assemblies of God (AOG)² the cohort of YPLM believes in the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit, in calling and equipping individuals for ministry within the church of Jesus Christ. Their understanding of New Testament leadership formation aligns with an apostolic pattern, where the active presence of the Holy Spirit plays a central role in baptising, encouraging and empowering believers to evangelise the world and build the body of Christ. This conviction is explicitly stated in the AOG constitution and bylaws:

That the Assemblies of God exists expressly to give continuing emphasis to this reason for being in the New Testament apostolic pattern by teaching and encouraging believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, which enables them to evangelise in the power of the Spirit with accompanying supernatural signs, adding a necessary dimension to worshipful relationship with God, and enabling them to respond to the full working of the Holy Spirit in expression of fruit and

¹ Both young individuals have already received their credentials by the time this thesis is submitted.

² The General Council of the Assemblies of God was formerly organised in April 2-12, 1914, Hot Springs Arkansas (People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God) McGee 2004.

gifts and ministries as in New Testament times for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Constitution and Bylaws, 2021:9).

This understanding underscores how the topic of becoming a church leader due to spiritual experiences, such as baptised in the Spirit or experiencing the call of God, has sparked widespread conversations in both religious and non-religious circle. While acknowledging the considerable volume of published works devoted to the topic of church leadership, it is important to note that, for the scope of this study, the focus is on highlighting the multiple factors that influence YPLM within the Pentecostal context in relation to their journey toward church leadership.

This journey is rooted in the belief that leaders must be spiritually qualified following a biblical pattern for the overall well-being of the Church (Crossley, 2008). Crossley emphasises the importance of spiritual character in leaders, though not necessarily requiring a vivid experience with the Holy Spirit. However, within the Pentecostal tradition, leadership formation often involves spiritual experiences, such as being baptised in the Spirit and responding to the call of God.

The response to the call of God is reinforced by Jesus' words in John 16:13-14: "When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth... He will bring Glory to me...". God does not call His church to service without equipping it for the task (Wood, 2010). According to Matthew 28:19, the church's purpose is to make disciples, serving as the primary instrument of God's kingdom in human history. The AOG emphasises the leading of individuals by the Spirit within the framework of biblical teachings (McGee, 2004:14). Therefore, this study will explore how these spiritual and doctrinal influences shape the leadership conversion of YPLM within the Pentecostal context.

This group of YPLM has engaged in a multi-step progression, encompassing the following phases:

1. Successful completion of Bible and theology courses offered by a recognised Bible institute.
2. Submission of an official credential application.
3. Fulfilment of a written examination requirement.
4. Participation in a personal interview, conducted by the district credentials committee.
5. Culmination of the journey at the national level, where the AOG, General Council Credentials Committee grants approval or disapproval of their credentials. This approval leads to one of three credential grades: certified, licensed or ordained.

The duration of this entire process varies based on individual circumstances, typically ranging from five to eight years, starting with certification and progressing towards ordination, which represents the highest level attainable. Within this thorough credentialling process, particularly during the interviews, one has the privilege of hearing the narratives and testimonies of these young individuals. These stories reveal the importance they place on the belief that God has called them to be ministers, significantly influencing their decision to pursue the path of becoming credentialed ministers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research is based on a well-known theory, while expanding into a less explored area. The thesis builds on Lewis R. Rambo's concept of conversion, providing a theoretical foundation. Rambo's work, recognised in the field of practical theology, situates this study within a well-established framework, indicating that the research is rooted in existing knowledge and seeks to contribute to it.

By expanding on Rambo's ideas and shifting the focus to Pentecostal leadership conversion, particularly among young Latinos/as in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God, this thesis identifies a gap in the literature. While Rambo's work addresses conversion broadly through a religious lens, this study specifically examines how these conversion experiences influence the development of leaders within this unique context. This shift in focus clearly defines the research problem as understanding the specific outcomes of leadership conversion (**among YPLM**) in a particular religious setting.

With this specific aim the thesis provides an analysis of how these conversion experiences catalyse the journey of young Pentecostal Latino/a leaders toward religious leadership within the Florida Multicultural District. This objective directly addresses the research problem, which seeks to understand the pathways from personal religious experience to leadership roles, offering both a descriptive and analytical approach.

Furthermore, the research problem is explored by examining the unique dynamics within Pentecostal communities. The study delves into specific cultural, social and theological factors that shape how these conversion experiences translate into leadership roles. It also aims to clarify how conversion transforms personal faith into leadership, investigating the mechanisms and conditions under which this transformation occurs.

1.3 Motivation for this Study

The motivation for writing this thesis stems from a deep interest in exploring the distinctive leadership and spiritual dynamics within Pentecostalism **SPECIFICALLY THIS DEMOGRAPHIC OF YPLM**. While Pentecostalism shares a commitment to the Christian faith with other traditions, it differs significantly in its approach to worship, leadership, and the experience of the Holy Spirit. These unique aspects have significant implications for how Pentecostal communities understand and practice their faith.

Pentecostalism's intense, experiential, and culturally integrated approach to faith, characterised by direct supernatural encounters with the Holy Spirit, offers a perspective on religious life that is often underexplored in academic discourse. Against this backdrop, this thesis investigates how supernatural experiences shape individual faith journeys and influence leadership styles and community life within Pentecostal churches.

The research seeks to deepen the understanding of how distinctive expressions of Pentecostal faith affect leadership roles and community structures, contributing to the broader discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in contemporary Christian practice. the goal is to provide valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners, fostering a greater appreciation for the rich diversity within the Christian faith.

1.4 Aim of the Study

Building upon the defined problem statement, this research focuses on key areas. Firstly, it aims to describe and explain the factors contributing YPLM becoming church leaders and ultimately ordained ministers within the Assemblies of God. By doing so, it addresses the existing literature gap on church leadership development among YPLM. Secondly, it aims to present the foundational beliefs and doctrinal teachings within the Pentecostal tradition, which collectively influence the perspective of our YPLM cohort. Thirdly, it examines the social reality experienced by the research cohort and Hispanics in the United States. This exploration enriches the academic discussion by investigating the socio-cultural dynamics and other issues affecting the cohort's experience. Through this research, we strive to understand how their faith, experiences, and unique socio-cultural background have converged to shape their journey towards leadership roles within their Pentecostal community.

1.5 Objectives

To accomplish the study's objective, several goals are proposed. Firstly, the aim is to define and elucidate the concept of leadership conversion for the cohort of YPLM and identify the components that validate this conversion using the data obtained from this research. Secondly, providing an overview of the Pentecostal theological formation of this group of young individuals. Key aspects of this theology include defining the concept of God's call, exploring the interplay between the divine and the human at critical crossroads, and examining the experiences related to the presence of God.

Thirdly, the goal is to delineate specific themes inherent to the ethos of the Pentecostal community and clarify how this shape the formation of church leadership among the cohort. These themes encompass the historical context of credentialing processes, personal experiences with God, levels of religious involvement, challenges within the church context, influential factors, upbringing in Christian households, and any frustrations encountered with church leadership. Lastly, it is important to understand the social context within the United States as it directly influences the Hispanic population and, consequently, this group of young Latinos.

1.6 Research Question

Given the outlined problem and objectives of this study, the primary research question guiding this inquiry is: What factors contribute to leadership conversion among YPLM in the FMD of the AOG? While an explanation of the experience of this group of emerging YPLM will be provided as the research progresses, the initial data indicates a clear connection between supernatural experiences with God the Holy Spirit and church leadership conversion. This group of young Latinos/as remains steadfast in their belief that God has called them to active ministry, thereby influencing their decision to pursue ministry ordination with the FMD of the AOG.

1.6.1 Subordinate Questions

- Are young Pentecostal Latinos/as in accordance with the doctrines and practices within their faith community?
- To what extent does the Pentecostal culture cultivated within the church influence the decisions of young Latinos/as to pursue leadership roles within the church?
- How does the social and cultural context of the United States impact young Latinos/as?

1.7 The Significance of the Study

This research initiative holds significant importance in academic discussions by providing valuable insights across multiple areas of understanding. Firstly, it enriches the comprehension of church leadership conversion among YPLM by unveiling and clarifying the process of leadership conversion within this demographic's church leadership development. By doing so it helps grasp the developmental journey of YPLM leaders. Secondly, it explores the influence of God the Holy Spirit experience in this group of young individuals, highlighting the significance of God's call among YPLM within the broader context of Pentecostal belief. Furthermore, this study enhances our insights into church leadership within the nexus of these intersecting themes. It broadens the understanding of the religious interests, biases, and spiritual journeys of younger generations and offers valuable implications for the practice of church leadership within diverse faith communities. By exploring the dynamic relationship between God's call, conversion, and leadership development, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on effective leadership within religious contexts, particularly among emerging young leaders.

1.8 Study Limitations

1.8.1 Scope

It is essential to clarify that this research focuses solely on a particular group of young Latino millennials who have chosen to undergo the credentialing procedures of the Assemblies of God to become church leaders. However, it is also important to note that there is room for further investigation in the future to understand why some young Pentecostal Latinos millennials choose not to pursue credentials with the denomination while active in church ministries. This study leaves this aspect open for future research.

1.8.2 Methodology

The methodological approach employed in this research is qualitative prioritising a thorough examination of the data before drawing conclusions. However, it is worth acknowledging that certain pieces of data could have been analysed using quantitative methods, involving numerical data and statistical analysis. While both methods have their strengths and weaknesses, the researcher opted for the qualitative analysis intending to explore and understand the experiences of the cohort members. This opens a window of opportunity for future research using both approaches.

1.8.3 Generalisability

While the research findings are specific to The Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God they cannot be generalised to all other Pentecostal denominations or to other Hispanic Districts within the denomination. The findings are relevant and valid within the specific context of the denomination chosen for the study but may not necessarily apply to Pentecostal denominations with different beliefs, practices, or organisational structures.

1.9 Structure Outline

This thesis project is divided into eight chapters to provide a clear and structured presentation of the research objectives, aiming to address the research question in an academically appropriate manner. Chapter one introduces the main idea of the project. It discusses existing literature on the theory and identifies the gap this research aims to fill. Background information on the main idea is provided, along with descriptions about the problem being addressed. The project's goal and objectives are specified by presenting the research question. Additionally, the importance and significance of the study are highlighted. The chapter also acknowledges the limitations of the research, mentioning several aspects that restrict this research.

In chapter two relevant literary sources are reviewed in the context of leadership formation. It provides an overview of existing discussions and research related to the research problem. It includes a section that delves into the meaning and significance of the religious conversion process, specifically within the context of church leaders to clarify the concept for the audience. Given that the research cohort consists of young individuals in a Pentecostal setting, the chapter also explores the Pentecostal theological views that influence these individuals, helping to contextualise their experiences. The chapter also touches upon the social aspects of the lives of Latino people in the United States, emphasising how these aspects impact the group of young individuals under study. This societal context is important for understanding their experiences. Overall, Chapter Two provides a review of the literature, and key factors related to leadership formation in a Pentecostal context, effectively addressing these elements to ensure clarity and understanding.

Chapter three presents the methodology used in this research, which aims to explore the experiences of young individuals on their journey to becoming church leaders

and ministers within a denomination. It includes the research design as well as philosophical aspects such as the ontology and epistemology of the project. The chapter also explains the sampling method for interviews and the processes involved in obtaining the necessary data to serve as the foundation for the desired theory.

Chapter four discusses the process of religious conversion for this group of young individuals who, having had a spiritual experience, decide to become church leaders, embracing the credentials process to become ministers of the Assemblies of God. Using the data acquired through interviews, the conversion model of Lewis R. Rambo is analysed in relation to the components of a religious conversion.

Chapter five establishes the Pentecostal theological foundations of this group of young individuals, all of whom have been shaped by this perspective. It explores what the call of God implies, the intersection between the divine and the human, the challenges of God's calling, and other theological aspects integral to Pentecostal culture and community.

Chapter six focuses on the stages of leadership formation within this group of young individuals in the church. It provides a historical overview of the Assemblies of God and the evolution of the credentialing processes within this movement. The chapter presents various experiences that shape the religious interests of these young individuals: their experiences with God, their practical involvement in various church activities, and the challenges and frustrations encountered within these practical experiences. Additionally, this chapter includes testimonials from these young individuals about their respective experiences.

Chapter seven delves into the social dynamics of the Hispanic population in the United States of America. The primary focus is to illustrate the lived social experiences of our group of young individuals in the study. They share their belief that, despite the

challenges they face, God speaks, and they can respond to His divine guidance. The chapter is structured to first introduce general statistics related to Millennials as a whole, then present specific statistics concerning young Latino Millennials, and finally focus on the subgroup of young Latino Millennials within the Pentecostal community in Florida.

Chapter eight, as the concluding chapter, provides a summary of the entire thesis, highlighting its objectives, findings, and contributions. It also addresses limitations and offers recommendations for future research.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

While leadership development has long been a topic within practical theology (Branson & Martinez, 2011), the distinctive dynamics shaping leadership conversion among Pentecostal Latino churches have been largely overlooked. Practical theology, as a discipline, is committed to engaging with the diversity of human experiences (Swinton & Mowat, 2006:10). Therefore, this research incorporates a theoretical framework that integrates conversion theory, Pentecostal theological reflections, and the social realities of Latinos/as in the United States. This integration is important for capturing the unique processes and influences that shape leadership development among YPLM addressing the complexity and diversity of factors involved.

- **Conversion Theory:** Conversion theory, particularly in the context of religious studies, often deals with the process by which individuals experience a radical change in beliefs, identity, and community belonging (see section 2.1.1) For Pentecostals, conversion is not just a cognitive change but an experiential encounter with the divine, often marked by supernatural experiences. For YPLM, conversion can serve as a foundational moment that shapes their spiritual identity and calling. This transformative experience may motivate them to pursue leadership roles within the church as a response

to what they perceive as a divine calling or purpose. It can also impact their leadership style, often emphasising personal testimony, evangelism, and spiritual authority derived from their conversion experience.

- **Pentecostal Theological Reflections:** Pentecostal theology is characterised by its emphasis on the Holy Spirit, supernatural experiences, and the immediacy of God's presence. It often highlights doctrines like the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and supernatural experiences such as divine healing. This theological framework shapes YPLM leadership in several ways. First, it creates an expectation for leaders to exhibit charismatic authority, often validated by spiritual gifts. Second, it influences leadership dynamics to be more fluid, with a focus on spontaneity and divine inspiration rather than rigid hierarchy. Third, it supports the belief that anyone who feels 'called by God,' can become a leader which helps open up opportunities and encourage young people to take on these roles.
- **Social Realities of Latinos/as in the United States:** The social realities of Latinos/as in the U.S. encompass issues such as immigration, cultural identity, socioeconomic status, and systemic challenges. These factors shape how Latino/a communities engage with religion and leadership. For YPLM, these social realities often necessitate a leadership style that is culturally sensitive and community focused. Leaders from these backgrounds may prioritise community support within their ministerial roles. Additionally, the challenges faced by Latino/a communities in the U.S. can lead to a form of leadership that is resilient, adaptable, and committed to addressing both spiritual and social needs.

When these three elements are integrated into the theoretical framework, they offer a lens to understand church leadership among YPLM. Conversion theory provides insight into the personal motivations and spiritual experiences that drive individuals to leadership. Pentecostal theological reflections outline the doctrinal and spiritual expectations of leadership within this context, while the social realities of Latino/a communities add a layer of cultural and social understanding that shapes how these leaders navigate their roles in a complex environment.

The combination of these three theoretical lenses allows for a nuanced analysis of church leadership among young Pentecostal Latino/a millennials, highlighting how spiritual experiences, theological perspectives, and social contexts collectively influence their leadership styles, motivations, and approaches.

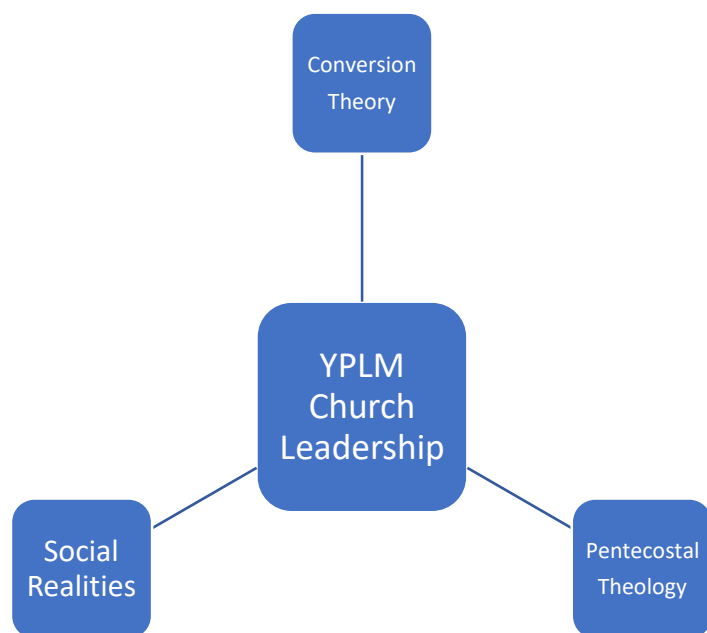


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

1.11 Assumptions and Ethical Challenge

1.11.1 Assumptions

The research data was gathered through a series of interview sessions where questions were exchanged between the researcher and young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials (YPLM) who had transitioned into church leadership roles. These participants, guided by their personal experiences such as sensing a call from God to ministry, their theological Pentecostal formation, their church tradition in a U.S. social culturally diverse context shared testimonies that offered insights into their journeys into leadership. Their experiences not only shaped their understanding of these transitions but also influenced their decisions to pursue credentials as ministers with the Assemblies of God.

The themes that emerged were the results of semi-structured interview sessions.

1. **Role of Attitude Towards Leadership:** The question was, what is the opinion of your peers regarding ecclesiastical leadership? From the data collected the assumption gathered is that the disposition of YPLM towards leadership within the church, plays a pivotal role in shaping their choices concerning the credentialling processes within the context of the FMD.
2. **Significance of Divine Calling:** When asked, "Tell me about your religious experience," participants consistently emphasised the significance of sensing God's call in some manner, which influences the perspectives and behaviours of YPLM.
3. **Church Organizations and Youth Dynamics:** The question was posed, what is your peers' opinion on church denominations? Exploring the relationships among young individuals within church organisations, can

provide valuable insights into how YPLM embrace church leadership through the AOG credentialing process.

4. **Decision-Making Factors:** This assumption arises from the question, how drawn are young Latinos to be coming church leaders? The decision-making process of YPLM is shaped by their perceptions of personal benefits, and the strength of their connections with significant individuals in their lives.
5. **Impact of Social Realities:** When asked, are there any obstacles to becoming a church leader? The influence of social realities became apparent. The religious beliefs and practices of YPLM are intertwined with the socio-cultural realities experienced of Latino communities in the United States, which significantly shape their perspectives.
6. **Millennials and Social Context:** Overall understanding U.S. millennials helps us better understand the complex social world young Latinos/as live in.

These guiding assumptions will inform the research project providing a structure framework to better understand YPLM's role in church leadership. They offer a lens through which the complexities of decision-making processes, as well as other influencing factors can be systematically explored and better comprehend.

1.11.2 Ethical Challenge

As a researcher, I recognise that my position within this study is informed by my experiences and roles. With twelve years of service as a District Superintendent with the Florida Multicultural District of the AOG (FMD), I bring a perspective shaped by being both a participant and an observer. This dual role has naturally influenced some aspects of the study's design and planning. As FMD's District Superintendent³, as well as a

³ Assemblies of God District Superintendents are elected officials, according to districts constitution and bylaws, with the responsibility to oversee, with an Executive Team, a group of churches and credential ministers.

practitioner, denominational officer, and pastor, I am mindful of the potential for bias arising from my involvement and I am committed to approaching the subject matter thoughtfully and objectively.

To uphold the integrity of the research, confidentiality has been a priority throughout the process. It is also important to note that discussing church-related matters can sometimes bring about hesitation among young Latinos, especially when it involves sharing personal perspectives and experiences. The willingness of this specific group to engage openly in dialogue with me largely stemmed from the trust we have built over time, which encouraged them to express their thoughts and experiences candidly.

1.12 Definition of Terms

1.12.1 Charismatic

A member of a religious group or movement that stresses the seeking of direct divine inspiration and charisms (such as speaking in tongues and healing)⁴. It can also mean God's gift of his Spirit to his servants, either individually or collectively, to anoint, empower, or inspire them for divine service⁵.

1.12.2 Generations

Generations can be defined as persons who grew up in a particular era, sharing similar experiences during the first twenty to twenty- three years of their lives that ultimately shape beliefs, behaviours, values and attitudes (Del Campo, 2010). There will be three attributes associated with the make-up of any generation: perceived membership, common beliefs and behaviours, and a common location in history (Howe and Strauss 2000).

⁴ "Charismatic." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charismatic>.

⁵ Roger Stronstad. *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, (2012:34).

Some of the most prominent literature on generational understanding is found in the works of Neil Howe and William Strauss, particularly “Millennials Rising, and “Millennials Go to College”. However, defining any group of people poses challenges for most generational theorists as it risks misrepresentation and generalisation (Beck,2009). Educator Cailin Brown, who works with Millennials, believes that labelling people Millennial, along with other generational labels, is undignified and misleading (Luttrell and McGrath, 2015). While there is no consensus on the precise birthdate range for Millennials, for the purpose of this research, I will refer to them as individuals born between 1980 and 2000 in the United States of America.

1.12.3 Latinos / Hispanics

Both Hispanic and Latino are widely accepted the terms for identifying groups of people in the United States, who have ancestral ties to Latin America, including countries, such as Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America (Mulder, 2017:13). The official recognition of Latinos, as a distinct population, came about in 1976, with the passage of public law, 94–311 and the establishment of federal standards for collecting racial and ethnic data by the Office of Management and Budget. In 1980, Hispanics were officially counted for the first time, not as a part of a broader, white category, but as a distinct racial/ethnic group (Zambrana, 2011:15). Throughout this research, the terms “Latinas/os” “Hispanics” will be used interchangeably to refer to the population of individuals of Hispanic, Latin America, or Caribbean descent residing in the United States.

1.12.4 Millennials

The name Millennials have been contentious. Howe and Strauss (2000) indicate that the students coined that term themselves to dissociate themselves from the Generation X. They also use 1982–2000 for 18 childhood years for the high school

graduating class of 2000 as they entered the new millennial. This generation is also called Generation Y or (Gen Y). The term appeared for the first time in an editorial by Nader (2003) in *The Age*. It was derived simply from the succession of Generation X. Some researchers call them Echo Boomers. This term relates to the size of this generation and its relation to the Baby Boomers. Another term used on Millennials is the Net Generation. This term was coined by Dan Tapscott (1997). It is linked directly to the Internet and the emerging technology of the 1990s with which this generation grew up with. In 2008 an article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* where it refers to the Millennials as the Trophy Generation or Trophy Kids. This term derived from competitive sports, and the practice, where no one loses, and everyone receives a trophy for participating (Alsop, 2008), in other words, everyone wins and should be recognized for their efforts. For the sake of this research, I will be using 1980 to 2000 to reference Millennials.

1.12.5 Pentecostals

Of, relating to, or constituting any various Christian religious bodies that emphasise individual experiences of grace, spiritual gifts (such as glossolalia and faith healing) expressive worship and evangelism (Merriam-Webster, "Pentecostal." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Pentecostal>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2024)

1.12.6 Sacraments

Comes from the Latin words "sacer" and "sanctus". Sacrament is a way of receiving holy grace. The person who receives it is sanctified or made holy by it; this holiness or sanctity is believe to result from God's grace (Merriam Webster, 1998:490).

1.12.7 Supernatural

Departing from what is usual or normal, specially to appear to transcend the laws of nature; of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe; of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit, or devil (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines various literary sources related to the primary research question: What factors influence young Pentecostal Latinos millennials (YPLM) in their decision to pursue church ordination with the Assemblies of God (AOG)? The discussion explores aspects such as the conversion process, experiences with God the Holy Spirit and the call to ministry, highlighting how these divine encounters shape YPLM's behaviour and decisions. Additionally, the chapter delves into the journey of becoming church leaders within the AOG and the broader social context of Latinos in the United States.

The aim is to situate the research within the relevant discussions on church leadership conversion and contribute by highlighting the perspective of young Pentecostal Latinos millennials. This perspective emphasises the role of spiritual experiences such as hearing the call of God as a factor in their decision to embrace church leadership and pursue ordination as ministers within the AOG.

This section aligns with the conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter, integrating perspectives from conversion theories, Pentecostals studies, and U.S. Latino social realities, that are relevant to the research question. By incorporating these voices and their respective incites, an understanding of the topic will be developed.

2.1 Conversion

2.1.1 Definitions

There are various definitions of conversion. In *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Lewis R. Rambo offers several definitions. Here is a section where he describes various meanings of "conversion":

It will mean a simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation with one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system. It will mean a change of one's personal orientation towards life, from the haphazard of superstition to the providence of a deity; from a reliance on rote and ritual to a deeper conviction of God's presence; from belief in a threatening, punitive, judgmental deity to one that is loving, supportive, and desirous of the maximum good. It will mean a spiritual transformation of life, from seeing evil or illusion in everything connected with "this" world to seeing all creation as a manifestation of God's power and beneficence: from denial of the self in this life in order to gain a holy hereafter: from seeking personal gratification to a determination that the rule of God is what fulfils human beings; from a life geared to one's personal welfare above all else to a concern for shared and equal justice for all. It will mean a radical shifting of gears that can take the spiritually lackadaisical to a new level of intensive concern, commitment, and involvement. (Rambo, 1993:19-20).

According to Rambo, conversion will be defined **as a radical shift** that takes individuals from spiritual indifference to a new level of intensive concern, commitment, and involvement (Rambo, 1993:19-20). Rambo emphasises conversion as a process of religious change occurring in a dynamic environment of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations (1993:23). Conversion is characterised by:

- Being a process over time, not a single event
- Being contextual, influencing and being influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations, and situations.
- Having multiple, interactive, and cumulative factors (1993:23)

Rambo explores the conversion experience through a religious lens, focusing on the transformative journey of individuals. This thesis builds on that concept but shifts the perspective to Pentecostal leadership. Specifically, examines how the conversion experiences of young people, as revealed through interviews, led to changes in their lives. These changes not only deepened their commitment to their faith but also guided them toward becoming credentialed ministers within the Assemblies of God, ultimately taking on leadership roles within the church.

With this understanding in mind, this study aims to provide an understanding of how the initial experience of conversion can evolve into a pathway toward religious leadership, highlighting the unique dynamics within Pentecostal communities.

2.1.2 Process

What factors influence young people's decision to pursue church leadership? What occurs during the process of conversion? Conversion is a complex process involving a culmination of interconnected experiences that span psychology, sociology, anthropology, and theology (1993: 22). Data from this research reveals that, for young Pentecostal Latinos, the journey towards church leadership is influenced by spiritual experiences **characterised by a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.** This sensitivity, perceived as the voice of God calling them to ministry, manifests in diverse ways and under varying circumstances. While these spiritual experiences are significant, the decision to convert also takes place within a broader social, cultural, and religious context.

The descriptive approach of the conversion process delineates the contours of the phenomenon, addressing questions such as: What happens in conversion process? What behaviours are changed? What beliefs are altered? What experiences are elicited in the process? (1993:25). While further explanations will be provided in a different section, it is important to note that the cohort changed their behaviour to accept the role of church ministers. This indicates that experiences were present, behaviours changed, and beliefs transformed.

2.1.3 Components

Rambo suggest four components in the holistic model of conversion: cultural, social, personal, and religious systems (1993:27). The cultural component builds the intellectual, moral, and spiritual atmosphere of life. People acquire language and life

guidance from the surrounding culture. The cohort's knowledge of denomination, credentials and church leadership highlights the significant role played by culture in the conversion process. The second component is the social aspect. Conversion towards church leadership occurs within a society organised into religious groups, denominations, and ecclesiastical organisations. This society makes decisions regarding religious processes, which individuals integrate according to their regulations integrate (1993:29). The personal component is the third in Rambo's list. The psychological aspect involves changes in thoughts, feelings, and actions, and decisions (1993:29). According to William James in Varieties of Religious Experiences, conversion is often preceded by anguish, turmoil, despair, conflict, guilt, and other difficulties, which aligns with the stories shared by our cohort. (James, 1929).

The final component to consider is the role of religion. This is methodologically challenging. Rambo notes, "How can we understand, predict and control that which is generally invisible to the outsider, but mysterious and sacred to the insider"? Another challenge is that religious conversion aims to bring people into a relationship with the divine, where a sense of meaning and purpose is pursued (1993:31). If conversion phenomena and experiences are to be taken seriously religious spheres must also be considered seriously (1993:32). These considerations include:

- The religiously ideology that shapes the conversion process
- The religious imagery that influences the consciousness of the convert
- The religious institutions that often provide the matrix in which conversion takes place (1993:32).

2.1.4 Types

According to Rambo, there are four types of conversions (1993:35):

- Apostasy or defection – This is a form of deconversion, where individuals retract or negate their former beliefs.
- Intensification – This revitalises conversion as a process of religious commitment to a faith with which the convert has had previous affiliation. Individuals deepen their involvement through significant religious experience.
- Affiliation – This involves the movement of an individual or group from no or minimal religious commitment to full involvement with an institution a community of faith.
- Institutional transition – This entails the change of an individual or group from one community to another, within a major at tradition.

According to the data, a new type of conversion has emerged. In addition to the four known types, a fifth type, termed “Spiritual Leadership Conversion” has been identified by the researcher. This is a “*hybrid conversion*,” **combining elements from “affiliation” and “intensification”, with the particularity that the “intensification” is inspired by an act of the Holy Spirit, in some kind of supernatural experience.** This illustrates that the YPLM cohort, as part of the AOG, made a commitment to become credentialled ministers within this faith community based on their personal spiritual experience, thus transitioning into church leadership roles.

2.1.5 Motifs

Motifs are defining experiences that make each type of conversion distinctive (1993:36). According to this approach, there are six types of motifs: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive. The intellectual motif seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual issues. The mystical motif is described as a sudden and traumatic burst of insight, induced by visions, voices or other paranormal

experiences. The experimental motif involves active exploration of religious options. The affectional motif emphasizes interpersonal bonds as an important factor in the conversion process. Revivalism uses crowd conformity to induce behaviour. The coercive motif involves brainwashing and is considered rare due to the need for specific conditions to be present (1993: 37-38).

Just as hybrid conversion types arise, a similar phenomenon emerges in motifs. Our research data reveals a combination of motifs, with the *mystical* and *affectional* motifs standing out among the six identified. The mystical motif emphasises insight, vision, and experiences of hearing voices. This aligns with the stories shared by our cohort members, where some experienced God's calling through prophetic means, while others had different kinds of spiritual manifestations. Similarly, the affectional motif underscores the support received from pastors, family members, and leaders, who encouraged and affirmed them in their spiritual journey.

2.2 Pentecostal Reflections

In the journey of becoming a church leader within Pentecostal traditions, particularly as a credentialed minister, experiencing a call to ministry through the Holy Spirit and recognising the authoritative primacy of the Holy Scriptures are fundamental. These concepts form the theological foundation and significantly influence the personal and moral responsibilities of the research cohort members pursuing leadership roles within the church. Although this insight may appear simple and straightforward, it also underscores an ongoing controversy concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit: the tension between **narrative** and **theology** in New Testament literature. While a full discussion of this controversy lies beyond the scope of this thesis, gaining a broader understanding of the topic and justifying the stance of these young people regarding the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, and their decision to embrace church leadership requires

examining the theological perspectives that have shaped their thinking, including some that are part of the controversy.

To explore how these fundamental concepts have shaped the beliefs and leadership journeys of young Pentecostal Latinos (YPLM), this chapter will engage with the works of Roger Stronstad, Tony Richie, and Amos Yong. These scholars provide valuable insights into the theological perspectives that influence the understanding of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures, including perspectives that are part of the ongoing controversy. By examining their reflections, this study seeks to understand how these theological ideas have impacted the conversion to leadership and ordination processes of YPLM within the Assemblies of God (AOG), shedding light on their unique path toward church leadership.

The first issue centres around receiving the Holy Spirit to empower and equip church leaders. For Pentecostals this experience is called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. According to Stronstad the gift of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts can be understood as divine empowerment and communal transformation (Stronstad, 2012: 129). It reflects a continuity with the tradition of charismatic leadership in Israel, where individuals were endowed with the Spirit for specific roles. However, it also envisions a new paradigm—a community collectively endowed with both the charismatic power of the Spirit and the indwelling presence of the divine (2012, 129).

The second issue centres around the active presence of God in the present time. Pentecostals firmly assert that God continues to intervene in human history, actively engaging with His creation, through various means, such as preaching, prayer, worship, and equipping His church through the baptism in the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit (Acts 2). Within the Pentecostal tradition the belief in God's ongoing and direct involvement in human affairs through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) holds immense

importance. It is normal within this faith community to correspond with the God who interacts with them. The conversion processes of the cohort of YPLM into church leaders occur through a series of experiences, within the context of their interactions with the Holy Spirit.

The third issue revolves around the Pentecostal stance on the authority of the Holy Scriptures. The reading, interpretation and application of biblical teachings hold a central place in the lives of Pentecostals. They believe if the Holy Spirit continues to interact with people today, His presence is also evident in the way believers engage with the Scriptures. This engagement with the Scriptures is seen as being accompanied by the Holy Spirit.

Critics often argue that Pentecostals prioritise their personal experiences over the sacred Scriptures. However, a deeper understanding of the Pentecostal perspective, requires a closer examination of this issue.

By exploring the thoughts and insights of these three influential theologians, the complexities surrounding these controversial topics and their significance within the context of YPLM leadership conversion can be better understood. This analysis will foster a theological reflection on leadership conversion among Pentecostals and its implications for Pentecostal movements.

The testimonies and personal narratives of the YPLM cohort, recounting their individual conversion experiences and divine calling to serve in church ministry, have been the primary motivation for pursuing church ordination. Listening to their testimonies and observing how they articulate their experiences, it becomes apparent that what they have encountered is considered normal within their specific context. Expressing their experience with God comes naturally to them, to the extent that they do not feel compelled to offer theological justifications, or explanations to others.

There are experiences within a Pentecostal church that may not be acquired through former classroom education. Instead, these experiences are gained through exposure and direct participation in the liturgy and the vibrant life of the church. Over time, these encounters become ingrained within an individual shaping their identity and becoming an integral part of who they are.

2.2.1 Receiving The Holy Spirit

As members of Pentecostal communities, the research cohort spiritual formation emphasises that being filled with the Holy Spirit is an empowering experience. While the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit is often associated with the New Testament, its foundational roots are firmly established in the Old Testament, where the purpose remains largely the same. It equips believers with the power needed to fulfil the mission of evangelisation. In essence, *it is a baptism of power intended for service*. Stronstad (2012:32) affirms that Luke's intention in the book of Acts is to demonstrate that, rather than relating the Holy Spirit to salvation or sanctification, it is exclusively tied to a third dimension of Christian life---service.

This statement is at the heart of the theological debate and controversy: whether the historical narratives in the Bible, particularly in the book of Acts, serve a didactic purpose. While this research does not aim to delve into that specific question, the researcher aligns with the statements of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (NIV).

2.2.1.1 The Charismatic Spirit in the Old Testament

In "The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke," Stronstad argues that to properly study the charismatic activity of the Spirit of God in the Book of Acts, one must

understand this activity through the lens of the Old Testament (2012: 34). He identifies three aspects in the activity of the Holy Spirit's activity in the Old Testament:

- The Distribution of Charismatic Activity
- Septuagint⁶ Terminology
- Charismatic Motif

2.2.1.1.1 The Distribution of the Charismatic Activity

According to Stronstad, the distribution of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, is not homogeneous. He argues that the Spirit of God is not regularly and consistently active throughout Israel's history (2012:36). The researcher partially understands what the author means with this statement. It is possible that Stronstad refers to the Holy Spirit being active in specific individuals at certain times. However, in the researcher's opinion, the Holy Spirit has always been active in the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 1:2; Psalms 139:7-8). What may not have been present in all eras, however, was a receptive people.

Stronstad identifies five distinct periods of charismatic activity in the Old Testament (2012: 38-39):

1. **The Founding of the Nation of Israel in the Wilderness:** During this period, the Spirit of God was in Moses, and God took the Spirit from Moses and placed it upon 70 elders (Numbers 11:7).
2. **The Period of the Judges:** This era saw sporadic manifestations of the Spirit through various judges who were empowered to deliver Israel.
3. **The Founding of the Monarchy:** The Spirit of God came upon Saul and later upon David (1 Samuel 10:1-10; 1 Samuel 16:3).

⁶ The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, (Stronstad, 2012:34).

4. **The Time of Elijah and Elisha:** During this time, the Spirit of Elijah came upon Elisha (2 Kings 2:15).
5. **The Period of Exile and Restoration:** In this period, Ezekiel was notably aware of the Spirit of God (Ezekiel 2:2; 3:12).

Stronstad concludes that the significance of the Spirit's activity during these five periods is threefold:

1. The offices corresponding to these five periods of Israel's political and religious development are charismatic.
2. There is no experiential continuity between these periods of charismatic activity. The cessation of charismatic experience in any given period is never permanent or irrevocable. The continuity rests in God, not in the recipients, for it is God who gives His Spirit.
3. The descriptions of the Spirit's charismatic activity are typically programmatic, indicating a divinely orchestrated plan throughout Israel's history (2012:38-39).

2.2.1.1.2 Septuagintal Terminology

Apart from the distribution of the charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, another important aspect to consider is the Septuagintal terminology reflected in the writings of Luke. According to Stronstad (2012:40), much of the language used in Luke-Acts mirrors the terminology found in the Septuagint. In the Old Testament, there are 23 verbs used to describe the charismatic activity of the Spirit, and Stronstad (2012:43) points out that in cases where God is the subject, He is the one performing the action. For example, God fills the craftsmen with the spirit of wisdom (Exodus 28:3; 31:3), fills Joshua with the spirit of wisdom (Deuteronomy 34:9), and promises to take the Spirit from Moses and place it upon the elders (Numbers 11:17).

On the other hand, when the Spirit is the subject, a wider variety of verbs is used to describe its actions. For instance, the Spirit rested upon the elders and Elisha (Numbers 11:25-26; 2 Kings 2:15). The Spirit also came upon various figures such as Balaam, Othniel, Jephthah, the messengers Saul sent to David, and Saul himself (Numbers 24:2; Judges 3:10; 11:29; 1 Samuel 19:20, 23). This variation in terminology emphasises the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the Spirit's activity in the Old Testament.

2.2.1.1.3 Charismatic Motifs

Stronstad argues that the most notable theme concerning the charismatic activity of the Spirit of God is its association with the transfer of leadership, referred to as the transfer motif, which occurs specifically through the passing on of the Spirit (2012:44). He supports his argument by citing instances where the Spirit of Moses was transfer to the elders, and similarly, from Elijah to Elisha.

According to Stronstad, the transfer of the Spirit serves two primary purposes: to validate new leadership and to provide the necessary skills for new responsibilities. This is demonstrated in several cases: from Moses to the seventy elders (Num. 11:16-17); from Moses to Joshua (Num. 27:18, 20; Deut. 34:9); and when Samuel anointed David as Saul's successor, where "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that Day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). Similarly, in the case of Elijah and Elisha, the transfer of the prophetic vocation and the gift of the Spirit is confirmed by Elisha's ability to part the Jordan River (Stronstad, 2012:46).

The second motif Stronstad presents is the sign motif, which serves the purpose of providing a sign to confirm God's call to leadership. An example of this is seen in the case of Saul, where Samuel informs him that a sign will confirm that "the Lord has anointed you ruler over his inheritance". Samuel then enumerates three signs that will occur for Saul, with particular emphasis on the third sign (1 Sam. 10:1-7). This narrative

clearly demonstrates that the gift of the Spirit of prophecy serves as a confirmation, or sign, that God is with Saul (2012:47).

The third motif identified by Stronstad is the vocational motif. In this context, the Spirit is not merely a sign; it also endows the recipient with skills appropriate to their calling to leadership. Several examples illustrate this motif: the artisans who crafted Aarons' priestly garments were filled with "the spirit of wisdom" (Exod. 28:3) or "the Spirit of God in all craftsmanship" (Exod. 31:3). In Joshua's case, the spirit of wisdom enabled him to lead the nation into the Promise Land. In contrast, for the judges, the gift of the Spirit was granted to impart military skills, rather than craftsmanship or leadership (2012:48).

In summary this section seeks to describe how the activity of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament possesses an experiential dimension, such as the manifestation of prophecy, while also serving a functional role in bestowing the appropriate skills for leadership and service.

2.2.2 Pentecostal Experience Lived

In "Essentials of Pentecostal Theology", Tony Richie explores various perspectives on Pentecostal theology offered by different scholars. Within these theological discussions, Richie captures the essence of what the YPLM cohort has expressed in the personal testimonies. He brings to the discussion the theological reflection of Walter Hollenweger, which affirms the oral and thought experience manifested primarily in songs, testimonies, preaching, worship and prayer within Pentecostal experiences (Richie, 2020:20). Hollenweger's work validates the firm conviction held by our cohort that they have been divinely called to pursue ministry.

However, given the diversity of the Pentecostal experience across various cultural, ethnic, and geographical settings, the manifestations of God's presence can

differ significantly - a point Richie fails to address. His focus appears to be predominantly on the theological and doctrinal aspect of the Pentecostal theology, such as the presence of God, while somewhat neglecting the significant element of the people who actually experience these manifestations. It is believed that an investigation into how diverse ethnic groups within Pentecostal communities experience the presence of God and their encounters with the Holy Spirit will yield varying results.

Empirical data substantiates the fact that the calling experiences of the YPLM cohort have taken place in a wide range of settings and have been shaped by diverse personal encounters. These young church leaders firmly believe in the transformative power of experiencing God within the Christian faith. The message of this possibility has been consistently conveyed to them over the years from the pulpit, Sunday school, youth camps, and within their family environments. As a result, they embrace the belief in actively living out their personal experiences with God.

Richie asserts that Pentecostal theology, rather than being solely focused on intellectual discourse, is primarily characterised by its effective and intuitive nature (Richie, 2020:20). However, it is important to acknowledge that there is cautionary note within the Pentecostal tradition. Pentecostals recognise the need to exercise discernment, as not every experiential encounter can be considered reliable or trustworthy. This is precisely why Pentecostals place emphasis on the final authority of the Scriptures. When defending their experiences, Pentecostals face a theological challenge: they must strike a balance and avoid excessive emphasis on the emotional aspect, thereby preventing themselves from falling into an anti-intellectual or anti-educational extreme (Richie,2020:20).

While Richie effectively captures a crucial aspect of the experience with God, the presentation would have been even better if he had included descriptions of how the Holy

Spirit manifests in all contexts including disadvantage groups. This would have provided an understanding of the topic and shed light on the diverse ways in which spirituality can be experienced and expressed across various social contexts.

A Pentecostal theology must not overlook the significance of human struggles through which God chooses to manifest Himself. Biblical examples illustrating this can be found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, with notable instances such as the day of Pentecost. It is important to emphasise that a fundamental aspect of a Pentecostal theology centred around the Holy Spirit, as the liberation and freedom brought forth by the Holy Spirit.

While Tony Richie acknowledges the valuable contributions of three Latino theologians – Samuel Solivan, Eldin Villafañes, and Daniel Alvarez- he does not provides them with sufficient space within the discussion of essential elements in Pentecostal theology. Throughout biblical times and beyond, struggles, crises, and disadvantages have consistently provided fertile ground for God’s intervention and the manifestation of His presence.

In a brief reference, Richie acknowledges Samuel Solivan’s Hispanic Pentecostal perspective, which holds great significance within the context of the challenges faced by the Latino community to which the YPLM cohort belongs. Solivan’s perspective highlights the integral role of the lived experience with the Holy Spirit in navigating the daily struggles encountered by Latinos in the United States (Richie, 2020:30). He also provides a concise summary of Villafañe’s contribution on social ethics tailored specifically for the Hispanic Pentecostal church in America. Additionally, he mentions Daniel Alvarez’s Pentecostal theology concerning immigration, emphasising the active presence of the Holy Spirit among suffering immigrants (Richie, 2020:31).

2.2.3 Pentecost Within the Framework of Biblical Teaching

There is an emerging belief among young Pentecostal Latinos millennials (YPLM) that God speaks in our time, and one of the contributing factors to this attitude is the interpretation of the Bible in Pentecostal context. While Pentecostals worship services may involve emotional and experiential aspects, they are grounded in biblical teachings and interpretations. Amos Yong in “The Hermeneutic of the Spirit” suggests that Christian biblical hermeneutics can be considered Pentecostal hermeneutics due to the central role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers’ interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures, as exemplified from the day of Pentecost onward in the New Testament (Yong, 2017:388). According to Yong, adopting ecclesiastical practices that gave rise to the canonical writings can enhance our reading of the biblical text. By doing so, we nourish the sensibilities and instincts required for faithful interpretation. Moreover, this approach not only strengthens understanding but also helps align Christian practices with the testimonies evidenced in scriptures (Yong, 2017:188).

Pentecostal theology places an emphasis on the authority and relevance of Scripture, which is reflected in the focus on preaching during services. Whether on a Sunday or during mid-week services, preaching plays a crucial role in inviting listeners to respond to various spiritual calls. It serves as a catalyst for individuals to seek salvation, re-dedicate their lives, pursue healing, seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and even surrender to the call of God for a life of ministry. In the words of Yong, “... divine word is received not merely cognitively, but effectively...” (Yong:, 2017:1453).

Pentecostalism is characterised by an experience where listeners actively respond to the message, similar to the events described in Acts 2 during Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. The immediate reaction of the audience to Peter’s preaching

when they ask, “what shall we do”? exemplifies this dynamic nature of Pentecostal preaching.

Through the power of preaching, Pentecostal believers are challenged to respond, engage within their faith, and make transformative decisions in their spiritual journey. The significance of preaching in Pentecostals services lies in its ability to ignite a genuine and passionate response from the congregation, inspiring them to seek a deeper connection with God and actively participate in their faith.

In Pentecostal preaching, the treatment of the biblical text goes far beyond simply reading a secular document. It involves an engagement with the text, viewing it as a living and transformative message. Unlike a mere literary exercise, reading the biblical text is approached with the recognition that what is expressed about God in the Bible is not limited to a specific era or historical context.

Pentecostal preachers understand that the text has timeless relevance and relevance for today’s world. Preaching is not merely to recount what God did in the past, but also to reveal what God can and desires to do in the present. As a result, Pentecostal preaching becomes a divine dynamic that introduces the God of the Bible as the God of today, actively involved in the lives of believers and the world.

This approach to preaching infuses a sense of immediacy and relevance into the message, urging listeners to experience a personal encounter with God in the present moment. The preached word is believed to carry the power to inspire faith, spark spiritual transformation, and lead individuals to respond to God’s call in their lives. By presenting the God of the Bible as living and active in the world today, Pentecostal preaching seeks to draw believers closer to their faith and empower them to embrace God’s divine purpose for their lives.

In brief, the lives of the young Pentecostal Latinos millennials (YPLM) cohort have been significantly influenced by two key factors: the impact of biblical teachings, emphasising the presence of God, and the approach to interpreting the Bible through the lens of the early church perspective.

2.2.4 Spiritual Awareness

The theological formation of the research cohort is based on a practical Pentecostal theology. The foundational element that propels the church towards its divine mission is the experience of God or a connection with the divine. In this context, practical theology finds its essence in this experience of God. Without this experiential dimension, the church's engagement with the world would lack a fundamental basis, relying solely on human-generated compassionate motivations. Swinton and Mowatt provide a concise definition of practical theology, characterising it as a critical and theological reflection on the interaction between the Church's practices and those of the world (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006:12). Their definition centres on promoting and fostering faithful engagement in God's redemptive mission within, to, and for the world (2006:12). This research affirms that what enables this encounter between the church and the world is the active presence of God.

The experience of God serves as a catalyst, inspiring and guiding the church's actions and mission. It goes beyond mere empathy or human-driven goodwill, deriving from a connection with the divine that grounds the church's purpose in a deeper spiritual context. This connection not only reinforces the church's commitment but also provides a sense of divine calling and purpose that transcends human motivations. It underscores the importance of this spiritual connection in shaping the church's mission and activities, emphasising that without it, the church's actions may lack an enduring spiritual significance.

The cohort of YPLM has responded affirmatively to the ministry following their experience of God's call. This decision has led them to embark on a transformative journey towards assuming leadership roles within the church. Their choice to step into leadership positions signifies a significant shift in their roles and responsibilities within the religious community.

Within the framework of practical theology, the response to God's call and the decision to become a church-credentialled minister are aspects within Pentecostal theology. According to Swinton and Mowatt, a theological perspective is essential for engaging in theological discussions effectively (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006:15).

In this context, the YPLM's decision to assume roles as church ministers and their commitment to engaging with the world based on their encounters with the divine serve as a validation of practical Pentecostal theology.

What are these experiences, and how can they be effectively comprehended and interpreted? (2006:15). Their experiences of God's presence and calling serve as a testament to the dynamic interplay between the divine and human experiences, affirming the belief in God's ongoing redemptive work in the world. By delving into these experiences and grasping their significance, valuable insights can be gleaned into how faith, spirituality, and theology intersect with human existence.

Such an approach to practical theology serves to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and lived experiences, thereby enriching the understanding and practice of ministry and church leadership.

However, it is worth noting that Swinton and Mowatt take a cautious and conservative approach when attempting to define some of God's redemptive practices manifested in human experiences. While they acknowledge the encounter of human experiences with God's redemptive actions, their work falls short in providing concrete

examples. For instance, the cohort of YPLM is inspired to assume church leadership roles due to personal encounters with God.

By incorporating more illustrative examples, the authors could make a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on church leadership. This research can enrich the debate by highlighting the transformative impact of human experiences when encountering God's redemptive actions. As these encounters unfold, they may result in occurrences that defy conventional explanations, possibly resulting in supernatural and unexplained events. Shedding light on these connections between human experiences and divine redemption can offer valuable insights and perspectives into the realm of practical theology and its implications for church leadership. Such an approach would provide readers with a deeper understanding of the ways in which God's redemptive actions shape the lives of individuals, particularly those in church leadership roles.

Recognising the significance of theological reflection, the YPLM cohort and others can gain a deeper understanding of the nuances in their decision-making processes, leading to an awareness of how faith, spirituality, and theology intersect with their experiences. This understanding can be instrumental in refining their approaches to ministry leadership and their responses to God's call in their lives.

Swinton and Mowatt view practical theology as a discipline rooted in human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on that experience (2006:6). Their book offers a dialogue between church practice, such as leadership development, and the social sciences in terms of how knowledge is acquired, analysed, understood, and recorded (2006:6). However, this research proposes that it should also be open to considering Pentecostal confessions of faith. This qualitative research provides accurate data to immerse in the much-needed theological reflection (2006:7).

2.2.5 The Call Experience

In this thesis, the belief held by the cohort of YPLM regarding their conviction that God has called them to the ministry is seen as a redemptive action of God in the world. Their choices and actions are influenced by their understanding and value of this divine calling in their lives. However, it is important to note that these decisions are not made in isolation; they are shaped by various underlying factors, including personal values, beliefs, theological perspectives, and other assumptions. Many of these underlying factors may go unnoticed or unexamined.

Swinton and Mowatt's believe that in church practices there are hidden or unseen elements which are intricate and multifaceted and become apparent through the process of theological reflection (Swinton & Mowatt, 2006:20). When individuals engage in theological reflection, they are encouraged to introspect and explore the complexities behind their beliefs and decisions. Through this reflective process, they gain a clearer understanding of how their theological convictions and personal values influence their responses to God's call and the redemptive actions they perceive in their lives.

2.3 The Social-Psychological Significance of “Supernatural Experiences” in the Conversion Process of Church Leadership

In this thesis, the researcher has included an addendum that explores the relationship between supernatural experiences -- such as sensing “the call of God” -- and the impact these experiences can have on individuals' behaviour. (see Addendum for more details). The addendum is intended to pave the way for future research from a socio-psychological perspective, specially focusing on how supernatural experiences influence individuals' decision -making process.

A social psychological analysis of how religious experiences influence human behaviour can provide valuable insights into why young Latinos often choose to pursue

leadership roles after perceiving a call from God. While this analysis highlights the complex interaction between religious experiences, beliefs, and behaviours, it does not directly impact our current research findings but opens up promising avenues for future exploration.

In their book *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change*, Gregory R. Maio and Geoffrey Haddock discuss the work of social psychologists Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, who developed the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This theory suggests that people's behaviours are shaped by their attitudes toward objects, whether abstract or concrete, and by whether they hold favourable or unfavourable views of these objects (Maio & Haddock, 2015:48). Although these insights into decision-making processes are valuable, they do not directly influence the outcomes of our study. To bridge the gap between the theory's content and our research objectives, future studies could simplify and clarify these complex terms, making them more accessible and relevant for further exploration.

2.4 U.S. Latino Social Realities

2.4.1 Latino Impact in the Landscape of America

In “Hispanic Realities”, Daniel Sanchez provides an exploration of the growth and impact on the Latino population on the socio- economic and religious landscape of America (2006:vii). Through research and analysis, Sanchez illuminates the dynamic changes brought about by the expanding Latino demographic. One of the central themes explored by Daniel Sanchez is the transformative influence of Latino cultures on the religious landscape of America. This influence is a factor to consider when observing young Pentecostal Latinos, aspiring to become church leaders within American society. The blending of Pentecostalism with elements of Latino culture elements creates a unique and vibrant form of religious experience that resonates with young Pentecostal Latinos.

He divides the book into three sections: “Realities”, “Understanding” and “Ministry to the Latino population in the U.S.” In the “Realities” section, he examines various factors within the Latino population that influence American society. These factors encompass areas such as growth, expansion, language and education among others.

Sanchez emphasises a crucial reality that resonates throughout various sections: the diversity within the Latino population. As highlighted in the introduction and footnotes of this presentation, the term “Latinos” refers to individuals in the United States with roots tracing back to Latin America. Given the research’s primary focus on understanding how the call God influences YPLM in their decision-making process regarding ordination, it became imperative to consider the diversity factor highlighted by Sanchez while conducting the interviews with primary sources. The reason is that YPLM from diverse cultures and experiences carry their own history, influencing their perceptions of the social world. Latinos have a unique pilgrimage in establishing residency in the United States (2006:79) and simultaneously encounter the dual challenge of immigration and assimilation (2006:57).

By acknowledging the various cultural, linguistic, and regional differences within the Latino community, an understanding was gained of how the call of God manifest uniquely in our YPLM cohort. This deeper appreciation for diversity enriched our research findings and enabled a grasp of the multi-faceted ways in which YPLM respond to their divine calling.

2.4.2 Millennials Rising in the U.S.

Howe and Strauss define millennials as individuals born between 1982 and 2001. Placing the cohort of YPLM in the broader context of the U.S. millennial generation is crucial for better understanding their perspectives. According to Howe and Strauss,

millennials are part of a “good news revolution”. They are not focused on dismantling ineffective old institutions, but rather on constructing new ones that align with their vision (2000:7). It is interesting that during one of our interviews, a YPLM expressed a nearly identical sentiment. Both the literature and the primary data suggests that the younger generation, including our cohort, seeks active participation with a fresh approach. While there appears to be a disconnect between younger generations and religious organisations, it is not a destructive disconnection, rather, it signifies a desire to rebuild and reshape their involvement.

The book underscores the significant increase in births within the millennial generation. The authors note that this growth is partially attributed to second- generation immigrants, including what they term the “rising immigration wave” that has swept America since the mid-60s (2000:83). However, it is important to clarify that when they discuss the rise in childbirth, they are referring to immigrants in general, including Latinos, Asians, and Europeans, not solely Latino immigration.

While I agree with the authors’ overall statements, I find it essential for them to be more explicit with the data. As the book focuses on the upcoming generations in the U.S., the data should reflect the country’s increasing ethnic diversity. Particularly, the authors cannot overlook the fact that the Latino population is already the largest minority group in the United States.

Throughout the book, various indicators and statistics on religion, economy, family, and other aspects shed light on the social reality of millennials in the U.S. however, one noticeable limitation is the minimal mention of specific data regarding young Latinos (2000:85). To ensure the research’s credibility and accuracy on the topic of millennials, it is important to have correct statistics. Without specific representation of young Latinos in the data presented by Howe and Strauss, it becomes challenging to

claim their findings accurately depict the reality of all millennials in the U.S. Addressing the diverse ethnic representation within society is vital to obtaining a complete and accurate picture. Regrettably this book falls short in this regard, and it could be considered a weakness. The absence of Young Latinos representation in the statistics, hinders an understanding of millennials in general in the United States.

2.4.3 Articles on U.S. Latino Socio-Reality

2.4.3.1 Population Growth

According to a study, conducted by Antonio Flores at the Pew Research Centre in 2017 the Latino population in the United States had reach nearly 58,000,000 people by 2016. Since the year 2000, it has been the primary driver of the U.S. demographic growth. Despite a recent slowdown in growth, Latino still constitute 18% of the nation's population, making them the second-largest racial or ethnic group training only behind whites.

The study further reveals that 55% of Latinos in the United States identify as Catholics, while 22% are protestants accounting for approximately 12.7 million individuals. The remaining percentage comprises various other religious affiliations, and non-affiliated individuals. Remarkably around 80% of Latinos identify themselves as Christians.

This religious inclination within the Latino population suggests that Christianity holes/ holds a significant place within the community. As Latinos have migrated from Latin America to settle in the United States, they have brought with them their religious upbringing contributing to this religious prevalence.

Given these findings it is plausible that the Latino population could play a vital role in carrying the banner of Christianity in the U.S. in the years to come, given their substantial numbers and religious fervour. Their religious identity appears to be

ingrained, likely influenced by years of cultural continuity from their countries of origin. Considering the connection between Latinos and the Protestant sector of Christianity in the United States, it raises the question of whether this growth is proportionally reflected in the number of leaders being developed within U.S. Protestant organizations, including FMD. As mentioned in the research background, FMD currently has 100 young Latinos in the ordination process.

In addition to considering the growth factor the demographics aspect holds significance in our study. Presently Latinos constitute 22% of all children under the age of 18 in the U.S., a notable increase from 90% in 1980 (Fry & Passel, 2009). Among the nation's 16 million Latino children, a majority (52%) are now classified as "second generation" (2009), meaning they were born in the United States. The remaining 48% (approximately 7 million) were born in Latin America.

The pertinent question is whether there are differences in the religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes towards church leadership between those born in United States, and those born in Latin America. While existing literature lacks specificity on the leadership aspect, primary sources did not shed light on this issue.

2.4.3.2 Social Challenges

YPLM striving to become church leaders encounter challenges within American society. First, they grapple with the pressure of forging their identity in a racially and culturally conflicting context (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997:114). Additionally, for the 48% born in Latin America, language becomes a significant obstacle. Immigrants typically require 8-10 years to master a second language and assimilate into a new culture (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper 2002).

The mental health challenges faced by Latino youth stem from various factors, including identity crisis, immigration status, language barriers, and economic hardships.

Compared to non-Hispanic white and African American youth, Latino youth experience higher rates of unmet mental health needs (Kataoka, Zhang, & Wells 2002). The legal status of many immigrants puts them at risk of deportation at any moment, subjecting their families to environments of power and abuse. Undocumented, immigrant Millennials may feel great disappointment in their ability to enrol in college due to their undocumented status.

Furthermore, Latino millennials encounter various hardships, including living in crowded housing (26%), experiencing food-related problems (39%), facing high rent that exceeds 50% of family income (13%), and dealing with poor health (10%). Additionally, family separation poses another significant challenge for Latino millennials, with approximately 80% of children and youth who come to the U.S. experiencing separation from their families at some point (2002).

CHAPTER 3.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The research is shaped by several key areas of focus that guide its methodology and objectives. One primary focus is the process of church leadership conversion among Young Pentecostal Latino Millennials (YPLM) who are pursuing ordination within the Assemblies of God (AOG). This investigation delves into the spiritual, cultural, and social factors that influence these individuals as they develop into church leaders. Additionally, the research pays close attention to the role of supernatural experiences, such as sensing God's calling, which are central to Pentecostal beliefs and practices. Understanding how these spiritual experiences impact the journey towards leadership is crucial and necessitates a methodology capable of capturing these personal and often intangible aspects.

Another significant area of focus is the broader cultural and religious context in which these young leaders operate, particularly within the Latino Pentecostal community. This context calls for a culturally sensitive approach that recognises the unique interplay of faith, identity, and community within this group. The research also considers the challenges and dynamics faced by emerging young Pentecostal leaders, acknowledging that leadership development is a process influenced by generational shifts and specific cultural conditions. Finally, the study emphasises the importance of studying participants within their real-life environments, as advocated by Denzin and Lincoln, to gain a holistic understanding of how God's calling and leadership development intersect in the lives of YPLM (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:3). These areas collectively inform a qualitative research approach that seeks to explore and articulate

the lived experiences of these young leaders within their natural settings, offering a nuanced understanding of leadership conversion in this context.

3.1 Research Design

The research focuses on understanding different factors that impact church leadership conversion among young Pentecostals Latino/a millennials (YPLM). A qualitative design was employed to identify and describe the experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994). To effectively study this phenomenon, an exploratory and flexible approach to the research methodology was adopted (Mason, 2002:24). This approach involved delving into the topic with an open mind, seeking to uncover new insights and perspectives that might not have been extensively studied before. The study did not start with a fixed hypothesis or preconceived notions; instead, a wide range of information and viewpoints were gathered from participants to better understand how young Latinos/as choose to convert into church leaders and become ordained ministers with the AOG.

Flexibility in the study model meant being adaptable in the collection and analysis of data. Rather than following a rigid structure, the data guided the research (Mason, 2002). Information was gathered through interviews, with the focus and questions adjusted based on emergent patterns and themes observed. This approach allowed the study to remain responsive to the complexity of the participants' experiences and explore avenues of inquiry that might not have been anticipated at the beginning of the study.

This open-minded and adaptable mindset ensured that the richness and diversity of participants' experiences and perspectives were captured. The data gathered shaped the direction of the investigation, providing an understanding of the factors influencing YPLM in their journey to becoming church leaders within the AOG.

3.1.1 Philosophy

3.1.1.1 Interpretivist

An interpretive approach was employed in this study to gather descriptions that serve as the foundation for a reflective analysis of the attitudes held by YPLM regarding their religious experiences and leadership within their church community. They are integral to the Pentecostal community, and their perspectives on supernatural experiences carry significance for the broader Pentecostal movement. This approach enables the research to gain insight into the social world these individuals have created through their ongoing actions and engagement (Blaikie, 2000:115).

To achieve this, dialogue and interviews were conducted between the researcher and the cohort of YPLM participants. These conversations played a pivotal role in grasping the ideas and meanings that YPLM ascribe to their religious experiences. It was essential to comprehend how their personal religious experiences, beliefs, and practices shape their perceptions and attitudes towards church leadership, particularly within religious organisations like the FMD.

In summary, an interpretive approach was adopted to capture in-depth descriptions that formed the basis for analysing the attitudes of YPLM. By exploring their religious experiences and views on church leadership, the research aims to contribute not only to their specific community but also to the broader Pentecostal context. This approach allowed the study to delve into the social world they have constructed through their actions, with interviews and dialogues being instrumental in understanding their perspectives and insights on these matters.

3.1.2 Approach - Qualitative

This research embraces a qualitative methodology that operates along an inductive investigative path. Within this framework, the theories that emerge are

grounded in the collected data itself. The approach is empirically grounded, maintaining an open stance that refrains from attempting to formulate an original blueprint or substantiate the efficacy of any specific social theory.

Qualitative research in this context is marked by its multifaceted methodological approach. It embodies an interpretive and naturalistic perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:3). This implies that qualitative researchers immerse themselves in the genuine environments where phenomena occur, with the aim of comprehending and interpreting these occurrences based on the significance attributed to them by the people involved (1983:3). This methodology also aligns harmoniously with the epistemological belief that the perception of truth and knowledge within human individuals and communities is a construct of varying degrees and forms (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:699).

Qualitative research in its essence encompasses a spectrum of methods and strategies. It includes a rich tapestry of approaches that elicit insights unattainable through statistical methods or quantification techniques. While certain data points may undergo quantification, the crux of the analysis lies in the qualitative interpretation (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995:206).

To address the research question at hand, it is necessary to explore the narratives and experiences of young individuals within the social context. In light of this, qualitative research methodology enables researchers to actively listen and capture the personal importance people give to their experiences. Furthermore, this methodology acts as a means to uncover recurring themes within the participants' narratives, thereby enhancing the analysis of leadership development.

3.1.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Positions

This study focuses on a cohort of YPLM who have become church leaders as credentialed ministers with the AOG. It explores their reported spiritual experiences, and

how these experiences have significantly influenced their decision to embrace church leadership. They are part of the Florida Multicultural District (FMD) of the AOG where members pursue church leadership through a credentialing process that leads to ordination. Rooted in their personal identities, these individuals share a common faith and belief system centred around Pentecostal Christianity. At the core lies the conviction that they have received a divine summons from God to take up leadership roles within their faith community, intricately woven with their cultural heritage as Latino millennials. To understand how attitudes and behaviours concerning religious experiences influence YPLM behaviour, one must rely on FMD members' understanding and interpretation of such religious phenomena.

The ontological assumptions informing this research are idealist in connection with the epistemological assumptions of constructionism. Social reality is considered not to have an independent existence from either social actors or researchers. It is made up of shared interpretations that social actors produce and reproduce as they go about their lives (Blaikie & Priest, 2017:31). The ontological assumptions embrace the idea that the social world can be understood only through a complex social process of constructions, interpretations, and meaning seeking from the social actors interacting with their world, (Merriam & Grenier, 2019: 3).

To understand church leadership conversion and the significance of spiritual experiences such as sensing the call of God on YPLM, the researcher had to rely on young Pentecostal Latinos/as' understanding and interpretation of the experience. The research implies that multiple realities interplay with their decisions. Therefore, the researcher's role was to endeavour to understand the concepts that individuals within this demographic derive from their experiences as they went about their lives (Mason, 2002:14).

The research's epistemological assumption is that a meaningful way to generate data was to interactively talk with the social actors; ask them questions and listen to them to gain access to their accounts and articulations (Mason, 2002:64). This assumption is based on the idea that truth and knowledge and the ways in which they are perceived by human beings and communities are constructed by individuals in communities (Swinton, 2001:97). Thus, engaging interactively with people to ask questions and listen to their accounts is a legitimate and meaningful way to generate data (Mason, 2002:64).

A constructivist paradigm was chosen, positing that social reality can only be understood through the experiences and practices of social actors. The interaction between researcher and social actors within the constructivist paradigm brought forth valid knowledge to the research. Therefore, the study argued that understanding **Pentecostal leadership** / the significance of the call of God on YPLM could only be known by engaging with them and considering several factors from their understanding and interpretation, as well as the researcher's interpretation of their ideas.

The research does not claim complete objectivity due to the influence of the researcher's experiences and relationship with the cohort, as efforts were made to bring understanding to the concept of the call of God (Kvale, 2009:33).

3.1.3 Strategy - Phenomenology

People's real-life experiences, such as sensing a message from God, affected their choices to become leaders in their faith community. The cohort of YPLM discussed how they felt this special calling from God and how this experience influenced their decision to become church leaders through a process called "ordination" with the FMD. They shared their stories about how the idea of God's call played a significant role in their decision to become leaders in the church.

The aim was to understand the core of the experience. Meaning making is essential to phenomenological studies: to understand the essence of the phenomenon, thirty individuals were interviewed (Peoples, 2021:3). The goal was to let these individuals explain in their own words what this experience was like for them. This way of studying experiences is called phenomenology, which seeks to answer the question, “What does it feel like when something special like sensing the call of God happens to you?” (Peoples, 2021:3).

One challenge the researcher faced was ensuring the focus remained solely on the actual experiences as told by the social actors themselves. Phenomenology is all about understanding the experiences, not what people think about them (Peoples, 2021:4). By closely examining these personal stories, researchers can construct a clear and important picture, identifying common themes to understand how feeling called by God shapes people’s choices to become church leaders.

3.1.4 Sampling Strategy

To effectively tackle the research question, which seeks to understand the church leadership conversion process of young Pentecostal Latinos/as, it was imperative for the researcher to immerse themselves in the narratives and lived experiences of the cohort of YPLM. This required entering the environments where phenomena occur. (Mason, 2002:3). This approach was chosen to facilitate an exploration of the subject matter.

The moments spent in these interviews were truly captivating. Each participant brought forth a unique tapestry of experiences and stories that had propelled them towards the path of ministry. These conversations not only enriched the understanding of their motivations but also highlighted the diverse factors that play pivotal roles in their vocational decisions.

As the findings and insights from this study are explored, it is essential to recognize the foundational experiences shared during those credentialing interviews. These stories served to enhance the understanding of vocational aspirations within the ministerial sphere. The interplay of individuals' backgrounds, spiritual callings, and diverse range of factors contributed to the choice of a ministerial path.

3.1.4.1 Identifying and Sampling Interviewees

When it was time to interview candidates for this research, there were one hundred credentialed ministers under 40 years old in the FMD population. A communication was sent out to the potential interviewees out of which 30 responded. Those who agreed to participate did so voluntarily.

The method used to invite participants for this study was probabilistic random sampling (Mason, 2003:124). Initially, a list of one hundred potential interviewees was compiled, out of which contact was established and thirty individuals agreed to be interviewed. This method relies on random invitation, which helps ensure that the sample is representative of the population.

What linked these thirty individuals was their shared status as credentialed ministers within the FMD. Despite the diversity in their personal stories, the conversations ultimately revealed a common thread – their desire to become church leaders pursuing ordination, driven by a conviction of being called by God. While the specific ways in which they experienced these calling differed, certain core elements were universally present among their accounts.

3.1.4.1 Sampling Frame

The sampling frame of this research was based on credentialed YPLM under the age of forty from the Florida Multicultural District (FMD) of the Assemblies of God (AOG). Within the FMD, there were one hundred credentialed young ministers who met

these parameters. To maintain objectivity and avoid potential bias, the administrative assistant of the credentials office contacted those who volunteered, asking if they were willing to participate in the interviews. The interviewees came from various cities across the state of Florida, with most not being from Orlando, the city where the researcher resides. This approach ensured a broad regional representation within the cohort.

Those who volunteered were contacted by the administrative assistant of the credentials office and asked if they wanted to participate in the interviews. The majority of cohort were not from the city of Orlando where the researcher lives. The interviewees came from various cities in the state of Florida, ensuring good regional representation.

(For detail information on members of the YPLM cohort see Table No.2)

3.1.4.2 Sampling Theoretical Assumptions

One of the key assumptions of this research is the representativeness of the sample. The cohort for this study consisted of twelve females and eighteen males, which reflects a balance within the broader population of credentialed ministers under 40 years of age within FMD. This diversity ensures that various perspectives and experiences are captured. Another important assumption is the independence of observations and opinions. The participants were young individuals from different cities and regions across the state of Florida, representing over twenty-five churches. This geographical spread helps to mitigate regional biases and supports the diversity of views represented in the data.

The adequacy of the sample size is also an important consideration. The cohort represents 30% of all credentialed ministers under 40 years of age in the FMD of the Assemblies of God. This substantial proportion provides a solid basis for drawing meaningful conclusions about the population. Additionally, the sampling method relied on voluntary participation, which helped to ensure the absence of personal bias in the

process. Participants chose to be involved without any coercion or undue influence, which strengthens the ethical foundation of the study.

Furthermore, the relevance of the cohort to the research questions is another critical assumption. The participants were directly involved in the context being studied, making them highly appropriate for providing insights relevant to the research questions. This alignment between the participants' experiences and the study's objectives enhances the validity of the findings. Lastly, it is assumed that the population remained stable over the period of the study, meaning that the characteristics of the cohort and the broader population did not change during the research period. This stability ensures that the results are both accurate and reliable reflections of the targeted demographic.

Overall, these assumptions provide a foundation for the study's methodology, enhancing the reliability and applicability of the research findings.

3.2 Data Generation – Protocol Use to Interview

The focus of this research is on the conversion processes towards church leadership and ordination among young Latinos/as. Listening to the voices of the cohort is key to achieving this goal. To guarantee validity and integrity, consideration was given to the methods used to collect, generate, and interpret the data (Blikie & Priest, 2019:25). Exploring the diverse experiences of these YPLM is essential for understanding their unique perspectives on receiving a divine calling. The researcher's connection with the Pentecostal community, which spans back to his formative years, coupled with extensive comprehension of Pentecostal ecclesiology and positions him as an authentic conduit to convey their lived realities. However, there was an acute awareness of the delicate balance required in this process – the need to investigate these topics without imposing personal interpretations or inadvertently placing words into the mouths of the interviewees.

The researcher's personal history within the Pentecostal community not only provides a nuanced understanding of their faith and practices but also fosters a sense of trust and rapport with the participants. This trust was essential in creating an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their intimate experiences and reflections on divine calling. Furthermore, familiarity with the intricacies of Pentecostal ecclesiology, allows for an appreciation of the broader theological framework within which these experiences unfold, enriching the ability to contextualize their narratives.

Nonetheless, maintaining the integrity of the participants' voices and experiences was always at the forefront of the approach. It was essential to ensure that the researcher's perspective did not overshadow the richness of their stories and that their authentic voices resonated throughout the research, unencumbered by external influences. This delicate balance allowed for a truly collaborative exploration of the subject matter, where the participants' voices remained at the forefront, and the researcher's role was that of a sensitive and respectful facilitator of their narratives.

The data generated for this study was captured within its natural setting as articulated by Swinton and Mowat (2006:55). To characterise the attitudes of young Latinos/as towards church leadership, it was essential to observe and carefully scrutinise how the social actors articulated their thoughts. The words gathered and subjected to analysis are drawn from in-depth interviews, as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014:10).

The research centred on gathering and analysing data pertaining specifically to church leadership development influenced by the call of God. It examined how YPLM perceive and respond to what they believe is a divine calling to serve in leadership roles within the church. Additionally, it explored the ways in which YPLM engage with the church credentialing process on their journey toward ordination. Throughout the research

process, rigorous verification procedures were employed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the gathered data, particularly in relation to these two aspects.

By focusing on these two central themes and carefully verifying the data, the research aims to gain an understanding of how God's call impacts the decisions and experiences of YPLM as they embark on the path towards church leadership and ordination.

3.2.1 Method

The primary method employed to gather data for this qualitative study was through semi-structured interviews, a technique outlined by Mason (2002:64). In qualitative research, knowledge is seen as inherently contextual and situation-dependent, underscoring the significance of focusing on context (Mason, 2002:64). This approach provided a valuable opportunity to tailor our questions to specific cases, enabling deeper probing whenever relevant information presented itself. The interviews served as a dynamic platform, affording the interviewees the freedom to guide the discussions towards topics and themes most pertinent to their personal experiences and reflections on the significance of God's calling in shaping their leadership development process.

This approach ensured that the research was not rigidly confined to a predetermined set of questions but allowed for a more flexible and organic exploration of the subject matter (2202:64). It also acknowledged the importance of the participants' unique perspectives and the nuances of their individual journeys in understanding the role of divine calling in their leadership development.

In the course of the research, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for thorough analysis. At the commencement of each interview session, explicit permission was sought from the participants to record the dialogue, a procedure to which all interviewees consented.

The interviews were conducted primarily in English. However, within the context of the Latin communities represented in the study, there were instances where interviewees occasionally responded in Spanish or employed a combination of Spanish and English.

This linguistic diversity in responses is a noteworthy facet of the data collection process, reflective of the cultural nuances and bilingualism prevalent within these communities. It is essential to acknowledge and account for these linguistic variations when analysing the qualitative data derived from the interviews, as they contribute to the richness and authenticity of the narrative shared by our participants.

During the interviews, questions were deliberately framed in an open-ended manner to foster an environment where each interviewee felt free to express themselves without any hint of manipulation or pursuit of specific answers. While some questions were consistent across the cohort sessions, unique sub-questions were incorporated based on each individual's responses. Throughout each session, an unstructured conversational flow was encouraged, allowing the interviewees to feel at ease.

Interestingly, despite the distinct characteristics of their personal experiences, a common thread emerged: a sense of divine calling to ministry. It became evident that these young Latinos/as, while navigating various challenges and conflicts, ultimately perceived God's hand, guiding them toward their calling in ministry. They believe that God has specific purposes for their lives, even amid struggles and uncertainties. This shared theme of the divine calling is what lends a captivating dimension to this research.

3.2.2 Research Location

This research was conducted within the Florida Multicultural District (FMD) of the Assemblies of God (AOG). Geographically, the study zone was delimited to the state of Florida, spanning from the southern city of Miami to the northern city of Jacksonville.

Notably, the FMD is one of the fourteen Hispanic districts operating within the broader network of the United States AOG. The U.S. AOG, a nationwide Pentecostal denomination, is subdivided into a total of sixty-eight districts, with fourteen of them designated as Language District/Hispanic or Latino districts as defined by the U.S. AOG By-laws. These Hispanics districts hold a unique status, categorized under the umbrella of language districts, reflecting the cultural diversity inherent within the denomination.

The choice of our research location was influenced by several compelling factors. First, the researcher's extensive involvement in denominational church leadership development within the FMD and other contexts played a pivotal role. Over the years, the researcher had not only actively participated but also keenly observed the ideas and values expressed by the YPLM credential applicants.

For the past three decades, the researcher has held the position of District Superintendent, working alongside a dedicated executive team. This role entails overseeing the entire leadership development process, from the initial submission of applications to the examination of references and conducting insightful interviews with all credential applicants. Importantly, FMD has made it a central mission to foster the growth and development of leaders through the processing of ministry applications. This first-hand experience in leadership development uniquely positioned the researcher to undertake this study.

Another key rationale behind FMD as the research location lies in its vibrant and diverse composition. This fellowship is a microcosm of the rich tapestry of Latin American cultures, with congregations representing a multitude of countries. Among the one hundred and eighty congregations that make up FMD, there is no single dominant nationality or ethnic group. While certain regions of Florida may host larger populations of specific communities, such as Cubans in the southern region and Puerto Ricans in

central Florida, the overall landscape of FMD maintains a harmonious and balanced representation of diverse nationalities and backgrounds throughout its fellowship. This diversity presents a unique and valuable backdrop to the research endeavours.

The third and pivotal reason for this research centres on unravelling what holds meaning for the relatively small cohort of YPLM all under the age of forty (40), (at the time of the interviews), who have embarked on the path toward becoming credentialed ministers within the AOG in the FMD. At the outset of this inquiry, this group represented a noteworthy thirteen per cent of the entire ministerial body within the FMD, which at the time consisted of five hundred and ten credential ministers.

This circumstance prompts a fundamental question: Why are these young individuals, in contrast to their counterparts in other age brackets within the FMD, drawn to embrace church leadership roles? The research explores this inquiry, aiming to provide an insightful explanation and foster a deeper understanding of church leadership among the younger generations. It strives to bridge the apparent gap and organizational misalignment that can exist between the younger generation and established church organizations, such as the AOG.

Interviews for this research were conducted at various locations to accommodate the diverse needs of the interviewees. Some interviews took place at the FMD District offices in Orlando, Florida. In other instances, interviews were arranged within church settings to provide a familiar and comfortable environment for the participants. Additionally, due to geographical constraints, several interviews were conducted remotely through online platforms like Zoom, allowing engagement with interviewees who were physically distant. Notably, one interviewee opted for an interview at Asbury Theological Seminary, as it was more convenient for him, given his status as a student at

the seminary. These flexible interview arrangements were designed to ensure accessibility and convenience for all participants.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Coding

The analysis of the data was conducted using NVivo software, employing a thematic analysis approach. This method allows researchers to discern and articulate meaningful patterns, known as themes, to convey their interpretations of qualitative data inquiries (Terry & Hayfield, 2021:3). Each social participant was given a code using YPLM for Young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennial and a number based on the order in which they were interviewed.

Indexing was a tedious process. Although NVivo software provides valuable assistance, the essential human element in the process remains evident when reading and juxtaposing the identified themes with my research question (Mason, 2002:160).

In the preliminary phase of indexing and coding, the model for data analysis by Terry and Hayfield was adhered to (2021:29). This involved dedicating ample time to acquaint oneself with the data before embarking on the coding process. Subsequently, the objective was to generate themes, and this phase yielded a total of one hundred and four distinct themes from the thirty recorded interviews were designated for analysis. The intricacy of this task stemmed from the imperative need to align these themes with the overarching research objectives.

3.3.2 Analysis

Analysing qualitative data is a challenging endeavour, demanding precision, and extensive intellectual and strategic deliberation (Mason, 2002:203). The thematic approach permits the researcher to group word facts so they can be classified, organised, and summarized (Terry & Hayfield, 2021:3). The analytical journey commenced by

transcribing every word spoken during the interviews conducted. This qualitative study primarily relied on semi-structured interviews as the data collection method technique, (Mason 2002).

This data analysis approach can be characterized by several key principles essential for a thorough and well-structured presentation (Terry & Hayfield, 2021:3):

- a) **Theoretical Flexibility:** This analysis emphasizes theoretical flexibility, meaning the researcher considers various theoretical frameworks and concepts when interpreting the data. This approach recognizes that the choice of theory can significantly impact the analysis' outcomes and is willing to adapt as needed.
- b) **Procedural Focus:** The analysis places a high degree of importance on the procedural aspect of the research process, following a systematic and rigorous engagement with the data. This systematic approach ensures that the analysis is methodical.
- c) **Reflexive Contribution of the Researcher:** The researcher's role is not passive in this analysis. Instead, there is an active and reflexive contribution from the researcher, who is aware of their perspectives, biases and interpretations. This self-awareness enhances the credibility and transparency of the analysis.
- d) **Framing of Themes:** One of the central elements of this analysis is the framing of themes. Themes are not treated as isolated concepts but are seen as interconnected and multifaceted. This approach acknowledges the complexity of the data and aims to capture the richness of meaning within and across themes.

- e) Conceptual and Meaning-Based Patterns – The analysis focuses on identifying conceptual and meaning-based patterns within the data, going beyond surface-level observations to uncover deeper insights and connections. This aims to provide an understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

As mentioned in section 3.1.4.2 (3.1.4.1) “Framing”, the approach prioritises reliability and trustworthiness. For this reason, the researcher’s administrative assistant served as the primary point of contact with the interviewees, utilising phone communication. Data analysis commenced upon verbal consent, as no written consent forms were used. Interviewee scheduling followed no specific order.

After completing the interviews, the recorded conversations were transcribed and subsequently entered into the NVivo software program allowing for the identification of recurring words and themes. The researcher followed Terry & Hayfield’s suggestions (2021:29). First, a thorough and ongoing familiarisation with the data set. The researcher thoroughly and continually familiarised with the data set by repeatedly reading the transcriptions, searching for repeated words or phrases. Second, an open-ended organic coding process, not constrained by concerns about agreement between different coders, nor by delimiting and defining codes. Tentative prototype themes were generated from codes. As a Pentecostal researcher familiar with the language and phrases from the interviewees, there was a risk of *semantic coding*⁷. Rather than merely conducting a surface-level reading of the data, the analysis warranted a more in-depth data analysis using the *latent code*⁸ method of data analysis. Third, tentative prototype themes were

⁷ Semantic codes stay at the surface level of the data and often capture or summarize a point that has been made by the participant. They stay close to participant meanings but are generally not their exact words. (Terry & Hayfield, 2021:37).

⁸ Latent codes tend to require more in-depth engagement with the data and capture something that lies beneath the data and requires interpretation from the researcher (2021:38).

generated from codes. As the researcher delved deeper into the transcripts, recurring phrases and themes were identified, prompting a gradual refinement toward broader thematic categories. Fourth, developing, reviewing, and testing those prototype themes against the data and developing them as needed. It involved deconstructing and rebuilding new themes, defining and naming final themes. This process was repeated, systematically, aligning themes with the data to encapsulate the essence of the analysis more accurately. For this step, the clustering group method was used. Codes that shared a story about a particular aspect of the data were identified and brought together (Terry & Hayfield, 2021:47). Fifth, writing up the report.

In summary, this data analysis approach is characterised by its theoretical flexibility, rigorous procedures, active researcher involvement, holistic framing of themes, and a focus on a conceptual and meaning-based patterns. These principles come together to provide insights to the field.

3.4 Secondary Sources

The bibliographical exploration reveals a multifaceted research focus encompassing Pentecostal reflections, practical theology, and leadership development, sociology, and the socio-psychological dynamics specific to the Latino population, with particular emphasis on young Latinos. To examine the influences shaping the lives of young Latinos within the context of FMD, a summary was compiled. This summary delves into the historical and contemporary social issues impacting the Latino population in the United States.

This investigative endeavour extended beyond literature reviews to include an analysis of constitutions and bylaws, as well as an examination of other relevant publications. This broader approach ensured that the research not only expanded existing knowledge but also provided additional and valuable insights into the subject matter.

3.5 The Methodological Limitations

An evaluation of the study reveals its diverse limitations and considerable promise for future scholars interested in the subject matter. The study is based on the first-hand accounts of young Pentecostal Latino millennials, who offer valuable insights into the interplay of God's calling and its influence on their leadership development. Essentially, this research provides fertile ground for the exploration and enrichment of knowledge within this specialised field.

3.5.1 Outward Credibility of the Research

Within this cohort of YPLM, there was a notable commonality in their qualifications and holding an AOG credential. However, while some beliefs were shared, the group also exhibited significant differences, including variations in age, gender and geographical locations. These different characteristics provided a valuable opportunity to learn from a wide range of perspectives. Consequently, this diversity played a pivotal role in enriching the process of identifying crucial themes within our research.

Nevertheless, in striving for excellence, it is important to consider areas for further improvement. It is suggested that future research includes two additional criteria to expand the scope and depth of the investigation: incorporating non-credentialed YPLM and including YPLM from different regions of the United States. By broadening the participant pool to encompass these groups, the research can yield more nuanced insights and achieve understanding of the topic.

The element of time posed a constraint throughout the course of the research endeavours. Ideally, the investigation would have concluded by now. However, various unforeseeable circumstances, many directly linked to responsibilities as a pastor and denominational leader, caused delays. A pastoral transition was planned over five years, following a lengthy twenty-one-year tenure as the lead pastor of a congregation. Despite

a substantial investment of time and effort during this transitional period, circumstances beyond control prevented its execution. Consequently, the need to continue in the pastoral role impinged on the time that could be allocated to the research.

3.5.2 Inward Credibility of the Research

The semi-structured interview method was chosen for interactions with the group. However, it is important to acknowledge that the data could have been further enriched by incorporating focus groups into the research methodology. Focus groups offer a unique vantage point to delve into the perspectives and experiences of the group members. In this approach, individuals participate in discussions where they actively share their thoughts and respond to the viewpoints of their peers. This creates a dynamic and interactive environment where ideas are exchanged and evolve in real time. It also fosters a rich tapestry of insights by capitalising on the collective wisdom and diversity of the group. Rather than relying solely on individual responses, it leverages the synergy and interplay among participants, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. As a result, a broader spectrum of perspectives and nuances can be tapped into that might not be as readily apparent in more traditional research approaches.

Incorporating focus groups into our research strategy could have further amplified these benefits by allowing us to explore specific topics in greater depth and uncovering hidden dimensions of the group's dynamics. While the semi-structured interview method has its merits, the addition of focus groups would have provided a multifaceted view of the subject under investigation, ultimately enhancing the robustness and validity of our research findings. This approach enables researchers to witness the dynamics of situational interactions and the processes by which issues are conceived, addressed, and resolved within the specific contexts (Mason, 2002:64).

3.5.3 Researcher Stance as a Reflective Practitioner

It is important to recognise the researcher's own role and perspective within the context of this research endeavour. Certain facets of the researcher's position warrant explicit acknowledgment, as they may have influenced the approach to the research topics. It is necessary to clarify that the researcher does not claim a stance of complete neutrality in this research, primarily due to personal associations outlined in section 1.7.2 of this work. Researchers bear the responsibility of selecting research topics, defining study objectives, determining the methodology to be employed, and choosing the analytical framework (Blaikie & Priest, 2017:2). This process inevitably involves a constant tension between subjectivity and objectivity, shaping the overall research stance. Recognising this dynamic is essential to understanding the research's context and potential biases.

In agreement with Donald A. Schön, the researcher engaged in this project by reflecting on the research and simultaneously reflecting while conducting the research (Schön, 1983:55). The focus was ecclesiastical leadership from the perspective of young Pentecostals Latinos. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured question format, which allowed participants to expand on their ideas. The themes that stood out the most were: the importance of leadership in the church; the spiritual or supernatural experience with the Holy Spirit, which sensitizes individuals to God's call to ministry; the experiences and doctrines lived within the context of Pentecostal communities; and the influence of the social context as Latinos in the United States while fulfilling their call to ministry. The researcher, upon gathering the data, provided verbal descriptions to understand the theories of the interviewees or this group of young people (Schön, 1983:59).

It is part of the researcher's task to reflect on the theories of the interviewees while also reflecting on their own motives, which, to some extent, are not entirely objective due to being part of the Pentecostal community.

3.6 Semi-Structured Questions

The development of the interview questions was guided by several key observations and considerations. Initially, a notable trend was observed: a declining participation of individuals under 40 years old in the credentialing processes within the Assemblies of God. However, an exception emerged in the form of an identifiable group of young adults who displayed a distinct interest in pursuing ministerial credentials within this denomination. This anomaly prompted a deeper inquiry into the underlying factors influencing their vocational decisions.

The primary objective was to explore the specific influences that guided their decision-making processes. Specifically, the research sought to understand the role of spiritual experiences, if any, in shaping their commitment to ministry. Additionally, the significance of denominational affiliation in their vocational aspirations was assessed. To effectively investigate these research questions, it was essential to adopt a methodological approach that facilitated an in-depth immersion into the lived experiences of this cohort of young adults.

3.6.1 Initial Questions

- A) May I have your permission to record?
- B) Tell me about your religious experience?
- C) How did you hear about church leadership?
- D) What's the opinion of your peers regarding church leadership?
- E) What is your peers' opinion on church denominations?
- F) How many young people do you know have applied for church leadership?

- G) How drawn are young Latinos towards becoming church leaders?
- H) Are there any obstacles in your view to becoming a church leader?
- I) Define leadership?
- J) How do you see a religious organisation such as FMD?
- K) What is your opinion about having a minister's credential?

3.7 Trustworthiness and Ethics

3.7.1 Ethics

Due to the researcher's active participation and close involvement with FMD, there was an acute awareness of the potential for personal biases to influence the interviewees' responses. Additionally, the subtle intimidation that the researcher's presence might exert during the interviews was recognised. To address and mitigate these concerns, deliberate steps were taken to establish transparency and trust in the interview process.

To counteract any potential bias or intimidation, several key strategies were implemented. First and foremost, the purpose and objectives of the study were articulated to the interviewees, providing an explanation of why the research was being conducted. This aimed to demystify the study and clarify that the intention was purely for research purposes.

Furthermore, close attention was paid to both verbal communication and non-verbal cues such as gestures and body language, during the interviews. A conscious effort was made to maintain a neutral and non-judgmental demeanour throughout the conversations. This was essential in reassuring the interviewees that their responses would not affect their credentialing process within the FMD.

The approach centred on transparency, clear communication, and an empathetic demeanour. By taking these proactive measures, the goal was to create a comfortable and

open environment for the interviewees, ensuring that they felt at ease sharing their insights and experiences without fear. This ethical approach helped to maintain the integrity of the research process and fostered trust between the interviewees and the researcher.

3.7.2 Ethics in Conducting Interviews

In conducting and recording interviews for research, a consistent protocol was followed to ensure ethical considerations. This process involved several key steps to obtain informed consent and facilitate open dialogue with the interviewees. First, verbal permission was sought. This permission was twofold: to conduct the interview itself and to record it for documentation purposes. This ensured that interviewees were fully aware of the nature of the interaction and provided their consent willingly.

Second, permission for public use was also requested. During the initial consent process, interviewees were explicitly asked for permission to use portions of the interview for public dissemination if required. This step was essential for maintaining transparency and ensuring that interviewees were comfortable with the potential broader visibility of their responses. This aspect of permission served as a safeguard against any unexpected implications for interviewee stemming from the public release of the interview content. Third, the questioning technique during the interview process was carefully structured to encourage open responses. Questions were designed to be open-ended, allowing interviewees the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences. This approach aimed to capture rich and nuanced insights from the interviewees.

Fourth, the interview process was designed to be dynamic and adaptive. As conversations unfolded, additional questions would naturally emerge based on the

interviewee's responses. This flexible approach allowed for a deeper exploration of topics and ensured that relevant aspects were not overlooked during the interviews.

Overall, this interview protocol was crafted to uphold ethical standards, respect the autonomy of interviewees, and facilitate insightful exchange of information. It prioritized informed consent, openness to elaboration, and adaptability, ensuring that the research process was both rigorous and respectful of the individuals participating in the interviews.

3.7.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher ensured the anonymity of the participants and safeguarded the confidentiality of the data they contributed to the research. It is vital to emphasise that young Latinos often approach sharing their personal viewpoints with a degree of caution and discretion. The interviews were conducted within the context of a pre-existing mutual trust that had been cultivated between the interviewer (the researcher) and the interviewees.

The willingness of these individuals to participate in the interviews and share their insights was underpinned by several factors. First, there was a level of comfort and trust that emanated from their shared Pentecostal background. This common affiliation created a sense of rapport and understanding which likely facilitated their willingness to engage in candid discussions during the interviews. However, it is important to acknowledge that self-interest played a role in this dynamic as well. Despite the shared religious background, the interviewees may have had personal motivations for participating in the interviews. These motivations could range from a desire to influence church practices or policies to seeking opportunities for personal growth and reflection.

In essence, the success of these interviews was contingent upon a delicate balance of trust, shared background, and the potential for mutual benefit. It is within this context

that the interview is exhibited a positive attitude towards both the interview process and the researcher. This positive disposition was not solely due to our shared religious background but was also influenced by the understanding that their perspectives and experiences held value and relevance within the research context.

In summary, the researcher's role encompassed a commitment to protecting the identities of the participants and ensuring the confidentiality of their contributions. The interviews were conducted within a framework of trust, facilitated by our shared, Pentecostal background, and a recognition that participation could be mutually beneficial. This multifaceted approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the perspectives and insights of young Latinos on church-related issues.

Table 1. Cohort of Young Pentecostal Latinos/as Millennials

Code	Name	Gender	Age	Credentials	Education	Job / Profession
YPLM 1	D.O.	M	34	Ordained	B.A.	Dept. Sup.
YPLM 2	E.B.	F	24	License	M.A.	Emergency Sup.
YPLM 3	H.B.	M	30	Certified	B.A.	Student Advisor
YPLM 4	J.C.	M	25	Ordained	M.S.	Structural Engineer
YPLM 5	J.R.	M	26	License	B.A.	Youth Direct
YPLM 6	J.V.	M	33	Ordained	Trade Sch.	Cyber Security
YPLM 7	R.R.	M	24	Ordained	B.S.	Missionary
YPLM 8	M.R.	F	25	Ordained	B.A.	Missionary
YPLM 9	A.G.	M	28	Ordained	M.A.	Chaplain
YPLM 10	S.L.	M	38	Ordained	B.A.	Sales Marketing
YPLM 11	S.D.	F	32	Ordained	M.A.	Church Relations
YPLM 12	S.G.	F	38	Ordained	M.A.	School Principal
YPLM 13	B.P.	F	26	Ordained	H.S.	Admin./ Receptionist
YPLM 14	M.G.	F	28	Ordained	M.A.	Mental Health Ther.
YPLM 15	W.L.	M	33	License	H.S.	Bus. Owner
YPLM 16	B.F.	M	38	License	H.S.	Bus. owner
YPLM 17	S.G.	M	27	License	CERT.	Private Invest.
YPLM 18	R.P.	M	26	Ordained	B.A.	Exe. Pastor
YPLM 19	Y.G.	M	23	Certified	B.A.	Firefighter
YPLM 20	K.B.	F	37	Certified	M.Div.	Exe. Dir. Students Affairs
YPLM 21	R.T.	F	27	Certified	J.D.	Attorney
YPLM 22	N.O.	M	32	License	H.S.	Realtor
YPLM 23	L.R.	F	30	Certified	B.S.	Quality Manager
YPLM 24	Y.S.	F	34	Certified	M.A.	Youth Pastor
YPLM 25	J.G.	M	33	Certified	H.S.	Pastor
YPLM 26	J.B.	F	31	Ordained	H.S.	Patient Ser. Rep.
YPLM 27	N.G.	F	37	Certified	M.B.A.	Business Owner
YPLM 28	J.F.	M	34	In Process	B.A.	Youth Pastor
YPLM 29	E.O.	F	27	In Process	M.A.	Staff at IGNITE
YPLM 30	A.F.	M	30	Certified	H.S.	Youth Pastor

Table 2. Summary of Cohort of Young Pentecostal Latinos/as Millennials

Name	Code	Summary
D.O.	YPLM-1	Born and grew up in Chicago. He grew up in a Christian home. His married. Later on, he moves with his father to Florida and did not continue in the Christian faith. His cousin invited him to his Church, where he had an encounter with God. His Pastor mentored him. Invited him to lead youth ministries and felt the call to ministries and motivated to apply for credentials with the Assemblies of God.
E.B.	YPLM-2	Born in the U.S. She grew up in a Christian home. She is single. Her grandparents were Pastors and Cuba. She began to have a relationship with Jesus at thirteen years of age. It was at a youth camp where she encountered the power of God. She always wanted to know if God cared about her personally. She was inspired by her grandfather to ministry in spite of being disappointed by her parents' failures. She enrolled in Bible institute motivated by her friend who shared her own stories and she felt God was speaking to her and that inspired her to embrace church leadership and become credential minister.
H.N.	YPLM-3	Born in Puerto Rico. His married with a three-year-old son. He was raised catholic. Moved to Florida with his family. They were part of a church plant mission. There was a period of his life where he had questions about God, and he left the faith. While pursuing a college degree and working as an academic advisor one student went to his office and spontaneously asked him, "why are you running away from God. He call that his Elijah moment. From that moment forward he felt a call to the ministry.
J.C.	YPLM-4	Born and grew up in Iowa. Raised in a Christian home. He is married and one child. From an early age he was involved in church ministries specifically as an evangelist. He felt the call of God to become an evangelist. The two driving factors that motivated him was his love for God and ministry.
J.R.	YPLM-5	Born and grew up in Orlando, Fl. Raised in a Christian home. Not married. From an early age felt the call to ministry. From an early age was involved in church ministries. Became youth pastor and later he became the district youth director.

Name	Code	Summary
J.V.	YPLM-6	He was born in Puerto Rico but grew up in the Bronx, NY. He was not raised in a Christian home. He describes his family as everybody for themselves. He took to the streets and lived a wildlife. He began using drugs. He felt God was putting people in his life who spoke to him about God. He heard the voice of God and realized he had to change and felt that God was giving him a purpose in life.
R.R.	YPLM-7	He was born in the US. He is married. He grew up in a Christian home. His parents are missionaries. His parents were assigned to serve in college campus. Therefore, he was surrounded by ministerial students. He was involved in church ministries very early in life, but around the age of 12 is when he felt that God was calling him to the ministry.
M.R.	YPLM-8	She was born in Peru. She grew up in a Catholic family. They moved to the U.S. when she was very young. A friend invited her to church. As time went by one day, her friend invited her to a youth convention. While the preacher was bringing the message she was understanding what he was talking about. She gave her life to Jesus at that moment. While she was in college, she was invited to a mission gathering and there she felt God calling her to China.
A.G.	YPLM-9	He was born in the U.S. He grew up in Christian home. He is married. Was involved in youth ministry at his local church. Later on he was involved in youth ministry with the district. He felt God calling him to the ministry and serve the district.
S.L.	YPLM-10	He was born in Puerto Rico. His family moved to N.Y. when he was 5 years old. He grew up in a Christian home. He is married. He felt God's calling to ministry when he was 13 years old even when those were rebellious years. God used someone he did not know to speak to him about God calling him to ministry.
S.D.	YPLM-11	She was born in the U.S. her parents are from Brazil. She is married. Her parents became Christians when she was 10 years old. She has been involved in ministry since her teen age years. She believes God allowed her to be involve early in her life in ministry. She believes God has guided her placing her in ministerial positions.
S.G.	YPLM-12	She was in Puerto Rico. She grew up in a Christian home. She is married. She received the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a child. She received God's calling and became involved in church ministry very early in life. She has served the district in various capacities with youth and educational ministries.

Name	Code	Summary
B.P.	YPLM-13	She was born in the U.S. and raised in Christian church. At the age of 12 she gave her life to the Lord. She was called by God at the age of twelve. She became active in church in different ministries. In 2018 she became the Associate Pastor of her church.
M.G.	YPLM-14	She was born in the U.S. She grew up in a Christian church. She accepted Jesus at the age of six. Her parents were pastors when she was eight years old. She started building a relationship with God early in life. She felt God's calling the day she was given the opportunity to preach a sermon.
W.L.	YPLM-15	He was born in Guatemala. He was raised catholic. His grandfather began taking him to a vacation Bible school. He received Jesus when he was thirteen years old. He moved to the U.S. at the age of eighteen where he did not continue his relationship with God. About a year and half later he was invited back to a church where he reconciled with God. He began to sense God's calling and felt a sudden passion for people. Later on, he became a credentialed minister with the A/G.
B.F.	YPLM-16	He was born in the U.S. He was raised in a Christian home. He is married. His grandfather was an Executive leader of the A/G in the Dominican Republic, and his father is an executive member of the FMD. He was called by God to preach early in his youth. He went to Bible Institute and graduated. Later he became a credentialed minister with the A/G.
S.G.	YPLM-17	He was born in the U.S. He was raised in a Christian home. His grandfather and father were credentialed minister with the denomination. He knew God was calling him to ministry from an early age. When he was in his mother's womb his mother received a prophetic word about the child, she had in her womb who would be a pastor. He had an encounter with God where he argues with God, about entering the ministry. At some point, he yields to God's calling.
R.P.	YPLM-18	He was born in Puerto Rico. He is married. He converted to Christ when he was 16 years old. He became active in church ministries due to his pastor's illness. He was given opportunities to preach, and to lead worship. He had a pastoral calling from God, so his pastor encouraged him to pursue credentials with Assemblies of God.

Name	Code	Summary
Y.G.	YPLM-19	He was born in the U.S. He is Bi- vocational. He is a P.E. teacher at a public school, and also youth pastor in his local church. His pastor acknowledge that he had a calling to ministry and encouraged him to pursue his credentials with the Assemblies of God.
K.B.	YPLM-20	She was born in the U.S. She has been active in youth ministries early in her life. She went from local church youth pastor to sectional Youth Leader. This responsibility exposed her to different churches and many pastors in her section. It was her pastor who encouraged her about her, calling to become a minister with the Assemblies of God.
R.T.	YPLM-21	She was born in the U.S. She grew up in a Christian home. She is married. Her calling from God through a prophetic word that she should embrace her pastoral calling and leave her aspiration to go to law school. It was through an opportunity my pastor gave me to lead the youth ministry. He put me on a six-month trial. During those months, I felt the burden and the call God had given me through the prophetic word and I accepted my pastoral calling.
N.O.	YPLM-22	He was born in the U.S. He was raised in a Christian home. His parents were pastors in South Carolina. He came involved youth ministries very early in his youth. He knew God was calling him to Pastoral ministry. He was encouraged to accept a youth pastor position in his local church. He became a credentialed minister with the A/G.
L.R.	YPLM-23	She was born in Puerto Rico. She was also born and raised in church. Pastoral ministries were not strange to her, because her uncles and grandfather were pastors for many years. It was during a retreat with the Assemblies of God in Puerto Rico, where she receives God's calling to ministry. The following Sunday during church service, the guest speaker gave her a prophetic word that confirmed her pastoral calling. Her pastor encourages her to go to Bible Institute, which she did. A few years later, she received her first credentials with the Assemblies of God.
Y.S.	YPLM-24	She was born in the U.S. She grew up in a Christian home. Involved in church ministries in her youth. She felt God's call to work with youth, but she has also work in evangelism and part of the church worship team.

Name	Code	Summary
J.G.	YPLM-25	He was born in Puerto Rico. His family moved to Florida when he was young. He is married. It was at his local church in Lakeland, Fl. where he received Christ as his saviour; was baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit. In 2006 he received his calling from God to go to a ministry called Ignite. It was there he felt God's calling to a pastoral ministry. it was also there that I went through the credentialing process.
J.B.	YPLM-26	She was born in the U.S. She was raised in a Christian home. She was involved in church ministries at an early age. She started working with Youth and then other ministries. Both her grandfather and father are credential ministers with the Assemblies of God. When she was 16 years of age, she felt the call of God to enter the ministry. She was encouraged to apply for credentials from her parents, based on the fact that she needed spiritual covering for her ministry.
N.G.	YPLM-27	She was born in the U.S. She is married. When she accepted Christ as her Savior, she decided to go all in with God. She has been active with Ignite ministries and their congregation. She felt God's calling to be involved in social justice. She decided to receive her credentials with the A/G.
J.F.	YPLM-28	He was born in Puerto Rico. He was raised in a Christian home. He began to get involved in church ministry very early in his youth. He has family members who are pastors of different congregations. The first youth convention he went to in 2011 he had an encounter with God. He felt God touching his heart for ministry but there was fear and a lack of knowledge. He became the youth pastor. He is in the process of credentialing.
E.O.	YPLM-29	She was born in the U.S. She gave her heart to the Lord while attending UCF. She began volunteering in church. Friends and coworkers began to encourage her about the gift that God has placed in her life. She is a staff with Ignite ministry. She is in the process of credentials.
A.F.	YPLM-30	He was born in the U.S. He is married. He received Christ as his saviour at 22 years of age. Immediately he began to be involved in church ministries specially with media, and youth ministries. He sensed the call of God the same day he gave his life to the Lord. He is a credentialed minister with the A/G.

Table 3. Characteristics Summary of the FMD Cohort of Young Pentecostal

Characteristic			Total
Born in the U.S.	YPLM	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30	20
Born Outside of the U.S.	YPLM	3, 8, 10, 12, 15, 16, 18, 23, 25, 28	10
Raised in a Pentecostal Home		1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24	20
Raised in a Catholic Home	YPLM	3, 8, 15	3
Not Raised in a Christian Home	YPLM	6, 18, 19, 25, 27, 29, 30	7
Had a Fall Out of Faith	YPLM	1, 3, 15	3
Married	YPLM	3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 25, 27	10
Involved in Church Ministry Early in Life	YPLM	20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30	7
Had Encounter with God	YPLM	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 15, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29	12
Had a Sense of the Call of God	YPLM	7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 25	11
Had a Sense of the Call of God While Engaged in Church Ministry	YPLM	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30	26
Applied for Credentials While Active in Ministry	YPLM	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30	30

Characteristic			Total
Education – B.A.	YPLM	1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 18, 19, 28	8
- B.S.	YPLM	7, 23	2
- M.A.	YPLM	2, 9, 11, 12, 14, 24, 29	7
- M.S.	YPLM	4	1
- M.Div.	YPLM	20	1
- M.B.A.	YPLM	27	1
- Juris Doctor	YPLM	21	1
- Trade School	YPLM	6	1
- High School	YPLM	13, 15, 16, 22, 25, 26, 30	7
- Certificate	YPLM	17	1
Credentials – Ordained	YPLM	1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 26	13
- License	YPLM	2, 5, 15, 16, 17, 22	6
- Certified	YPLM	3, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30	9
- In Process	YPLM	28, 29	2

3.8 The Concluding Summary

To ensure a robust methodology for addressing the research question, the researcher opted for an approach that would authentically capture the experiences narrated by the YPLM. The research methods were designed to investigate the phenomenon within its real-life context, refraining from any form of manipulation while upholding the utmost standards of trust and ethical conduct.

The research was conducted using a qualitative design to explore the conversion experiences of the YPLM cohort and the significance of God’s call in their church leadership development. This approach allowed the researcher to gain deep insights into their social world without using traditional random statistical techniques for sampling.

Instead, the sampling was purposeful, drawn from the FMD. The claims of the YPLM were organized within a theory of conversion.

Data collection took place in natural settings through semi-structured interviews. NVivo software was used for coding, employing a thematic analysis approach. The analysis emphasised theoretical flexibility, rigorous procedures, active research involvement, holistic framing, and the identification of conceptual pattern-based insights. While complete neutrality was not claimed, ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4.

LEADERSHIP CONVERSION AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

4.0 Introduction

A group of YPLM from the FMD of the Assemblies of God decided to enter the ministry and seek ministerial credentials with the denomination, believing that God had called them to serve. These young individuals were already active members of their churches, actively participating in various church programs. However, something within them compelled them to step up and commit to a higher level of service. What factors contributed to this change? What significant experiences influenced these young people? The task at hand is to provide a description, explanation, and understanding of the factors contributing to the development of church leadership among YPLM in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God. We aim to analyse this process through the lens of conversion theory. To achieve this, we will utilise Lewis R. Rambo's theory of conversion in conjunction with data collected from our cohort as a framework to better comprehend this experience. In this chapter, we will focus on the process of conversion, examining the definition and the components of a conversion experience.

4.1 Definition of Conversion

According to Lewis R. Rambo, definitions of conversion abound, posing a problem for scholarship (Rambo, 1993:25). The controversy exists not only in the differing definitions but also in who defines it. There is often a contradiction between the individual who has converted and the advocate of conversion. The former sees the experience as sincere and significant while the latter perceives it as less adequate (1993:24). Rambo offers a resolution to this discussion by distinguishing between two approaches to the definition of conversion: the normative approach, which formulates a definition based on theological convictions within religious traditions, and the

descriptive approach, which seeks to outline the nature of the experience (Rambo, 1993:24-25). This research primarily approaches conversion descriptively, enabling an examination of the dynamic and multifaceted process of transformation. For some, this manifests as a sudden and radical change, while for others, it involves a more gradual transformation.

Rambo views conversion as a process rather than a single event. He describes it as a transformation of religious of nature that occurs within the dynamics of relationships between the convert and those around them. This transformation happens through a combination of events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations (1993:23). Based on the data obtained from interviews with Latino youth, this research aims to demonstrate that the decision of this group to embrace church leadership was a conversion experience rooted in supernatural encounters with the Holy Spirit.

4.2 Components

4.2.1 The Cultural

The holistic model of conversion suggests four components: the cultural, social, psychological, and the religious component. From a cultural perspective, the cohort of YPLM was raised within a religious church culture and acquired their religious language within that context. The data shows that the cultural component influenced these young people in several areas: their upbringing, church leadership knowledge, early spiritual awakening, church rituals, and morals.

4.2.1.1 Upbringing

Many YPLM members had early exposure to the Christian faith during their upbringing. The data indicates that there are twenty-six references to growing up in a Christian home, but only ten will be included here. All testimonies share a common

thread of being raised or exposed to the Christian faith since childhood, with each story containing aspects about their individual experiences in church leadership development. YPLM-1 highlights that he was raised in a strict Christian home, stating, *“I grew up in a Christian home with a very strict mom”*. YPLM –3, shares that his family were part of a new church plant project from Puerto Rico:

“I moved here in the 1990s with my family, my grandfather, and his wife and also a group of eight members of the disciples of Christ church came here to plant. So, we decided to follow them”.

YPLM-13’s story reveals that she has known the gospel since early childhood, having been raised in the church. She said:

“My mom raised me in church my entire life and being raised in church I’ve always known the gospel”.

Similarly, YPLM-23 was born into a faith community: *“I was born and raised in the church”*. YPLM-14 shares a common experience among young Latinos of accepting Jesus at an early age: *“I accepted Jesus at 6 years old, my parents met the Lord before I was born so I was raised in church”*. Others like YLPM-2 come from a home where family members were already leaders in the church:

“My grandparents are pastors or pastors in Cuba. So, I grew up knowing about Jesus and about church and how it worked”.

YPLM-7 was born to missionaries in the field providing exposure to other Christian experiences in different countries, *“I was born to missionary parents. My parents had become missionaries right after they got married”*. Not all the cohort members had the upbringing as YPLM-16, who was raised in a home of ministers and denominational leaders:

“I was familiar with the credential process because my grandfather was a Superintendent in the Dominican Republic. My mother and my father were licensed ministers from the Spanish district of the Assemblies of God. So, it's been something that I've been well versed in”.

YPLM-12 shares that even when moving geographically, they maintained their affiliation with the Assemblies of God:

“I was born into the church, always been a Christian, and when we moved here, we moved to an Assemblies of God church where I was definitely exposed to the beautiful relationship that is to have a relationship with Christ”.

YPLM-15 credits his family for intentionally ensuring he was exposed to the gospel from an early age. (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH):

” Since I was little, he began to take me to the Christian church in Guatemala. I always attend children’s vacation schools to listen to the word of God. I received Christ at the age of 13”.

In summary, the testimonies presented in this section serve as evidence of how the upbringing of these young individuals played a pivotal role in exposing them to the gospel from a very early age, thus influencing their Christian journey. Their upbringing was intertwined with various Christian institutions, including churches, missionary agencies, and denominations, which were not just places of worship, but integral parts of their culture. These institutions not only instilled religious values but also shaping their identities and strengthening their spiritual growth.

4.2.1.2 Leadership Development Knowledge

Understanding denominations, ministry processes and churches is contingent upon the organisation of the culture as these institutions become known within that context. Culture is a force in the shaping and renewal of individuals, groups, and societies (1993:29).

The cohort of young Latinos/as shared their experiences with these institutions during interviews. In this culture, church denominations exist to organise churches and develop ministers and leaders. One significant impact of denominations on young Latinos/as was their role in providing information about ministerial processes and the steps required to obtain ministerial credentials. This section features four statements from our cohort regarding denominations.

YPLM-26 declares several things that illustrate the impact the denomination had on her life:

“I grew up knowing about the Assemblies of God. My family is very passionate about the Assemblies of God since many years ago. Having that background and it's not just having that background, I believe having that coverage, having that coverage under an institution is very important”.

She emphasises the significance of her upbringing within the denomination, highlighting the impact it had on her faith journey. She underscores the deep-rooted passion in her family for this specific denomination and the importance of having a denominational covering, emphasising the sense of security and belonging it provides.

In her statement, YPLM-14 lists several denominational activities, serving as evidence that she was acquainted with the denomination's programs from a very young age thanks to her upbringing:

“I was aware of the 16 fundamental truths, actually, early on as a young person my parents were very involved, they were sectional leaders for Miami early on in the 90s so I always went to youth camps, I always went to conventions, I always knew the AG was the fellowship”.

Her narrative delves into the core doctrines of the Assemblies of God, suggesting a doctrinal foundation from her upbringing. Her mention of sectional leaders underscores her early understanding of the denomination's hierarchical structure. She also highlights youth camps, indicating active engagement of young individuals within the

denomination. Lastly, her reference to conventions highlights an aspect of the denomination's governance, where leaders are elected and chosen by the assembly evidencing her early awareness of the denominational leadership process.

YPLM-20 mentions that her pastor held the position of a presbyter within the denomination, indicating direct exposure to denominational activities and information:

“My pastor was a presbyter, so I knew about churches and AOG, I knew what we were, and what it meant”.

She alludes to three areas of information. First, her pastor being a presbyter means she has closer access to information regarding the denominational structure than other members of churches whose pastors are not presbyters. Second, she states that she knows about churches and the Assemblies of God, indicating she is informed about the churches in her section or neighbourhood, and the denomination overseeing her church. Lastly, she expresses that she knew who they were and what it meant, likely indicating her knowledge of the responsibilities of being affiliated with a church denomination.

YPLM-17's case is interesting as he grew up with both his father and grandfather as AOG credentialed ministers. He also expressed knowledge about the Spanish district, the district staff, and attending the denomination's convention:

“I knew it as south-eastern Spanish district because my father is still an ordained minister, and my grandfather was an ordained minister, and at a pointed time my father was presbyter of our section so I knew about the district in that sense and the sectional staff, going to conventions with him, getting to know pastors and the executive”.

Having parents and grandparents who were credentialed ministers of the denomination significantly influenced these individuals' considerations for church leadership roles. Their familiarity with the district structure and the district staff further enhances their comfort within the environment.

4.2.1.3 Early Spiritual Awakening

Religion and spirituality are integral aspects of culture, shaping the beliefs and practices of its members (1993:29). During interviews with our cohort of young Latinos/as, many mentioned having spiritual experiences from an early age, leading to the development of spiritual awareness. All members of this group expressed that they had a spiritual awakening early in life. This section highlights some of these experiences. YPLM-25 spent his formative years in a church in Lakeland, Florida, where his parents had relocated. During this time, he underwent a significant spiritual journey, which included his salvation experience, baptism in the Holy Spirit, getting married, and actively serving in the church. It was during this period that he received a call into the ministry:

“Then my father got a job in Lakeland, and we moved to Lakeland, and ended up in that church and I served there for years. I grew up there, all of my major life events happened in that church. I got saved there baptized in the spirit and I got married there. Being part of that congregation is where I received my calling to ministry”.

His spiritual awakening occurred within the nurturing environment of his local church, where he had a salvation experience. To reach this realisation, he had to comprehend the significance of that decision and engage in introspection about his life when he accepted salvation through Jesus Christ. He also emphasizes that it was within the same church, where he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As a Pentecostal, he was well-versed in both the biblical significance and the experiential aspect of this spiritual event. After getting married, he began serving in his local church, and it was through this service that he received his call to the ministry.

YPLM-26's passion for working with youth ignited at a young age, starting when she was just sixteen years old. Her deep-rooted desire to engage in God's work was evident from her early years:

"From a very young age I had the passion to work with young people. I had always been involved with youth ministry and I started ministering at the age of sixteen... From a young age I have felt a passion to do the work of God."

Her early involvement with youth ministry suggests that her pastor or immediate leader, recognized a spiritual awakening in her. Entrusting someone with working with young people implies confidence in their spirituality and ability to influence the young people they supervise. Her passion for doing God's work indicates an extraordinary motivation that drove her to serve God.

The interview with YPLM-15 was in Spanish. He grew up in Guatemala, where a church member would take him to church when he was little. He began to awaken spiritually when he started attending vacation Bible school. At the age of thirteen, he had a spiritual experience where he received Christ. At that same age, he was baptized in water and subsequently started working in the church, which was non-Pentecostal. By the time he turned fourteen, he began working with older people as part of the deacons, taking on roles such as treasurer or secretary: (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

"Since I was little, he began to take me to the Christian Church in Guatemala. I always attended children's vacation schools to listen to the word of God. I received Christ at the age of 13. At that same age I was baptised in water and basically, I was working as a young man in a church that was not Pentecostal. In that local church, about 14 years old, I worked with a group of elders (deacons). They were older people. I was like a treasurer or secretary to the group".

His experience reflects a common practice in many Hispanic Pentecostal churches, where children from the community are taken to church. Another significant aspect of his experience is his revelation that he received Christ at the age of thirteen, a widespread

tradition in Hispanic Pentecostal churches, including early baptism. It is noteworthy that by the age of fourteen, he was already actively serving alongside adults as a treasurer or secretary on the deacon board.

4.2.1.4 Credentials: The Ritual

Rambo declares in “Understanding Religious Conversion” that culture provides guidelines for living through myths, rituals, and symbols (1993:29). The religious denomination to which our core group belongs is the Assemblies of God (AOG). Within this denomination, there is a church ritual for church leadership development known as the credentialing process. This credential serves as recognition by the denomination that an individual has fulfilled its requirements for ministers, granting them a ministerial degree. All members of the cohort are credentialed ministers with the AOG.

In this section, we will delve into the testimonies of four young Latinos/as from this group in their aspirations to become ministers. We will explore how well they were informed, how they were introduced to the credentialing process, and their leadership journey. Within the cohort, there are approximately thirty-four references to the credentialing process. We will include a representative sample to demonstrate the level of awareness among the cohort regarding the process.

YPLM-1’s narrative highlights his pastor as the individual who first introduced him to the credentialing process. While he was already actively serving as a youth leader in his church, his pastor provided him with valuable direction and guidance in this regard:

“I probably heard about credentials for the first time when I was about 25 or so. It was introduced to me by my senior pastor at the time. I was a leader in the youth ministry. He just told me, you know where God is taking you, you need to get prepared; you need to get the knowledge and the study and the training that you need in order for you to move on where God is calling you”.

This young Latino brings up several significant points that merit consideration. Firstly, it is worth noting that he obtained information about credentials through his pastor. In the vast majority of cases, young individuals embark on the credentialing process with their initial source of information typically being their pastor.

One significant aspect of his story pertains to the words his pastor used to guide him through the credentialing process. The pastor recognized the depth of this young man's relationship with God, and consequently encouraged him to consider studying and preparing to fulfil his divine calling.

The story narrated by YPLM-4 reveals that he originates from an independent church organisation. His pastor held credentials from this organisation and actively encouraged other leaders to obtain credentials from the same organisation. Inspired by this, he made the decision to pursue credentials himself when he was just fifteen years old, ultimately receiving recognition as an evangelist:

“Actually, when I was very young back at the church where I was our pastor was credentialled to the organisation. In a lot of cases, he suggested that to the leaders of the church as well. So then at a young age at about 15 is when I got my credentials through the organisation as evangelists. So from 15, I think I had gotten involved in that”.

Several significant issues surface from this testimony. First, it underscores the opportunities afforded to young individuals within their local congregation. At the tender age of fifteen, this young man was already actively participating in the leadership of the church. Second, it highlights the pivotal role played by the pastor in inspiring and motivating individuals to seek credentials from a religious organisation. Third, this young man realized that his calling lies in becoming an evangelist.

In the case of YPLM-9, regarding the source of inspiration behind his decision to become a credentialled minister within the denomination, he responded affirmatively,

attributing his choice to his pastor. It was his pastor who first ignited the spark of motivation within him:

“Did your pastor or anybody inspire you or interest you to become a credentialled from the denomination?”

Yes, he did. He supported me financially. He supported me obviously verbally he just told me to go for it and it’s been a tremendous blessing”.

Not only did his pastor motivate him with words to obtain credentials from his denomination, but he also provided financial support through the process. For this young man, the economic aspect of this journey held significant importance. The generous act of his pastor sent a powerful message to him about the willingness of the adult generation to support and empower new generations embracing church leadership.

In her narrative, YPLM-14 shares her experience of how the credentialing process was thoroughly explained to her, along with its significance. She emphasises that this process encompassed a solemn commitment to God, which, to some extent, felt intimidating given that she was just nineteen years old at the time. She recognised that this commitment was to be made publicly, solidifying her dedication to the Assemblies of God:

“They explained to me the process and the meaning of the commitment to God, and I prayed about it because for me it was intimidating as a young person. Because at the age of 19 I was going to make this public commitment with the Assemblies of God”.

It is worth highlighting that in her testimony she underscores the thoroughness with which the credentialing process was explained to her. This indicates that she did not embark on this journey unaware or uninformed about the process. Her leaders took the time to provide understanding of these initial steps. At the tender age of nineteen, she openly acknowledges feeling a sense of intimidation. However, she also embraces the

fact that, despite the intimidation, she is making a significant and public commitment not only to her faith in God but also to her denomination.

4.2.1.5 Morals

It is pertinent to consider the testimonies of our Latino cohort regarding their moral values and the impact on their church leadership journey. Cultural aspect of life significantly contributes to the language and symbols individuals acquire in society. In interviews with the cohort, twelve references were identified that explore the connection between cultural influences and the aspirations of youth in shaping their life goals and ambitions. This section includes a small sample of those references.

In the interview with YPLM-1, he expresses how the social values governing his parents, who represent older generations, differ from those of newer generations. He provides examples of how views on important issues differ between generations:

“Well, I think in our culture, and especially for my age group a lot of things happen for us later. My parents got married when they were like 18, 19, and that was common in that time, where people in my age group don't get married until older, 28 or 30. They don't move out of their parents' house until they are 28. So I think really from my culture or my age group, it's more about everything being done later and really questioning the ideals of our parents and kind of what they lived. And they killed themselves for 20 or 30 years working at the same place. So I think for a lot of people my age in their twenties are still trying to kind of figure out their life what they want to do in life and, and the changes depending on the age and where you surround yourself around”.

He highlights the disparity between the traditional belief in early marriage and the passion-driven aspirations of today's younger generations. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary youth may still reside with their parents, even at the age of twenty-eight. He emphasises that in his culture, embracing a more deliberate approach to life choices and questioning the ideals set by their parents is a natural progression. He further notes that his parents dedicated decades to the same job and empathises with young people his

age who are still discovering their life's purpose, adapting to changing circumstances and responding to their immediate environment.

In the interview with YPLM-2, insights into her moral convictions and how they underpin her pursuit of becoming a church leader were uncovered:

“Because my heart is for people, I think I just want to be different. I want to be a different kind of leader. I want to show people that there can be good leadership. I can't deny it even though I get frustrated with my own like personality sometimes and my own mistakes. The ordinary feels like a limitation sometimes. Like I have to wake up at 7:00 AM and I have to do this, and I have to serve in this ministry that I don't even feel like it's my final call or it's not really what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I have to serve in it. So, kind of letting us work towards that vision and that dream while building that foundation of faithfulness. We don't feel like we're moving towards a bigger dream and since we're dreamers, since we want to do things differently, like we want to be part, we want to have that glamor and the glory but also right there, learn to be faithful”.

She emphasises her frustration with church leaders who fail to serve as role models. She articulates her desire to become an exemplary leader and hopes to demonstrate to society that there can be high standards of church leadership. However, she acknowledges her personal struggles and frustrations with her own personality. She feels that conforming to the ordinary aspects of leadership limits her potential. She finds herself tasked with responsibilities that do not align with her calling and long-term aspirations. She requests the opportunity to work toward her vision and dreams while also developing her faithfulness. At present, she feels she is not progressing toward her ultimate goals and identifies herself and her peers as dreamers who aspire to bring innovation to their roles. They desire not only to achieve recognition and glory but also to cultivate faithfulness and a fresh approach to the church leadership journey.

YPLM-5 straightforwardly outlined the distinct characteristics of individuals in his age group, aiming to rectify misconceptions commonly held about the millennial generation. He emphasised their desire to make positive contributions rather than exploit

opportunities, specifically identifying four areas that this generation is not interested in pursuing, and then highlighted the areas they actively seek to contribute to within their generation:

“They don't want credit, they don't want position, they don't want stage. Those aren't the value systems of our generation. They want to make genuine contributions. They want their voices to be heard, they want to experience change. They are about justice; they are about movement. That's what millennials want and so they see those opportunities being afforded to them within the American church, but they leave to the American church, and they feel a sense of cultural loss”.

He highlights four areas in which the millennial generation has no interest. First, they don't seek recognition or credit for their actions; they act out of genuine motivations rather than a desire for acknowledgment. They are not driven by the need to gain recognition from older generations. Second, they have no aspiration for traditional positions; unlike older generations, they do not prioritise climbing the hierarchical ladder in the fields of service. Third, they lack a desire for a platform; they don't seek to be seen or recognised by older generations. These areas do not align with the core values of this generation, which he believes is widely misunderstood.

The interview takes a shift in tone as he begins to articulate what this generation seeks recognition for. He highlights five aspects significant to this younger generation, beginning with their desire to make genuine contributions. They recognise their potential to sit at the decision-making table, actively participating in generating ideas and proposals alongside adults. They yearn for their voices to carry weight, desiring to be taken seriously within society. They assert that their youth should not equate to being ignored, but rather they should be afforded the same level of respect and consideration as everyone else during discussions and negotiations.

Moreover, this generation is driven by a yearning for transformative experiences. Rather than merely observing change, they wish to be active contributors, and feel a sense of usefulness in driving change. He underscores their keen interest in matters of justice and their inclination to be a part of the larger justice movement. They demonstrate attentiveness and alertness to the social dynamics of their culture, recognising their potential to make meaningful contributions to the ongoing social transformations within our society.

He concludes that Latino millennials desire these opportunities but perceive that they are more readily available in Anglo American churches. However, when they decide to move to Anglo American churches, they often experience a sense of cultural loss.

The interview with YPLM-12 was intriguing as she emphasised the commitment that defines this generation's desire to serve. Additionally, she highlighted their aspiration for personal growth, the drive to do more, and contribute further. Furthermore, she underscored the significance of time in light of the rapidly changing world:

“We have desires and hopes to grow and do more. I kind of feel that the world is changing so much that now I'm too old. I was first too young and now I'm too old so I'm trying to make sure that I'm around teenagers and young adults all the time to stay current”.

The desire to grow and do more reflects the moral values of this young generation demonstrating their commitment to contributing positively to society. She raises an important point about the importance of staying up-to-date, suggesting that an effective approach to achieving this is by actively engaging with and surrounding oneself with members of the younger generation.

In summary, the moral values that define this cohort of YPLM include differences in traditional beliefs and work ethics, frustration with failed role models, the pursuit of personal goals, misconceptions and a commitment to growth, and achieving more.

4.2.2 The Social Component

Religious conversion processes do not occur in isolation; rather, they are intricately intertwined within the broader context of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations, all intermingled (Rambo,1993:23). These diverse dynamics significantly influence individuals in their religious experience. Society, with its various elements, has played a substantial role in shaping the mindset and decisions of our cohort of YPLM seeking to become church leaders.

Within this societal framework, our primary objective is to assess the specific influence of religious organisations, specifically the Assemblies of God, on the conversion decisions of our cohort as they pursue their aspirations to become church leaders. This society, structured around religious processes, holds a pivotal role in guiding individuals' integration into these processes according with their respective regulations (1993:29). In this section, we will delve into the experiences our cohort, who are aspiring to become church leaders and explore their encounters with various aspects of church processes.

4.2.2.1 Denominational Knowledge

YPLM-26's testimony provides insight into her familiarity with the Assemblies of God, dating back to her early years. Her family's devotion to this denomination is evident as she portrays them as passionately committed to it.

Furthermore, she speaks highly of the denomination, emphasising its remarkable support for its members. According to her perspective, the Assemblies of God stands out as an organisation, that consistently extended support to those within its ranks.:

"I grew up knowing about the Assemblies of God. My family is very passionate about the Assemblies of God since many years ago... it's a privilege and you're able to work with a corporation that backs you up. Not only gives opportunity to young people but many who want to serve God. So, Assemblies of God has always been in my blood I would say".

What stands out in her statement is the involvement of children in the denomination. Growing up, she experienced active participation and involvement, sensing a sense of belonging and recalling memorable experiences.

This highlights, the denomination's dynamic approach in catering to the needs of children and young individuals, providing them with ample opportunity to engage and contribute. Furthermore, she acknowledges that her involvement with the Assemblies of God, has led to a sense of support and belonging.

In YPLM-14's testimony, she highlights her early exposure to the sixteen fundamental doctrinal truths of the Assemblies of God: "*I was aware of the 16 fundamental truths, actually, early on as a young person*" This exposure began in her childhood due to her parents' leadership roles as sectional leaders in Miami during the 1990s: "*my parents were very involved, they were sectional leaders for Miami early on in the 90s*" She also mentions her active participation in youth camps and consistent attendance at denominational conventions: "*so I always went to youth camps, I always went to conventions, I always knew the AG was the fellowship*". All these experiences contributed to her identification with the Assemblies of God denomination from a young age.

The story of YPLM-19 differs from those of the previously mentioned individuals, as he became acquainted with the denomination later in his youth. Unlike others in this cohort, not all members were raised within the church. Instead, some, like YPLM-19 became acquainted with religious organisations such as the Assemblies of God after being incorporated into the church:

"I didn't know as much as I know now about the denomination; like what we believe; ... Now that I'm a credentialed minister I know more obviously but at the time around when I was applying, I knew very little to be honest".

Like any religious organisation, the nomination is structured with by-laws and holds business meetings. These aspects, which may seem complicated to newcomers, are among the many facets of the denomination that not everyone is initially aware of. Additionally, the doctrinal concepts and beliefs of a religious organisation are not immediately grasped. This young man acknowledges that initially he was not fully acquainted with all the beliefs, but as he applied for his credential, he gained a deeper understanding compared to when he first started.

4.2.2.2 Disconnect

In any society, variations in comprehension of criteria, processes, and their significance are commonplace. Church leadership conversion processes inevitably involve conflicts, controversies, or misunderstandings due to the involvement of multiple parties. Within our cohort, there were twenty-two references related to their engagement with denominational processes and their pursuit of ordination. These experiences were not uniform; while some individuals expressed familiarity, others admitted their lack of knowledge concerning these processes. This section will provide examples from their testimonies.

The interview with YPLM-16 sheds light on the awareness these young people have regarding the discrepancies, differences, and disconnections between younger generations and ecclesiastical denominations. One disconnection identified is the inclination of young people towards pursuing ministry. He suggests that not many young people consider ministry as a viable option for them: *“I believe there is a disconnect especially in this generation to move on to ministry”*. He points out that congregations are struggling to retain members, let alone recruit people for ministry:

“Because we as a church are struggling just to keep people inside the church. So, to now make them into ministers is the great scheme”.

He suggests that initiating change involves implementing an “*extreme leadership*” approach which he defines as a leadership style at the local church level.

Recruiting efforts should start locally rather than solely at the denomination level:

“I believe that there are areas that we need to start to really emphasise. I believe that first, it has to start with extreme leadership. Instead of looking at the district to be able to bring down that message, it's more on a local level”.

A naturally evolving system should be cultivated at the local church level, one that naturally fosters the development of leaders:

“I believe that the true organic integration would be within the system of the church that would lead into a natural progression into creating these leaders:”. While the conversation covered various aspects, one particular point that stood out to me was when he mentioned that the issue is not young people being indifferent to becoming church leaders, but rather the clarity and effectiveness of the message, and its explanation regarding what the role entails: “I wouldn't say that the youth is reluctant or I wouldn't define it necessarily in that sense I would define it in a way that is the explanation or the definition of that message getting across”.

YPLM-20's testimony unveils additional aspects of how the younger generations are disconnected from the processes of becoming church leaders but suggests that these connections can be established with improvements. She notes that disconnections in obtaining church leadership positions can be reduced through pastoral intervention at the local church level. *“My pastor always pushed me towards it”. It was something that he always encouraged me to do”.*

She recounts her experience as a sectional leader, where she faced intimidation and fear from older pastors within the section:

“When I became a certified minister, it was difficult. I was supervised. I was a sectional coach. Going from being a leader in local church to being certified minister to sectional coach was difficult for me because I was 27-28 years old, and all the ministers in my section were a lot older than me”.

Age differences between young church leaders and their older counterparts can lead to conflicts and disconnection. We have highlighted many of these differences in the literature review chapter. The belief among younger generations that they have not earned the respect of adult ministers can be intimidating and discourage them from pursuing leadership roles:

“It took me a while to gain the respect of the ministers. It was a big transition for me. I didn’t see ministry like that until I became certified”.

She emphasises the importance of establishing a connection with prospective ministers, as many of them do not fully grasp the scope of the Assemblies of God beyond their local church:

“I think the connection needs to be with ministers. We are ordained, we are part of the AG, so a lot of our younger generation don’t know what AG is. They know we’re part of a local church, but they don’t know we’re part of a bigger picture, bigger body. I think that’s what helped me as a young person”.

She summarises the solution for preventing disconnection between the new generations and the denominations in their church leadership process:

“Making that connection in the churches, sections. Being influenced by pastors, not that our local church isn’t great, with the push of my pastor that made me realise there’s a lot more than the local church and that motivated me”.

In the interview with YPLM-10 several significant insights emerge that impacted him as a young individual aspiring to take on leadership roles within the church with the denomination. One standout observation was the importance of an individual investing in his development within the local church. He emphasised the value of someone having faith in his leadership abilities, recognising and appreciating his personal values and qualities, and providing words of encouragement:

“The connection with the church was that someone invested in me within the church. Someone believed in the leadership or in the values and the qualities of my life and saw it. I think those encouraging words have propelled me to where I am today”.

He understands that ordained ministers have the potential to inspire and influence younger generations within the local church:

“I think the connection between ordained and the church is we should have more people within the church to be a voice of inspiration to speak to a teenager, to speak to a young adult”.

Furthermore, he comprehends that these ordained ministers possess the capacity to not only inspire but also assist younger individuals in realising their own callings and provide guidance along their path towards becoming future church leaders:

“Help them see their calling over their lives, guide them through the journey of becoming a credentialed minister or to be certified, licensed or ordained”.

4.2.3 The Psychological Component

This thesis includes an addendum that delves into the psychological dimensions of supernatural experiences, such as feeling a divine calling from God and its impact on individuals' choices to assume leadership roles within the church.

Rambo suggests that in psychology, there are many ways to understand religious conversions (1993:30). The psychoanalyst approach focuses on emotional dynamics within oneself, which can affect relationships. The behaviourist perspective places an emphasis on an individual's actions and the extent to which these actions are associated with rewards or consequences within their social surroundings. The humanistic view suggests that when someone converts, they may become more self-aware and experienced personal growth. Lastly, the social and cognitive approach looks at how

interactions with others and their thinking processes affect individuals and groups (1993:29-30).

In this section, we will integrate testimonies from numerous participants, providing a diverse range of these psychological approaches and perspectives regarding the different reactions and emotions they experienced while transitioning into church leadership roles.

4.2.3.1 The Psychoanalyst Approach

This approach analyses the emotional dynamics of individuals that can affect relationships. The data from our cohort revealed various types of emotional dynamics in their efforts to achieve their goal of becoming church leaders.

4.2.3.1.1 Aspirations of Life

YPLM-12's testimony reflects emotions of aspirations and desire for growth and accomplish more in life. She understands that she is getting older and therefore wants to affect the younger generation:

“We have desires and hopes to grow and do more. I kind of feel that the world is changing so much that now I'm too old. I was first too young, and now I'm too old, so I'm trying to make sure that I'm around teenagers and young adults all the time to stay current”.

YPLM-6 expresses his desire to be a police officer, manifesting emotions of achievement and reaching a significant goal in life. He also expresses satisfaction upon graduating from high school, as he was the first in his family to do so:

“I always used to say I wanted to be a police officer. My main goal was to finish high school because no one in my household finished high school”.

YPLM-3 expresses his desire to become a pastor. His dream and aspiration to serve God and serve people:

“I know that God has called me to shepherd in some way, shape, or form. And that has now become my dream and aspiration is to serve God and serve people”.

4.2.3.1.2 Personal Struggles

In the interview with YPLM-2, it is evident that these individual faced conflicts related to youth and various sexual issues from a very early age. These struggles were highly distressing with being a dominant emotion. Consequently, this individual turned to ceremonies like baptism and involvement in church activities to alleviate these internal struggles:

“I did struggle with pornography when I was little. I kind of just deviated. It was a painful struggle because I was never rebellious. I was never like, oh, forget God. I always felt guilty. So it was always let me get baptised, let me let me do something to take this away. So it was a convicted kind of struggle”.

YPLM-31 felt that his struggles remained unresolved because he could not find anyone to mentor him and guide him in his faith journey. He believes that young individuals often find it challenging to maintain their faith due to the pressures, and temptations they encounter without readily available solutions. He perceives that young people can easily be influenced by various pressures and temptations:

“I remember being young and struggling with no solution. Not having somebody to disciple me through the process of staying saved. The process of remaining saved is hard as a young person. You have a lot of pressure and a lot of temptations. As young people, we don’t think of the solutions. We get dragged into the pressures and the temptations”.

Another emotion he expresses is discouragement. He mentions that young people often experience discouragement because they let negative thoughts from the enemy and comments from others affect them. He categorises young people as having vulnerable minds:

“As young people, we kind of get discouraged. We let thoughts and lies of the enemy come and comments of other people discourage us. Many of us can be weak-minded”.

YPLM-28 did not face significant struggles during his upbringing. However, his main challenges revolved around issues of authority, particularly at school. He experienced internal conflict because, as a Christian, he felt he should not exhibit such attitudes. Additionally, he expressed struggles with anger, frustration, and difficulties in trusting other people. His words were:

“Growing up, I did not have struggles as a young man. I struggled with authority at school, but I realised that as a Christian I shouldn’t be doing these things. I struggled with anger a lot and frustrations. I struggled with trusting people. I realised if anyone was going to trust me, I needed to trust others”.

4.2.3.1.3 Frustrations

Frustration is an emotional state characterised by dissatisfaction, frequently accompanied by feelings of anxiety or depression stemming from unmet needs or unresolved issues (Onebamo, 2008:8). The data obtained from the study reveals the existence of twenty references to frustration among the members of this specific cohort. This section provides examples of statements made by young Latinos in this cohort who transitioned to becoming church leaders, illustrating their experiences of frustration.

YPLM-21’s testimony conveys his frustration with his pastor. The Pastor was expected to adhere to the directives and guidelines set forth by the denomination, which included following up with the young prospect. However, the pastor failed to fulfil these responsibilities, postponing them for later. He expressed it this way:

“I had a negative experience in a daughter church within the Assemblies of God and what happened was that pastor either procrastinated or didn’t want to follow under leadership or fellowship of the district”.

He also highlights a consequence of the pastor's procrastination, noting that young individuals, despite having a calling and the passion to embrace roles as church leaders, refrain from doing so due to their disillusioned with the leadership:

"I think a lot of people are taking a lot longer to find their calling or accept it. So, by the time they get to the part when they accept it, they are already dissolution with any form of degree".

YPLM-17 as a pastor's son, derives his frustration from his personal experiences. It appears that he was not inclined to pursue a role as a church leader, primarily due to his own upbringing. He articulates the challenges that arise from the highs and lows inherent in the life of a pastoral family. He expressed:

"I saw first-hand what pastors go through, the difficulty, the ups and downs, that was something that I didn't want to go through and didn't want to put my family through".

He was more specific in pointing out that, as a pastor's son, he lived through experiences that were not very positive, and he did not want to put his family through similar experiences. He says it this way:

"There were a lot of things that I went through as a pastor's son that weren't so positive, so I never wanted to expose my children to that, so I ran from it for many years and fought with God".

YPLM-31 presents a different perspective on frustration. She speaks of frustration in her pilgrimage of faith. Within her theological perspective, she understands that it is easy to achieve salvation in the Lord Jesus, but the process of staying saved is difficult for a young person:

"It's easy to give your life to the Lord, but the process of remaining saved is hard as a young person".

She further explains why it can be challenging for young people to sustain their faith in the Lord. She emphasises that young individuals face numerous external pressures and temptations and often struggle to find viable solutions. According to her, young people tend to be drawn towards temptation when confronted with these pressures:

“You have a lot of pressure and a lot of temptation. As young people, we don’t think of the solutions. We get dragged into the pressures and the temptations”.

4.2.3.2 The Behaviourist

The behaviourist perspective places an emphasis on an individual’s actions and the extent to which these actions are associated with rewards or consequences within their social surroundings (1993:29-30). Many of the testimonies from these young individuals highlight that choosing to become church leaders brings them a sense of fulfilment and life satisfaction, stemming from their commitment to doing what is right and also the reward that they are doing the will of God.

4.2.3.2.1 Desire to Give Back

The testimony of YPLM-2 underscores that becoming church leaders brings the rewards of life satisfaction, including the opportunity to assist and support others. She attributes her decision to pursue credentials to her obedience to God and her desire to remain faithful in the position where God has placed her. She also expresses her determination not to be rebellious and miss out on what was meant for her:

“Because my heart is, is for people, I think, and I just want to be different. I want to be a different kind of leader. So really, I got credentials out of obedience to God. I want it to be obedient with the place that I was in. I didn’t want to be rebellious or deny that this really wasn’t the ideal thing for me”.

This youth (YPLM-5) expressed what young people in churches are longing for. He expressed what they do not want, but he also expressed what they want:

“They don't want credit, they don't want position, they don't want stage. Those aren't the value systems of our generation. They want to make genuine contributions”.

YPLM-9 has the desire to give back to his denomination and bless the district.

He believes that serving in ministry is worth it and wants to be an example without going astray:

“But I just want to give back to this district. I want to bless this district; serving in ministry is worth it. I want to be an example that says you know what, you don't have to go that route. You know it is possible to be successful and be in ministry, to have joy and be in ministry, to not burn out and be in ministry”.

YPLM-28 expresses his longing to make a meaningful contribution to humanity, believing that preaching is the avenue through which he can achieve this. He feels a deep desire to preach because it brings him a sense of peace. He emphasizes that when he preaches, he does so with unwavering sincerity, driven by an insatiable hunger and determination to reach that moment:

“I have noted that I have a desire to preach and bring the word. It brings me so much peace when I bring the word. I give them the word in black and white, because it's not for a specific age group, it's for all people. I have that hunger and desire, and I want to get to that point”.

4.2.3.3 The Humanistic

4.2.3.3.1 Church Involvement

The humanistic view suggests that when someone converts, they may become more self-aware and experienced personal growth. Each member of this group has been experiencing growth and integration into the ministerial work of the local church. Their testimonies are evidence of their understanding that they have a purpose and a place to do some work.

YPLM-1 plays a highly active role in his local church, overseeing all aspects of both internal and external services and events. He is aware of his responsibility to his congregation and fulfils his task diligently. His description of his role indicates that he has grown and matured to the point where his pastor trusts him with significant responsibilities:

“I’m in charge of every aspect of the service and events that happen in and outside of the church. So, I oversee, and I work together with the different ministries and different teams to make sure that the event works and goes without any problems. So, I must work with the worship team. I have to work with the pastors”.

YPLM-13 is another young minister who due to her development and growth, has been granted the position of associate pastor in her congregation. She serves as an Associate Pastor with a specific focus on youth as an Associate Youth Pastor. Additionally, she supervises adult ministries, participates in worship, and manages church accounting responsibilities:

“They just named me an Associate Pastor as of October 2018. I’ve been an active associate pastor for a year and two months. I also work very fluently with the youth. I am the youth Pastors assistant as well. I run the young adult ministry here in the church, and I am also very involved in the worship, and I work with the accounting in the church”.

YPLM-30’s reveals that he began his journey in the youth ministry at a very young age. He gradually expanded his involvement by contributing to other ministries. Alongside his wife, they led worship ministries while also learning to play the guitar. His journey continued as he became actively engaged in high school ministries, eventually rising to the position of youth pastor:

“I started out as a young adult in the youth ministry. I was also working in the sound ministry. From that point on, my wife was one of the lead worshippers, so I started to learn how to play the guitar when she was at work when we first got married. We became part of the worship team and got involved in high school Software leadership and that led to being youth pastors”.

4.2.3.3.2 Leadership Awareness

YPLM-6 recognises himself as a leader. In his testimony, he highlights the tangible difference he has made in the community noting that people tend to follow his lead without needing clear directions or instructions:

“I consider myself a leader not because I say so, but just the impact that I see I had in the streets. There were people that that would follow me and I didn't even have to tell them, hey, come follow me”.

When asked if he considers himself a leader, YPLM-16 confidently replied in the affirmative. He grounded his response in his biblical beliefs, citing the Bible's designation of believers as ambassadors of Christ. Thus, he believes they are representatives of a supreme leader:

“I do, because the Bible says that we are ambassadors of Christ. So, I am not just any leader. I am a leader, representing the supreme leader, so yes, I would consider myself a leader”.

In her testimony, YPLM-13 expressed her self-identification as a leader, attributing it to her passion for serving others. She believes that being a leader involves not only serving but also sharing and teaching others the importance of service, reinforcing her belief that her love for service makes her a leader:

“I do consider myself a leader for the reasons given that I love serving. I've always had a heart of serving, and my mum and the church have always shown me to serve others before myself. It has always been important to me to show others to follow in those same footsteps. So, I do consider myself a leader for the simple fact that I love to serve”.

4.2.3.4 The Social and Cognitive

The social and cognitive approach examines how interactions with others and their thinking processes affect individuals and groups (1993:29-30). Throughout their journey of becoming credentialed ministers and church leaders, this group had

meaningful interactions with pastors, family, and friends. These interactions influenced their decision-making process, challenged and their thoughts and ultimately helped them solidify their decisions.

4.2.3.4.1 Pastors' Influence

During his testimony, YPLM-25 cited his Pastor as the most significant influence in his life. However, he emphasised that the most impact came from observing his pastor's transparency and witnessing his humanity:

“Thank God for my Pastor. I thank God for all the pastors that I’ve served under, but this pastor has been so real with me and again real can be somewhat of a buzzword, but so transparent to show that pastors and leaders are human”.

In his testimony, YPLM-21 highlights how his pastor played a pivotal role in recognising God's calling on his life. His Pastor provided him with the encouragement and support needed to step into the role of youth pastor.

“He was the first pastor, when I was accepting my calling as pastor to be a youth pastor, to encourage me. He said, “God has called you and you have to go for it”.

In YPLM-22's narrative, it was his pastor who approached him when the youth pastor was leaving, asking for his assistance. He accepted the call and believed he was in the right place at the right time:

“My Pastor told me that the youth pastor was leaving at the time, and he asked me if I could help him fill that position. I said “ok”, I was willing to do whatever really. I guess I was in the right place in the right time and I got that opportunity”.

4.2.3.4.2 Family

This young man's testimony (YPLM-1) serves as a compelling illustration of how families can play a pivotal role in nurturing and inspiring young individuals to embrace their faith in the Lord. In his case, it was his cousin who brought him to church for the

first time. He describes how it was within the walls of that church that he had an encounter with God:

“My cousin, who I was living with at the time, introduced me to a Christian Church, and I started going there, and that's really where God encountered me”.

During the interview with YPLM-9, it becomes apparent that his mother, who had attended the Bible Institute, took the initiative to engage him in conversations about the Bible and learning its teachings:

“My mother was a part of bible institute, and so I didn't know too much about it as a teenager, but she would talk to me about it, learning the word and things of that nature”.

For YPLM-13, it was her aunt who not only introduced her to the church but also led the entire family to join because of her influence. She emphasises that her aunt continues to be a significant and enduring presence in her life even to this day:

“I've had my aunt, which is the oldest of my mum's sisters, my aunt Maria, who was the one that kind of brought everybody to church and brought my mum to church, and she has been my mentor and still is”.

4.2.3.4.3 Friends

YPLM-20 explains how her friends played a pivotal role in shaping her aspirations. Initially, she attended sectional youth meetings in her locality where young individuals gathered, sharing a common interest in pursuing roles as ministers. She acknowledges that these gatherings were deliberately created to foster such interest. It was during one of these gatherings that she was exposed to and engaged in conversations that inspired her to embark on the path toward becoming a church leader and minister:

“In the Spanish eastern district, we were having tri monthly youth services, so the young people would go to the youth services and a lot of the young people we're interested in becoming ministers were going to the pastors' meetings, so

they were exposed to that. Space was created. That's how I was exposed. Just hearing those conversations and being motivated to do so".

4.2.4 The Religious Factor

Rambo highlights various considerations when exploring the role of religion in the conversion process. First, it is methodologically difficult because of the complexity in trying to understand that which is invisible to the outsider, mysterious and sacred to the insider, and subject to debate within the tradition itself. (Rambo,1993:32). Secondly, Rambo emphasises that researcher must take the religious sphere seriously to stay true to the phenomenology and conversion experiences. This does not require belief, but it does imply respect, as religious processes involve multiple forces, including ideas, institutions, myths, rituals and symbols (1993:32). Following Rambo's line of thought, this section will examine three aspects of the religious factor that play a major role in the conversion process: the religious ideology that shapes the conversion; the religious imagery that influences the consciousness of the convert; and the religious institutions in which conversion takes place.

4.2.4.1 The Religious Ideology that Shapes the Conversion Process

In the introduction chapter of this thesis, the significance of experiencing God the Holy Spirit for individuals in leadership roles within Pentecostal communities was emphasised. Within the context of this research on YPLM leadership development, it was significant for them to articulate an experience that unequivocally demonstrated God's calling in their decision to embrace church leadership. As previously stated, two key concepts influence Pentecostal theology: the active presence of God the Holy Spirit and the authority of the Holy Scriptures as described in Hebrews 4:12, "living and active". The data from our cohort testifies to how these beliefs are part of their shared experiences.

4.2.4.1.1 God Encounters

Each of the young individuals in this cohort operates with the understanding that encounters with God can happen in various situations, whether through interactions with people, reading scriptures, or engaging with their pastoral leaders. They possess a personal inner consciousness that convinces them a specific encounter or experience is a manifestation of God's presence in their lives.

The testimony of YPLM-3 serves as an example of such an occurrence during an interview while in school, unrelated to church or ministries. During an interview a young woman conveyed words to him that made him realise he was having an encounter with God. His testimony is as follows:

“It was through an advising appointment. I was an academic advisor at the University of Central Florida (UCF), and I had a student who asked me this question: why are you running away from your call? I'll never forget this. You can call it the fear of the Lord; You can call it an Elijah moment, whatever the case may be, or a Pauline moment. All I know is that God was speaking through this young lady”.

In the case of YPLM-11, she believes that the leadership positions her leaders have entrusted her with are a result of God placing her in those roles:

“I began to see how God put me in this position. Then when we came to Calvario, obviously I had to leave that position of being a dance leader. I've pretty much always felt that God was always placing me in these positions of leadership, alongside with my parent's Portuguese ministry, and just throughout my youth even growing up”.

YPLM-28 firmly believes that God plays an active role in his life. Although he may not provide an explanation of God's dealing, he is aware that God has touched his heart, motivating him to undertake ministerial duties:

“Over time I felt God touching my heart, but there was a fear and lack of knowledge and ability to pray and lead and preach”.

He shares how during a convention, he had an encounter with God where he received healing in his body. This experience convinced him that God has a specific timing for everyone.

“I learned that God was my peace, and that man was flawed and was going to struggle. The first youth convention that I went to in 2011, I had an encounter with God. I received healing in that convention. I realised God’s timing is perfect. As imperfect people, we have to understand his timing”.

4.2.4.1.2 God’s Calling

This section is important to the research, even though the researcher provided a limited number of examples. These young individuals made eighty-four references regarding God’s calling in their lives, expressing in various ways how they were called to ministry. The references identify six distinct ways they perceived God’s call: an internal conviction, guidance from a pastor, a prophetic utterance, evangelistic preaching, reading the Bible, and encounters in unexpected circumstances. They all testify that they were called by God and understood it as such. After reducing the eighty-four references to six categories, we will provide examples from each.

YPLM-1 testified how his Pastor was the one who referred of God’s calling in his life:

“I was a leader in the youth ministry. He just told me, you know where God is taking you, you need to get prepared; you need to get the knowledge and the study and the training that you need in order for you to move on where God is calling you”.

Many young people sense God's call during evangelistic campaigns when they believe the message spoke directly to them, leading them to conclude that God called them at that moment. This is the testimony of YPLM-2:

“So in that youth camp, Reggie Dabbs preached, and he spoke about how God was going to call us by name. And I remember looking around and thinking, all

this is about me, and I was like, God if you want something with me, just to show me. And I began to feel the presence of God”.

YPLM-3 had an unexpected experience while working as an academic advisor. During an interview with a student, he was taken aback when a young woman expressed words that he believed were a message from God, calling him to ministry:

”it was through an advising appointment. I was an academic advisor at the University of Central Florida (UCF), and I had a student who asked me this question, why are you running away from your call? All I know is that God was speaking through this young lady and she said, you can run away from your calling but your calling will always show”.

The most frequent experience among the YPLM cohort was the deep conviction that God was calling them to ministry through a sense of consciousness. Although they do not provide specifics about the process their unwavering certainty about God communicating with them is undeniable. YPLM-9 said:

“Well, obviously I feel the call of God on my life to be a Pastor. I have felt that call of God to be a Pastor since the age of 16. So that’s one of the reasons, probably the main reason”.

The phrase “feeling the call of God” in YPLM-9’s narrative is significant in the context of religious vocations, particularly within Pentecostalism. This feeling is not just an emotional response but a spiritual experience that individuals interpret as a direct communication from God. For YPLM-9, this feeling is the foundational experience that shapes his understanding of his life purpose and direction. Notably his use of the word “obviously” in his testimony indicates that this feeling is an intrinsic part of his identity, something that is so clear and undeniable to him that it seems self-evident.

YPLM-25 highlights the intensity of his experience. It suggests that this feeling was powerful and compelling, difficult to ignore or dismiss:

“I received my calling in 2006. I felt a tugging of my heart that there was more to my life purpose. That’s when I felt a call from the Lord calling me to go to Ignite⁹. I knew I could sense in my spirit that I was called to ministry”.

The phrase “tugging of my heart” describes a heart-centred experience, suggesting that this realisation resonated within the person’s core being. This conviction indicates that the individual is being guided by a divine authority. Similarly, the phrase “I could sense in my spirit” refers to a form of spiritual discernment and intuition, suggesting an ability to perceive and understand divine guidance on a spiritual level, beyond the physical senses. Both phrases reflect deep, emotional, and spiritual experiences that provided clarity, direction, and motivation for the individual’s journey into ministry.

YPLM-31 became aware of a divine calling early in life. This early recognition shaped his spiritual journey and church leadership development from a young age. Being called at a very young age indicates a heightened spiritual sensitivity during childhood. He said:

“I recognised that the Lord had a calling over my life. He had called me since a very young age. Now that I have given my life to the Lord and I have devoted my life, not just to the Lord but to others, I’ve seen the Lord’s faithfulness. I’ve seen him speak to my life like never before”.

YPLM-31’s testimony implies that spiritual journeys and understanding of God’s role in a person’s life can have a beginning early in life.

Another accepted method within the Pentecostal community to affirm a divine calling is through a spontaneous prophetic declaration. In this experience, an individual, inspired by the Holy Spirit, delivers a message in an audible voice to specific individuals.

This was the case of YPLM-17. He testified: -

⁹ Ignite is a youth discipleship program based in Gainesville, Florida, founded by Rev. Mark Vega and his wife Lisa, ordained ministers with the Assemblies of God.

“My mother received a prophetic word when I was still in the womb and he described me. They didn’t know what they were having at the time, but he told them they were having a son and that I would be the tallest out of all their kids, and that God was calling me to be a pastor”.

The sixth way this group received their divine calling was through reading the Bible. Within the Pentecostal community, the influence of Hebrews 4:12 shapes the way they approach and believe in the Bible. These verses proclaim that "the word of God is alive and active." This signifies that when Pentecostals read the Bible, they do so with the intention of hearing the voice of God, the Holy Spirit. YPLM-12 testifies to this:

“I remember at the age of 11 and 12 years old I was already reading the bible every morning, already desiring to be a leader and to be called”.

This testimony indicates an early awareness that reading the Bible could lead to a calling in ministry and church leadership. It took discipline, commitment, and an early interest in spiritual growth on the part of YPLM-12. It also reflects a supportive and religious environment, such as family or church community, which encouraged and nurtured this practice.

4.2.4.2 The Religious Imagery that Influences the Consciousness of the Convert

According to The New Oxford American Dictionary, “imagery” is defined as visually descriptive or figurative language (2005: Location 404470). The data collected from interviews with this group of YPLM demonstrates their frequent use of vivid and descriptive language when describing their life experiences with God and their faith journey. This section provides examples of phrases used by these young individuals to recount their encounters with God the Holy Spirit. These descriptions are integral to Pentecostal culture, as each young person speaks of God with genuine innocence, devoid of prejudice or the need for elaborate explanations. This connection with God is nurtured through preaching, teachings, and counselling, within the Pentecostal community.

During the interviews, they shared forty-eight expressions describing important moments in their faith journey when they believed that God was actively involved in their lives.

These 48 expressions are divided into three major categories:

- God Interacting with Us
- Us Interacting with God
- Pentecostal Communities' Common Expressions

4.2.4.2.1 Phrases Describing God Interacting with Us

YPLM-1 used the expression “I had an encounter with God”. This phrase indicates a personal experience, where the individual felt a direct presence or intervention of God in his life. Such encounters are often transformative; spiritual moments that leave a lasting impact on the person’s faith and life journey. YPLM-6 used the expression “I heard the voice of God”. This suggests that the individual experienced a form of divine communication, perceiving a message or guidance from God. This voice could be literal or metaphorical, representing an inner conviction or direction attributed to divine origin. YPLM-8 used the expression “When God first gave me a calling”. This phrase signifies a moment when the individual felt that God assigned him a specific purpose or mission. A calling often relates to a sense of duty, or a path believed to meant to follow, which can influence one’s career, ministry, or personal life. YPLM-10 used the phrase “God has placed this in my life”. This expression means that the individual believes certain events, opportunities, or challenges in his life are orchestrated or given by God. It reflects a sense of divine purpose or guidance in the circumstances he faces. YPLM-11 used the phrase “God was always policing me”. This phrase conveys the individual’s perception that God is constantly watching over him, guiding his actions and ensuring he stays on the right path. It can imply a sense of accountability and moral oversight by a divine power. YPLM-28 used the phrase “I felt God touching my heart”. This indicates an

emotional or spiritual experience where the individual felt a connection with God. It suggests an inner transformation, comfort, or inspiration attributed to a direct interaction with God.

4.2.4.2.2 Phrases Describing Us Interacting with God

YPLM-21 used the expression “God, whatever you put; I’m going to go after it”. This phrase signifies a complete and unwavering commitment to follow God’s will, regardless of the challenges or opportunities presented. It conveys a readiness to pursue any path laid out by God with determination and faith, trusting that His guidance will lead to the right direction. YPLM-15 used the phrase “I received Christ”. This interaction with God refers to the moment of accepting Jesus Christ as one’s Saviour and committing to a Christian life. It signifies acknowledging Christ as Lord and Savior and committing to living according to His teachings and values.

YPLM-3 used the phrase “I was running away from God”. This phrase describes a period in one’s life where they were avoiding or rejecting a relationship with God, choosing to live independently from his guidance and presence. YPLM-14 used the phrase “I had a relationship with Jesus”. This indicates a personal and ongoing connection with Jesus Christ, developing a deep, personal relationship with Him through regular communication in prayer and living in a way that reflects his teachings. YPLM-22 mentioned the phrase, “Living for Christ”. This phrase means dedicating one’s life to following Jesus Christ and His teachings. It signifies a commitment to living according to Christ values and prioritising them in actions and decisions. YPLM-29 used the phrase “I gave my heart to the Lord”. This signifies a heartfelt and sincere commitment to God, surrendering personal desires and will to Him, and embracing his love and direction. YPLM-14 used the phrase “A process God had to do in me”. This refers to an inner transformation or development guided by God. It suggests undergoing a transformative

process to refine and prepare me for God's purposes, resulting in change from within. YPLM-17 used the phrase, "I fought with God". This indicates a struggle or resistance against God's will or direction, referring to a period of conflict in accepting or understanding His plans for one's life. YPLM-2 used the phrase, "Something God was trying to teach me". This suggests that there was a lesson or message from God in a particular experience, recognising that a certain challenge was intended by God to impart an important lesson or foster spiritual growth.

YPLM-2 also used the phrase, "God cared about me". This expresses the belief in God's personal concern and love for the individual, providing assurance that God genuinely cares, paying attention to their needs and well-being. YPLM-3 used the phrase, "God is leading me". This refers to following God's guidance, in one's life decisions and path, allowing God to direct their steps and trusting His will. YPLM-8 used the phrase, "God called me very clearly". This phrase means receiving a distinct and undeniable direction or purpose from God, referring to experiencing a clear and unmistakable calling from God towards a specific purpose or mission. YPLM-14 used the phrase, "God was preparing me for something". This suggests that passed experiences and lessons were part of God's plan to equip the individual for future tasks, indicating that God was using various challenges to prepare and equip them for a specific purpose or mission. YPLM-12 used the phrase, "God has taken me to work". This refers to being led by God through difficult situations to work in areas of one's life that needed transformation and healing.

4.2.4.2.3 Phrases Describing Common Expressions in Pentecostal Communities

In Pentecostal theology, the relationship with God is perceived as intimate and personal. This closeness is reflected in the language used by the community. Phrases like the ones highlighted in this section are common and signify an understanding that God's involvement in our life is direct and intentional. These expressions are more than just

words, they convey a sense of divine purpose and responsibility to use these talents for God's glory, and the benefit of others. Here is a list of phrases from the cohort's data, commonly used among Pentecostals:

- “Serve God” – YPLM-3; “Obedience to God” – YPLM-2; “Doing the work of God” YPLM-6; “Trusted God” – YPLM-6; “Commitment to God” – YPLM-14; “The work of God” YPLM-26; “God is calling you” YPLM-1; “God can take you somewhere” – YPLM-9; “God is taking you” YPLM-1; “God is a God of order” – YPLM-26; “If God has called you” YPLM-10; “God would be happy” – YPLM-19; “Pursue God” – YPLM-2; “God use someone” – YPLM-10; “God has a lot of plans for you” – YPLM-28; “God shows you” - YPLM-6; “The lead of God” – YPLM-9; “I felt the call of God” – YPLM-9; “Going to where God wants to take me” – YPLM-13; “Which route was going to take” – YPLM-12; “God has placed this in my life” – YPLM-10; “God put me in this position” – YPLM-11; “Go wherever God wants me to go” YPLM-24; “God open the door for me” YPLM-19; “God's timing is perfect” YPLM-28; “Key people that God has placed” – YPLM-6; “God had different plans” YPLM-1

These phrases are like pictures that describe how our YPLM cohort experience their faith. They feel that God meets them, guides them, and even speaks to them. They all share this same understanding and belief. Their talk about God is expressed in familiar way. Moreover, in the Pentecostal community, people develop phrases and dialogues about God to communicate with one another.

4.2.4.3 The Religious Institutions in Which Conversion Takes Place

Everyone young individual in this cohort belongs to the Assemblies of God, which makes them part of the Pentecostal community. They emphasise the importance

of experiencing the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This experience is significant for those who aim to become church leaders and credentialed ministers with the denomination. These young people, through their testimonies, clearly acknowledge their affiliation with the church. Three examples are provided below:

YPLM-1 testifies to overseeing all church programmes and being responsible for ensuring that everything in the church runs smoothly:

“I’m in charge of every aspect of the service and events that happen in and outside of the church. I oversee and I work together with the different ministries and different teams to make sure that the event goes on without any problems”.

Another young man (YPLM-13) was appointed as associate pastor in 2018. Since then, he has been active, and additionally, he serves as an assistant youth pastor:

“They just named me an Associate Pastor as of October 2018. I’ve been an active associate pastor for a year and two months. I also work very fluently with the youth I am the youth Pastor’s assistant as well”.

YPLM-29 began his discipleship process in church. He understands that regular attendance was part of that process. Additionally, he started serving wherever there was an opportunity:

“That’s where I started my discipleship process and going to church regularly. I came to Ignite, which I was so grateful for, and started serving in the church. I served wherever I could”.

4.3 Conclusions

In this chapter, the theory of conversion is examined through its definitions and components, informed by data provided by the members of this group. Defining conversion raises controversies regarding the converted individual and those who advocate for conversion. Conversion is a process, not an event. It is a change of religious nature and occurs in a world of people, ideologies, events, and institutions.

The four components of conversion highlighted are cultural, social, psychological, and religious. Each of these components is evidenced by the data provided. In the cultural component, the upbringing of these young people was noted, including the knowledge acquired about leadership development, early spiritual awakening, the ritual of credentialing processes and the moral aspect. The social component of conversion points to the knowledge this group has acquired about denominational matters and ecclesiastical processes, as well as the disconnects between new generations and their unfamiliarity with these processes.

"The psychological component provides four forms of analysis. The first is psychoanalytical, focusing on emotional dynamics. The data highlighted the life aspirations of these young people, along with their personal struggles and frustrations. The second analysis is behavioural, focusing on decisions that can bring satisfaction or punishment. In this analysis, the desire of these young people to contribute to society was noted. The third analytical approach is humanistic, emphasizing how conversion enriches the individual's life. This analysis emphasised the involvement of these young people in church matters and their awareness of leadership roles. The fourth aspect of analysis is social and cognitive, aiming to understand the interpersonal and intellectual impacts that influence groups. The data provided insights into pastoral, family, and friendship, influences.

The final component is the religious one, following Rambo's model. This component contains three important aspects: the ideology that shapes conversion, the images that influence consciousness, and the religious institutions where the conversion process takes place. In terms of ideology, the data showed that this group of young people is familiar with discussing encounters with God and God's calls within their Pentecostal community. Regarding the aspect of images that influence consciousness, three

prominent categories emerged: first, language emphasizing God interacting with individuals; language emphasising individuals interacting with God; and common expressions of experiences with God within Pentecostal communities.

Concerning the religious institutions where conversion processes take place, the data confirmed that the young people who participated in this study belong to Pentecostal congregations of the Assemblies of God. In these congregations, there is a prominent emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is fundamental in the development of ecclesiastical leadership in Pentecostal denominations.

Therefore, the data received from this group of young people clearly illustrate the theory of conversion.

CHAPTER 5.

LEADERSHIP CONVERSION AND THEOLOGICAL FORMATION

5.0 Introduction

In the last chapter, we analysed the conversion experience of our cohort members, understanding that conversion is a process grounded in spiritual experiences. These experiences occur through a combination of cultural, social, religious, and psychological dynamics. In this chapter, the aim is to provide a description and explanation of the Pentecostal theological foundation and ethos that underpin the emergence of these young Pentecostal leaders (YPLM). Their decision to pursue ordination with the Assemblies of God (AOG) stems from a deep conviction of being called by God. They testify to experiencing this calling during personal moments of reading the Bible, attending church services, facing life crises, and engaging in conversation with pastors, church leaders, and family members. Each of their stories is unique and independent, as will be elaborated upon in the data section.

The motivation to research this experience stems from four decades of working with pastors within Pentecostal context. Recognising and hearing God's calling is one of the distinctive traits of Pentecostal pastors. While other criteria for ministry are not excluded, these experiences validate pastoral ministries within Pentecostal communities. Like other denominations, Pentecostals also offer training and conferences on vision development, leadership skills, motivational attitudes, and team building. However, being attuned to God's voice and calling remains of utmost importance.

The belief in the supernatural, as exemplified by the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the awareness that God still communicates today akin to biblical times, drive Pentecostals in their preaching, teaching, worship experiences, and all evangelistic and missional endeavours. This is the shared testimony of the YPLM cohort. While their

individual stories exhibit similarities regarding their encounters with the presence of God, they differ in terms of their backgrounds, congregations, and cities within the state of Florida, USA.

This chapter explores foundational theological themes rooted in Pentecostal doctrine, as conveyed through preaching, teachings, and hymns within Pentecostal communities. These themes have shaped the belief consciousness of the YPLM cohort. To facilitate a clearer understanding, the chapter is divided into several sections. The first section addresses the intersection between the divine and the human. The second section discusses the challenges associated with answering the call of God. The third section considers the Pentecostal context of the issue, and the fourth section examines the experience of the presence of God.

5.1 The Divine and Human Crossroad

Can divinity be explained? Who can make sense of humanity's claim of experiencing the call of God in their lives? It is a difficult task. This section examines four schools of biblical interpretation regarding Bible theology and its view on God's intervention in history. Pentecostals young Latinos embracing church ordination are convinced of God's call through providential and supernatural experiences. Opinions on this matter range from total rejection to qualified acceptance. The topic's intrinsic connection to the supernatural realm, rather than a more rationalise view of Christianity, makes it controversial in many theological debates. This is why it is important to converge the voices and listen reflectively.

The debate whether God still speaks today as He did in Biblical times is directly related to Bible interpretation. The testimonies shared by the YPLM cohort are rooted in their belief that God has spoken to them in various ways. They perceive these experiences as divine inspiration, leading them to embrace the ministry. George Ladd in

his article “The Search of Perspective”, offers a New Testament Theology, in which he argues for *Heilsgeschichte*¹⁰ theology. This approach to examining the New Testament has three parts: first, examine a passage considering its setting and context; second, turn to the Old Testament to discover its background in God’s former revelation; third, return to the New Testament to expound the passage in the light of the whole scope of *Heilsgeschichte* (Ladd, 1971:42).

Ladd acknowledges the existing struggle in biblical interpretation for a relevant New Testament theology, specifically regarding the relevance of Jesus for Christian faith, (1971:41). He presents four approaches to New Testament interpretation: the historical – critical school, the existential school, the hermeneutical school, and the evangelical school (Ladd, 1971: 41-62). He does not delve into the hermeneutic approach, as it combines the historical-critical and the existential school.

The historical-critical school promotes scientific objectivity, treating the Bible like any other human document, (Ladd,1971:43). According to Ladd, “this method of studying history is a heritage stemming from the enlightenment” (1971:49). From this perspective, critical historical research with divine and supernatural interventions, nor does it allow for theoretical, presuppositions of God speaking, interfering, or acting in history. According to this school, God acts only through men, (1971:43). This school defines history as a “complex interaction of natural and social forces and the actions and reactions of men (1971:43).” Since history does not reveal anything from a providential perspective, it opposes the new biblical theology, which sees unity in the

¹⁰ This view states that revelation occurred in the acts of God in the “sacred history” recorded in the Bible being Jesus the climax of that revelation (Ladd, 1971: 42)

Bible in a single theology of history, contrary to this school, where it sees many theologies in the Bible (1971:43).

This scientific historical methodology penetrated New Testament studies in pursuit of the true historical Jesus in the Gospels. According to this perspective, it was the faith of the disciples that re-interpreted Jesus as a divine being. This approach was embraced in Germany and England at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of nineteenth century (1971:44).

The existential school emerged in Germany as a reaction to the historical-critical school of biblical interpretation. One of its biggest proponents was Rudolph Bultmann. He retained the historic-critical approach to biblical interpretation but sought a New Testament interpretation in existential terms that would make sense to modern man. He viewed the New Testament with the objective of describing man's existential situation, considering any idea of revelation in history as mythology (1971:48). Existentialists like Bultmann, in pursuit of a relevant New Testament theology, saw a distinction between the historical Jesus and the Jesus proclaimed in the Kerygma¹¹ (1971:44). This new perspective of Jesus in the New Testament, according to George Ladd is paradoxical: "Gods act of revelation it's not an objective act in history in Jesus of Nazareth; it is an act in my historical existence" (1971:44).

The hermeneutic school, which Ladd considered an extension of the existential school, seeks to translate the New Testament message in a way that makes sense to modern man using anthropological language, but this approach risks neglecting the activity of God in biblical thought (Ladd, 1971:46).

The evangelical school views history as the place where God revealed himself through concrete events involving ordinary men. It proposes salvation history "a biblical

¹¹ The Kerygma – the apostolic proclamation of Christ, crucified and risen.

theology which understands revelation to have occurred in the redemptive acts of God in the sacred history recorded in the Bible...” (George Ladd, 1971: 42). It is the supernatural breaking into the present, which is the testimonies of the research cohort of YPLM. Therefore, the Bible’s purpose is to tell the story about what God had done on behalf of man’s salvation (1971:48). George Ladd responds to the historical critical view by stating:

“If all historical events must by definition be explained by sufficient historical causes, then there is no room for the acts of God, for God is not a historical character” (Ladd:1971:50).

When Pentecostals read the Bible, it is not only to be informed of what God did in history but to believe in what He does and continues to do in history. For Pentecostals, reading the Bible it is an experience with the God of the Bible who oversees history from the beginning of time and continues to reveal Himself in history as in biblical times. Pentecostal readers do not question God speaking to humanity, which is why it is normal for their cohort members to share their experience with call of God. From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical narratives witness that God speaks to humanity. A simple reading of the text, without theological prejudice testifies that God and humanity have engaged in communication with each other. From the creation of Adam and Eve to the end, where the apostle John receives specific directives on end times events, everything is informed by some type of dialogue. Just as God appears unquestionably, without an introduction nor a preamble, in the creation narratives and speaks throughout the creation process, it is also unquestionable that He speaks to humans, and they hear his voice and listen.

In this chapter, we will explore foundational theological themes rooted in Pentecostal doctrine, conveyed through preaching, teachings, and hymns within Pentecostal communities. These themes have significantly influenced the belief consciousness of our

YPLM cohort. This chapter is divided into different sections for a better understanding of the topic. The first section has to do with the divine and human crossroads. The second section discusses the challenges of the call of God. The third section describes the Pentecostal context of the problem, and the fourth section examines the experience of the presence of God

5.2 Defining the Call of God

A nontheological definition of a call would be Merriam-Webster dictionary, which defines a “call” as that of speaking in a loud, distinct voice to be heard at a distance; making a request or demand; or attempting to reach someone by means of a call (Merriam: 2022). Os Guinness defines a call from God as, “the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service” (Guinness 2003:5).

Adding another perspective, Dallas Willard in “*Hearing God*” states that being close to God means communicating with him, which is always a two-way street and that is the Christian view (Willard 2012:9). God has created us for intimate friendship with himself, both now and forever, as supported by many biblical passages such as Exodus 29:43-46; Psalm 23; Isaiah 41:8 and Hebrews 13:5-6 (2012:11).

Pete Fleming offers yet another definition, describing the call of God as “nothing more, nothing less than obedience to the will of God as God presses it home to the soul by whatever means he chooses” (Bird & Willington 2015: 151). The phrase “by whatever means” could be interpreted as God speaking and calling people for service as he did in Biblical times. This concept is familiar within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, however, it does not come without scrutiny from a diverse range of evangelical denominations. Some proponents within these circles argue against the idea of

experiencing God today as in biblical times, proposing different interpretations. For some, the Holy Bible is the final manifestation, and if God is going to speak it would be through Scriptures. To place the phenomenon in a theological context, it is necessary to explore the academic debate regarding the call of God.

5.2.1 Defining the Call of God by YPLM

The research cohort did not define the call of God in an academic or dictionary-like manner. Instead, the definition is presented through a series of interconnected experiences that confirm and define the call of God, particularly within the context of the Pentecostal community. From the data obtained, four key experiences emerged that define the call of God from the cohort's perspective:

- Inner Realisation of God's Presence
- A prophetic Utterance
- Perceiving God's Communication
- Accepting Ministry commitment

5.2.1.1 Inner Realisation of God's Presence

This refers to an individual's inner consciousness of their relationship with God, a personal experience often described as an internal awakening. This awakening is not merely an intellectual understanding but a spiritual awareness of the presence and active work of the Holy Spirit within one's life. Through this awareness of divine presence, individuals begin to discern a deeper purpose or calling from God—a sense that their lives are being directed towards something greater than themselves. For instance, YPLM-1 shared his testimony saying, "I went to church and God encountered me". This statement reflects a moment where the presence of God was not just acknowledged but felt, leading to a life-altering realisation of God's purpose in their life.

Similarly, YPLM-9's testimony, "I always felt a call to be a pastor," indicates a continuous and persistent inner sense of vocation. This feeling was not something that came suddenly, but rather a constant awareness that grew overtime, solidifying their understanding of the role in God's plan.

Another compelling example is from YPLM-25, who stated, "I felt a tugging in my heart; that's when I felt the call of God." This metaphorical "tugging" represents a gentle yet insistent push towards a divine purpose, an internal urging that cannot be ignored.

These testimonies highlight that the inner realisation of God's presence is often the first step in recognising and responding to God's call. It serves as the foundation upon which other spiritual experiences and confirmations are built. In the broader context of the Pentecostal community, this concept of an inner realisation is particularly significant. It aligns with the Pentecostal emphasis on personal experience and the direct, experiential knowledge of God. In this tradition, the believer's relationship with God is not mediated solely through scripture or doctrine but through lived experiences that affirm and manifest the presence of the Holy Spirit.

5.2.1.2 A Prophetic Utterance

Prophetic utterances hold a significant place in many religious traditions, particularly within the Pentecostal community. These utterances are understood as direct messages from God, often delivered through individuals endowed with the gift of prophecy. In the context of discerning a divine calling, prophetic utterances serve as external confirmations of what one might already sense internally. The experience of receiving a prophetic word can be transformative, providing clarity and reassurance to the recipient. For those struggling with uncertainty about their path, a prophetic utterance can cut through doubt, offering a clear and direct affirmation of God's plan.

The stories from our YPLM cohort members highlight the role that prophetic utterances can play in confirming God's call. For instance, YPLM-3 recounts an experience where God's message was delivered through a young lady during a student-guidance counsellor interview. The prophetic word spoken during this encounter not only confirmed the individual's sense of calling but also did so in a way that was unexpected and unmistakably divine. It's served as a clear sign that God's hand was at work, guiding them towards their purpose.

Similarly, YPLM-23's experience at a retreat illustrates the impact of prophetic utterances: "I went to a retreat, and someone spoke directly to my life and confirmed my ministerial calling." Retreats are often, times of spiritual renewal, where individuals seek to draw closer to God and gain a clearer understanding of His will for their lives. In this context, receiving a prophetic word that directly addresses one's ministerial calling can be incredibly affirming. YPLM-23 shared how someone spoke directly to their life, confirming their calling to ministry. Prophetic utterances often come at critical junctures in a person's spiritual journey, when they are facing important decisions or wrestling with doubts. These utterances provide a sense of divine timing, where God intervenes to offer guidance and reassurance just when it is needed most.

5.2.1.3 Perceiving God's Communication

Hearing God's voice is a personal way in which individuals experience God's communication. This phenomenon, whether experienced as an audible sound or as an internal impression, serves as a direct and personal encounter with the divine. For many, this experience transcends mere thought or intuition; it is perceived as a clear and authoritative communication from God, often carrying implications for their life and spiritual journey.

The experience of hearing God's voice can manifest in various ways. Some individuals report hearing an actual, audible voice that seems to come from outside themselves, speaking with clarity and purpose. Others describe an internal voice—an inner prompting or conviction that is distinct that it feels like an external voice, resonating within their mind and heart. In both cases, the individual is left with no doubt that they have encountered God in a personal and direct manner.

This form of divine communication often comes at pivotal moments in a person's life, particularly during times of struggle, uncertainty, or transition. For instance, YPLM-6's testimony illustrates this: "I heard a voice while struggling in life." This simple statement captures the essence of how God's voice can pierce through life's challenges, bringing with it a message that is both timely and transformative.

For those who experience it, hearing God's voice becomes a defining moment in their spiritual journey. It solidifies their sense of calling and purpose, making it unmistakable personal. Unlike other forms of communication, such as reading scripture or receiving advice from others, the experience of hearing God's voice leaves a lasting impression that is difficult to question or ignore. It is often described as an encounter changing the individual's perspective and direction in life.

Hearing God's voice is more than just a mystical experience; it is a foundational aspect of how many believers understand and respond to God's call. It provides clarity, direction, and a sense of divine endorsement that can embolden and guide an individual throughout their life. For those who have had this experience, it becomes a cornerstone of their faith journey, anchoring their sense of purpose and their commitment to living out God's will in their daily lives.

5.3 Challenges on Experiencing God's Call

Claiming legitimacy in ministry and undergoing ordination due to an experience with God invites scrutiny. While these claims should be objectively assessed, examiners and credential committees must diligently evaluate applicants and consider the faith community they pledge to serve. Each story must be reviewed from biblical, theological, and practical church perspective. Many Pentecostal Latino applicants receive their biblical and ministerial training in Bible institutes. Though there may not specific courses titled “Discerning God’s Voice or The Call of God”, teachers often integrate their Pentecostal experiences and God’s calling into classroom teachings. Whether studying the Old or New Testament, students are constantly taught to experience God in their daily lives, making lectures dynamic and engaging. Additionally, applicants hear about perceiving God and discerning His voice from Pentecostal pulpits throughout the year. Pentecostal applicants from Latino churches are constantly reminded that hearing God’s voice and responding to His call is essential for ministry. When AOG districts interview credential applicants, they reinforce this by asking questions about their call to the ministry. However, other areas of the applicant’s life are also important. Many AOG districts, like other evangelical denominations, have added tools such as skill testing, spiritual gift discovery and psychological evaluations to their ministerial assessment process.

The vocation of an ordained minister or a credentialed minister within the AOG and other denominations should not be viewed as an ordinary job. Ministers are entrusted with people’s personal life issues, beliefs, and experiences, requiring someone who models the New Testament pattern of having heard the call of God. A minister should speak from both a cognitive and experiential conviction, reflecting this in their prayers, intercessions, worship, sermons, counselling, and administration.

Not everyone in the Evangelical community will validate this divine calling or support the idea of continual revelation. Some believe that once the biblical canon was closed, God ceased dealing with people as he did in biblical times.

In his book *Strange Fire*, John MacArthur outlines various objections to Pentecostals experiences. He equates Charismatic and Third Wave Movements with Classical Pentecostals (MacArthur, 2013: xii), despite significant historical, theological, and doctrinal differences between them. The book is divided into three sections: Confronting a Counterfeit Revival; Exposing the Counterfeit Gifts; and Rediscovering the Spirit's True Work.

MacArthur criticises Pentecostals for promoting a “counterfeit revival” based on several points: First, speaking in tongues is likened to pagan worship practices (MacArthur, 2013:4). He recounts the story of a Pentecostal person's account of chaos in the charismatic movement in Africa (2013:3). Second, he suggests that Pentecostals dishonour the Holy Spirit by teaching a power not available to every believer, reducing it to a force or a feeling (2013:5). Third, he argues that if Pentecostal claims were true, they should produce Christlike character rather scandals among Pentecostal pastors and televangelist who have brought disgrace on the name of Christ (2013:5). Fourth, Pentecostals promote a false gospel of material, prosperity known as Word of Faith doctrine (2013:8). Fifth, he believes Pentecostals prioritise religious experiences over biblical truth, interpreting scripture in novel and unorthodox ways to justify their experiences (2013:16). Sixth, he questions the legitimacy and character of modern Pentecostal founders (2013:21).

His seventh point is a series of tests he calls “testing the spirits”. The first questions the exaltation of Christ. Is Christ exalted among Pentecostals? MacArthur argues that Pentecostals obscure the focus on Christ due to their preoccupation with

spiritual gifts and supernatural empowerment (2013:41). The second test asks whether Pentecostals oppose worldliness. MacArthur believes that Pentecostal theology caters to worldly values, as demonstrated by many televangelist (2013:57-58). The third test emphasises the Scriptures. Do Pentecostals direct people to the Scriptures? The fourth test questions whether Pentecostal doctrine emphasises spiritual truth and doctrinal clarity, or if it creates confusion and promotes error? The fifth test examines whether Pentecostals practices produce love for God and others. MacArthur argues that Pentecostal worship services are characterised by disorder and chaos, which, in his view does not honour the Lord. (2013: 75).

MacArthur's second section focuses on counterfeit gifts, including prophetic words, speaking in tongues and healings. He disagrees with movements promoting apostolic successions, specifically criticising Peter Wagner's advocacy for the apostolic office's resurrection in the contemporary church (2013:91). Although not all Pentecostals align themselves with his views, MacArthur does not distinguish between them.

Regarding prophetic words, MacArthur objects to anyone claiming revelations from God today, describing such revelations as often erroneous and dangerous (MacArthur, 2013: 114). He highlights scandals involving Pentecostal pastors and evangelists who exaggerated prophetic gifts. He also critiques speaking in tongues, describing it as "making up languages and talking in gibberish" (2013:134). He agrees with William Samarin¹² that glossolalia is not a supernatural phenomenon (2013:134). MacArthur concludes that the experience described in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost was the supernatural ability to speak genuine, meaningful, translatable languages (2013:137).

Finally, MacArthur addresses the gift of healing by citing modern Pentecostal evangelist, known for healing ministries, but who made false claims and lived scandalous

¹² William Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angel* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 227-28.

lives. While he believes God can providentially heal people today, he does not find evidence of miraculous healing occurring today as it did during the apostolic age (2013:175).

5.4 The Pentecostal Context

This research aims to place the main research question in its proper theological and ecclesial context: what factors influence YPLM in their decision to embrace church leadership as ordained ministers with the FMD of the AOG? The cohort consists of members from various churches in the FMD, one of the fourteen-language districts in the USA AOG. Pentecostalism is diverse, lacking a single definition broad enough to encompass all adherents (Richie, 2020: 3). This diversity arises from historical roots, geographical settings, denominational emphases, exceptional leadership influences, and racial and gender identities (Richie, 2020:4).

Despite the diversities among Pentecostals, such as styles of worship and legalistic emphases often influenced by the geographical area of the faith community, there are common doctrinal views shaped by preaching and teaching that impact how congregants, including our cohort, perceive the Trinity: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The cohort's conviction is not formed in isolation; it is the result of a Pentecostal ethos. Life in a Pentecostal church evolves around the presence of the fullness of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship, praise, prayer, and preaching emphasise God the Father. Jesus is central as Saviour Redeemer, Baptiser, Healer and Coming King with the church's evangelistic mission based on Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20 (The Great Commission). The Holy Spirit is present in all of these areas with worship and praise service, including moments to allow the Holy Spirit to move freely. Excitement and joy in songs, personal testimonies of healing, and deliverance are attributed to Jesus and to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tony Richie in *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology* highlights common beliefs among Pentecostals, including the belief in receiving the same experience of the Holy Spirit today, as the disciples did on the Day of Pentecost (Richie, 2020:2). This belief, also known, as *the doctrine of subsequence* as proposed by William Menzies (Menzies, 2000:151) advocates a baptism in the Spirit subsequent to conversion as a fundamental truth for Pentecostals. In any given Pentecostal church meeting, there may be a call for those who want to receive this subsequent experience known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This experience distinguishes Pentecostals from other Christians, (Menzies, 2000: 23). Pentecostals were often ridiculed and not considered orthodox evangelicals. The researcher experienced this growing up in Puerto Rico, where street corner services were disrupted by people throwing rocks and bottles, injuring attendees. Experiences like this shape the faith journey of Pentecostals, including the members of our cohort.

Another influential factor for YPLM is what Richie describes as “This is that hermeneutics”, referencing Peter’s words in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16). This refers to a traditional Pentecostal interpretation of Scripture, characterised by a literal approach to the Bible (Richie 2020:2). The AOG upholds the inspirations of Scripture as the first of its sixteen fundamental truths, stating in the explanatory section of AOG web page the following statement, “the Bible is our all-sufficient rule of faith and practice”. The AOG Constitution and By-laws declare under Statements of Fundamental Truths, “The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible authoritative rule of faith and conduct (2Timothy 3:15-17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:21)”. One verse of Scripture which is constantly emphasised, and it has a vivid reality in the experience with the Holy Spirit, is Hebrews 4:12: ... For the word of God is live and active...

5.4.1 Pentecostal Criteria Validating God's Call

Are all stories about experiencing God's calling from credential applicants accepted by Pentecostals credentials committee? Definitely not. Credentials committee have a significant responsibility to validate applicants' claimed experiences with God. As mentioned in previous sections, Pentecostal movements vary worldwide, and each community establishes its own criteria, guidelines, and procedures for examining credential applicants. These criteria may be outlined in denominational by-laws or procedural manuals. Regardless, criteria and guidelines exist within Pentecostal communities to validate these claims.

Within the AOG, guidelines for ministry are part of the General Council by-laws¹³. This section will address three key criteria: character, evidence of call and doctrine. Credential examiners focus particularly on these three areas, which are essential for validating the Pentecostal testimony. Most critics of Pentecostal movements often target these criteria specifically.

Other important criteria in the by-laws include salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit, Assemblies of God polity, voluntary cooperation, and commitment to the fellowship. Some of these will be referred to in other sections.

Character is one of those criteria (GC By-laws, Article VII, Section 2, d). An applicant's character largely validates their experience with the call of God. Although not always in written form, credential applicants usually meet first with their pastor. One objective of this meeting is to validate the applicant's character. Applicants must have a signed form or recommendation letter from their pastors, which typically results from this initial meeting. Applicants should be members in good standing with reputable

¹³ The General Council of the Assemblies of God Bylaws, 2021. Article VII. Ministry. Section 2. Basic qualifications.

testimonies within the faith community and should comply with responsibilities of church membership. Pastors may have reservations about recommending applicants if their character, family life, and church responsibilities do not conform to a Christ-like character as described in the General Council (GC) by-laws (General Council bylaws Article VII, Section 2, d.).

Evidence of being called by God is another criterion in GC by-laws (GC Article VII, Section 2, c). This is a central theme in both the meeting with the local pastor and with the credential committees. The criteria specify that a call to ministry must be evidenced by personal conviction, confirmed by the work of the Spirit and the testimony of fellow ministers (GC Article VII, Section 2, c). Examiners must listen to candidates describe and explain their calling experience in detail, which must be accompanied by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Our cohort of YPLM testifies, as indicated in our data, to having experienced God's call to ministry through the witness of the Holy Spirit. At this point, the testimony of fellow ministers, such as credential committees, plays a major role in validating, questioning, or rejecting the experience based on Biblical patterns of God's call.

Another fundamental criterion among Pentecostal communities is doctrine (GC Bylaws, Article VII, Section 2, e). No experience is above the authority of the Scriptures. Any credential applicant must agree to the statements of truth of their denomination. Candidates' claimed experiences with the Holy Spirit must align with biblical doctrines and interpretation. The early church committed to the doctrines of the apostles (Acts 2:42-44). The supernatural manifestations witnessed by the early church never exceeded the bounds of the Scriptures known to them at the time.

Examples of that are found in the book of Acts where experiences were corrected by the apostles (Acts 2:16-17; 5:9; 8:20-23). The AG embraces sixteen statements of fundamental truths (GC Constitution 2021, Article V).

5.5 Experiencing God's Presence

To explain this section, two Pentecostal theologians: Amos Yong and Tony Richie will be referenced. The testimony given by the YPLM cohort about the presence of God aligns with Richie's affirmation that experiencing the presence of God in church life and worship occurs through a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit (Richie 2020:83). They felt a convincing awareness of God's calling in their lives. As they sought God's presence, they also felt that God was also seeking them.

In "*The Hermeneutical Spirit*", Yong describes the Day of Pentecost narrative not only as a cognitive experience but also a perceptual and affective one. To experience God's presence there must be a shift from the intellectual to the affective sphere (Yong, 2017:971 kindle pages). Yong's argues that the experience described in Acts 2:4 and Acts 2:8 involved all human senses. This is seen in the narrative's descriptions: the speaking in other tongues and the hearing, "each of us in our own native language", as well as the sound like the rush of a mighty wind and the divided tongues, as of fire, that appeared among them (2:2a,3a). According to Yong, these descriptions highlight the manifestation of divine *pneuma*, first seen and heard and then felt: "a tongue rested on each of them" (2:3b) (Yong, 2017:982).

Amos Yong provides another biblical example from the Apostle Paul to explain the engagement of human cognition and affection in divine encounters. He argues that if Peter's explanation of the many tongues was a sign of the last days (Acts 2:17a) there is a parallel experience to the eschatological "sighs" and "groans" of the Spirit in Paul's Romans (Romans 8:23, 26). This passage mentions believers groaning while waiting

for the adoption, the redemption of the bodies the Spirit interceding with sighs too deep for words. Yong's view presents two levels in the role of affection: what the text points to in human experience, and how human perception and feeling can provide perspective on the text (Yong, 2017:982).

To understand Yong's defence for an engagement between orthodoxy and Ortho pathos it is better to read it as he expressed it:

"If 'homo sapiens' are not only thinking but feeling animals, and even more so, are thinking creatures precisely because they are sensing and perceiving – loving, desiring, hoping- creatures, then there is no right thinking (orthodoxy) about biblical or theological interpretation without also right feeling (orthopathos)" (Yong, 2017:993).

Tony Richie, in *"Essentials of Pentecost"* explains the presence of God, stating that "the religion of the Bible is an invitation to experience God" (Richie, 2020:83). Richie offers insights into the manifest presence of God emphasising that:

"God is not a theoretical hypothesis. God is a living being, a living person – or, more accurately, God is the living being and the living person" (2020:83).

Through the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, one frequently encounters divine and human interactions such as dialogues, rebukes, judgements, sanctions, deliberations, blessings and expressions. In the New Testament, God's presence is even more intensified. From Emmanuel to the Holy Spirit, from miracles to messages, from the apostles to the church and the epistles, all testify to God's presence in direct encounters with people.

Richie agrees with Gordon Smith about the three ways of experiencing God's presence: through the preaching of the word; through participation in the sacraments; and through the immediacy of the Holy Spirit (2020:85). Although his focus is on the immediacy of the Holy Spirit, he also, addresses the other two areas. The importance of

the preaching of the word of God is not merely a human endeavour; it requires the agency of the Holy Spirit. The focus of Pentecostal preaching is not only to instruct or inspire but to bring God himself into the congregation, so that transformation occurs among the congregants (2020:86).

The second way to encounter the presence of God is through the sacraments, a diverse issue among Pentecostals. Most, like the AOG will accept water baptism and the Lord's Supper as ordinances but do not include foot washing, though it is occasionally practised as an act of reconciliation and forgiveness. Some Pentecostal denominations have accepted foot washing as part of their doctrinal ordinances. In practice, not all Pentecostal have been faithful in observing the sacraments of the Lord's Supper, often due to the perception of a mechanical liturgy that seems dry and formal (2020:86).

Richie includes practices such as bodily touch (the laying on of hands), anointing oil and prayer cloths as sacramental among Pentecostals. These practices do not replace the formal sacraments. (2020:87).

The third way to experience God's presence is through the immediacy of the Holy Spirit. Richie quotes Robert Cummings who notes that Christological debates preceded pneumatologically debates was because the Holy Spirit seemed to be an obvious and self-authenticating presence of God in congregational and personal spiritual life (2020:88). Communion with the Holy Spirit was normal among New Testament believers, encapsulated in Paul's doxology in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all". The Holy Spirit was present in all major experiences of a believers: Christian initiation/conversion, dependence on the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment from the Spirit for its mission (2020:88).

Explaining something as grand as the presence of God and its encounter with humanity is challenging. King Solomon, considered one of the wisest men, questioned whether humanity could ever encounter God's presence: "But will God indeed dwell with man on the Earth? Behold, heaven, and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built" (2 Chronicles 6:18 NIV). To explore such complex question, it is important to clarify the meanings of certain words and phrases commonly used when speaking about the presence of God. Peter D. Neumann, Tony Richie and Amos Yong will be the guiding theologians in pursuit of some answers.

When someone speaks about experiencing the presence of God, what do they mean? Generally, an "experience" is a particular instance of a personal encounter. (Richie,2020:89). Therefore, spiritual experiences are instances of being conscious of encountering God's presence and undergoing various attendant phenomena (2020:89). Peter Neumann says that experience of the Spirit has always been integral to Pentecostalism (Neumann, 2012:100). He differentiates Pentecostals from other church groups in that while other groups emphasise doctrine or moral practice, Pentecostals stress affectivity. This does not mean that Pentecostals do not adhere to doctrines and moral ethics; it states that the bedrock of Pentecostal faith is experience (2012:100). There is an informal consensus that Pentecostalism without an experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit is not Pentecostalism. Pentecostals are Spirit-conscious, Spirit-filled, and Spirit-empowered Christian believers (2012:100).

Neumann also suggests the important epistemological value the experience with the Holy Spirit has. He states that experience is an authoritative means by which God is known and the divine will revealed and at times it has primacy over theology and doctrine (2012:102, kindle page).

In “*The Hermeneutical Spirit*”, Amos Yong argues for a correct hermeneutic to achieve a proper biblical reflection on divine presence. He specifically uses the Acts 2 narrative account and suggests that a biblical reading of this passage should not come from modern revivals experiences such as the Azusa Street Revival. Instead, he promotes adopting the Day of Pentecost apostolic experience as an example for biblical and theological interpretation (Yong, 2017:783, kindle page). Taking the biblical and Lukan account of the Day of Pentecost, Yong sees a multicultural hermeneutic of the divine experience: “the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (Yong, 2017:826, kindle page). He is not suggesting that every multicultural testimony is to be accepted without analysis. Yong’s idea proposes that in our global interconnected world, a more pluralistic hermeneutic and theological approach in local contexts must be valued and engaged (2017: 826 kindle page). His post-Pentecost-al¹⁴ hermeneutical paradigm consists of three levels of guidelines. Each guideline requires extensive explanation. The paragraphs on this section are only a simple summary of each.

The first states that the reading of Scriptures must be read as the apostles themselves read them (2017:936 kindle page). Yong suggests that the apostles’ interpretation of the experience on The Day of Pentecost was based on their canonical heritage, which in this case was the prophet, Joel. Therefore, apostolic meaning-making of the experience was based on their scriptural tradition (2017:936, kindle page). The second guideline is a post-Pentecost-al hermeneutic that interprets Scripture following the “rules” of post-apostolic traditions, which includes the Christian tradition after the apostolic generations (2017:946 kindle pages). This includes historical and grammatical

¹⁴ The hyphenation is intentional to mean a connection to the Day of Pentecost rather than to modern Pentecostal movements such as the Azusa Street Revival.

criticism. Yong also includes patristic and medieval traditions of discerning the Scriptures, involve spiritual, moral, allegorical, and related interpretive methods (2017:946 kindle pages).

Yong views this level of interpretation as being more attuned to the spiritual aspect of scriptural reception. This approach focuses not only on understanding texts in their original context but also on their application in contemporary settings (2017:946 kindle page). A key point Yong emphasises is the variety of hermeneutical approaches that have developed throughout Christian history (2017:946 kindle page). In Yong's post-Pentecostal hermeneutics, the third guideline proposes that just as the diversity of languages was valued during the original Pentecost, it should also be appreciated in our current context (2017: 956 kindle page). This guideline highlights the presence of multiple ethnic groups on the Day of Pentecost and the specific mention of those from "the parts of Libya," opening the experience to many groups and validating their testimonies (2107:959 kindle pages).

Dallas Willard in "*Hearing God*" suggests that a message can be considered a word from God if it aligns with well-interpreted Scriptures". He adds that beyond this, diverse experiences such as manifestations of spiritual gifts also convey God's messages (Willard 2012:7). Willard believes that when a message comes through various means - such as people, inner voices, special experiences, the Bible or circumstances- it is recognised as a word from God if it aligns with the Bible's clear meaning and sound interpretation (2012:217). He views the Bible as God's final revelation, applied to individual circumstances. God's word and message are inseparable from human experience, addressing people in their reality and existence. When God speaks through his word, he does to people in their reality and existence. Therefore, to determine if a message is from God, one should rely on personal experience (2012:217).

It has already been argued in previous sections that Pentecostals firmly believe that God still speaks today, not only through Holy Scriptures but also through the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how God chooses to speak, it remains a topic of theological debate. Many biblical scholars accept that God spoke audibly in the past but argue that this no longer happens today. It seems contradictory to believe in an omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God who communicated audibly in the past but now relies solely on Holy Scriptures and no longer manifests Himself. Suddenly, God has abandoned His dual means of communication- audible speech and the immediate presence – in favour of just Holy Scriptures.

Albert N. Martin offers a different perspective, aligning with a segment of contemporary Christianity that believes supernatural manifestations, as described in biblical times, have ceased. He asserts that now we have God's complete revelation in the Bible. Martin states:

“The Holy Spirit has ceased to give direct revelations. He speaks to no rational adult now through any other medium than his word, applied by his gracious light to the understanding and conscience” (2018:93)

Martin provides reasons why people today believe they are called by God, differentiating between a call to preach- a public calling- and a call to a church office¹⁵. He argues that misunderstanding these leads to “imprecise thinking and practice” (2018:79). Martin advises those who believe they are called by God to soberly assess their giftedness, avoid the sin of pride, and remain humble. He also warns that those called by God will be held to a higher standard, citing James 3:1.¹⁶ Martin's warning

¹⁵ Martin refers to “church office” *poimen* for shepherd, *episkopos* for overseer and *presbuteros* for elder (Martin, 2018:79).

¹⁶ James 3:1 “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (NIV).

applies not only to aspiring teachers but also to the content of their teaching, and he urges through self-examination and alignment with scriptural standards. Those who have a sense of God's calling should be aware of the encouragement given in Scriptures along with God-given standards. (2018:81). Martin recommends that those responsible for evaluating candidates claiming God's calling should fulfil their duty by offering encouragement when it is deserved and discouragement when necessary (2018:82). He concludes by referencing Spurgeon's advice for candidates to reflect on their salvation and skills, which will become evident in their ministry (2108:83).

Martin's reasoning that God can call anyone, not just the young, includes a quote from James Henley Thornwell on the divine and sovereign call of God. Thornwell's quote also emphasizes that no limitation can be placed on the Holy Spirit. The better understand his perspective, here is the full quote:

But if the call be Divine, it must be sovereign; and it must impart a peculiar fitness, an unction of the Holy Ghost, which alone can adequately qualify for the duties of the office. If it be sovereign, it may extend to all classes and ages, to young and old, to rich and poor, to all professions and pursuits, to publicans at the receipt of custom, lawyers at the bar, merchants at the desk and physicians in their shops. We are not authorised to limit God's Spirit in this more than in any other department of His operations. He can call whom He pleases, and we should pray for an increase of labourers, without respect to the classes from which they are to spring (Thornwell, 1873:27).

Martin acknowledges that God's active presence is evident in practical areas of ministries. He sees church ministry as God's presence within the church, stating, "in every aspect of ministry there is a constant and delicate confluence and interaction of the divine and human element" (Martin 2018: 72).

However, Martin argues against the idea that God speaks today as He did in Biblical times. While God can call anyone, He asserts that today's callings are not for what he terms "extraordinary offices" (2018:94).

For Martin, the call to extraordinary offices such as apostles, prophets and evangelists differs from the call to ordinary offices like elders (presbuteros), shepherds (poimen) and overseers (episkopos) (2018:84).

Martin divides God's call into two categories: extraordinary and ordinary. He agrees with James Garretson that the period of extraordinary miracles and revelation has ceased (Garretson 2005:35). Martin argues that if someone claims to have received a call to pastoral ministry, regardless of the experience, it should not be classified as extraordinary. Instead, there is an ordinary, orderly, biblically grounded process to function in that office (Martin 2018:86). Nonetheless, he agrees that there is a divine element in both types of calls (2018:86).

Martin suggests that all theology exist in the realm of experimental divinity, or the theology of Christian experience. (2018:89). Some aspects of God's revealed will are precise and objective, while others are subjective and less precise. Therefore, we do not have the same precision as with objective theological propositions and subjects (2018:89).

This statement opens a dialogue with YPLM who claim to have experienced the call of God. Martin argues that personal experiences are influenced by individual thinking, the thoughts of others, temperaments and ecclesiastical association. These are subjective factors in the Theory of Planned Behaviour which we will discuss in another section.

Albert Martin emphasizes the need for a biblical perspective regarding the call to pastoral office. He warns of uninstructed, ignorant zeal, stressing that zeal without knowledge of what is required in a minister of the gospel is neither pleasing to God nor beneficial for the church (2018: 96). While partially agreeing with Martin, the other

extreme leans more towards ministry knowledge and instructions beyond the biblical mandate but lacks zeal.

Martin advises those called to ministry to avoid fanaticism or mystical piety (2018:96). While acknowledging that divine and the human encounters can lead to unusual experiences, he cautions against prematurely labelling every experience as fanaticism. Pentecostal tradition holds that the Holy Spirit still speaks directly to believers' hearts and consciences. It seems that there is an underlying prejudgement on the part of Martin regarding any experience that claims to be directly from God. He offers the negative warning but does not offer the positive perspective of what could be a true supernatural pious experience.

The third piece of advice is to avoid making private or isolated decisions regarding ministry. Martin cites Romans 12, emphasizing that every member of the body must consider the entire body when making decisions. Unity, not isolation, is a key teaching in Romans 12 (2018:98). Young Latinos in this research project are part of a faith community that assesses their giftedness and calling through interviews and written examinations.

The fourth piece of advice concerns having the right ecclesiology (Martin, 2018:99). Churches should differ from secular corporations in selecting leaders. A rationalistic ecclesiology might mislead young ministers into believing that their charismatic gifts and motivational abilities qualify them to become church leaders. (2018 :100).

Os Guinness distinguishes between primary and secondary callings from God. Our primary calling as followers of Christ is to Him and for Him. We are called to someone, not to something. Our secondary calling involves living and acting entirely for him in all aspects of life. (2003:61). Thus, all secular tasks should be seen as God's

calling, but they must yield to the primary calling of following Christ. Secondary callings matter only because the primary calling matters most (2003:61).

Jake Thurston, in an article titled “5 Ways Someone is Called to Ministry” stated that every Christian, regardless of their occupation or identity, is called to minister to others and make disciples. Whether you are a nurse, a business owner, a dog groomer, an athlete, or a combination of the these, you have a divine call to serve those around you and share the message of Jesus (Thurston 2020:1).

According to Guinness, the term “call” in the Old Testament can refer to calling each other or calling upon God. It can also mean “to name,” “call into being,” or “to make” or to become what we are not yet but are called by God to be. For example, when God called the light into existence in Genesis and called Israel to be his people (2003:60).

In the New Testament, “call” gains additional meaning, being associated with salvation in Christ, calling followers to become His disciples. The Greek word for church, *ecclesia*, means “the called-out-ones”. Jesus not only calls His followers to Himself but also calls them to peace, fellowship, eternal life, suffering, and service (2003:60).

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter describes the theological experiences of the research cohort, who have received preaching and teaching on the call of God as a conscious awareness of His immediate presence through the Holy Spirit. They attribute their ministerial endeavours to this divine call. Three guiding questions for this chapter are: Can an experience of God’s calling occur today? How can one be sure it is God’s call? Can God still speak to people today as he did in biblical times? These questions prompt

further inquiry beyond the scope of this research, which aims to inspire a deeper exploration of this theme from both cognitive and affective perspectives.

In addressing the first question the exposition of Scripture is fundamental in Pentecostal communities. In the context of leadership conversion, Pentecostals interpret the Bible as central to discerning God's call and empowering individuals for ministry. Scripture is often understood in light of experiential realities—such as sensing the call of God, receiving spiritual empowerment, and the confirmation of gifts—which collectively validate and guide a leader's journey. This emphasis amplifies the role of Scripture as both a catalyst for conversion and a foundation for equipping leaders, aligning their spiritual experiences with the biblical narrative. Thus, leadership conversion in Pentecostal contexts cannot be separated from the integration of Scripture with lived experiences of divine calling, transformation, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit.

Several biblical examples align with the Pentecostal perspective on leadership conversions, where personal encounters with God, divine calling, and empowerment play a central role. Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3-4), is a prime example of leadership conversion. Though hesitant and uncertain, Moses experiences a direct call from God to lead Israel out of Egypt. Isaiah's call to leadership comes through a profound spiritual experience—a vision of God's holiness and glory in the temple (Isaiah 6:1-8). Overwhelmed by his unworthiness, Isaiah receives cleansing through the symbolic act of a coal touching his lips. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the clearest biblical examples of leadership conversion. A radical encounter with the risen Christ transforms Paul from a persecutor of Christians into a chosen vessel to spread the Gospel (Acts 9:1-19). The disciples' experience at Pentecost is foundational

to Pentecostal doctrine. Though they were followers of Christ prior, their leadership was solidified and empowered after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).

These examples demonstrate how leadership conversion in Scripture often involves divine encounters, spiritual transformation, and empowerment—core tenets of Pentecostal doctrine and practice.

To address the second question, it is essential to understand the Pentecostal context of the YPLM cohort. Tony Richie's "*Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*" and Amos Yong's "*The Hermeneutical Spirit*" provide insights. Richie describes the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit today, akin to the day of Pentecost (Richie, 2020:2). Yong asserts that experiencing God's presence requires a shift from intellectual understanding to affective experience. He also offers arguments for God's immediate presence today through the Holy Spirit, suggesting that right thinking involves right feeling. His hermeneutical perspective on Acts 2 views it as a multicultural divine experience (Yong, 2017: 971 kindle pages).

It is also important to consider differing perspectives. Albert Martin argues that while God still manifests today, it is not exactly as in biblical times. He believes the Holy Spirit communicates with rational adults solely through the Scriptures. Nonetheless, Martin, quoting Thornwell, acknowledges that "we are not authorised to limit God's Spirit" (Thornwell, 1873:27).

In summary, various voices, and perspectives on experiencing God's presence and call today enrich the understanding of this theological theme.

CHAPTER 6.

LEADERSHIP CONVERSION AND CHURCH TRADITIONS

6.0 Introduction

Thus far in our previous chapters, we have considered two influential factors in the conversion experience of the research cohort members: the spiritual experiences and the theological aspects. This chapter investigates the inherent factors in the lives of our cohort that have contributed to their development as church leaders. By “inherent,” the researcher refers to factors that are acquired and influence the group from the perspective of the church, the faith community, or the denomination to which they belong. In the Pentecostal community, there are shared stories, ways of speaking, and typical behaviours that are not taught in formal settings, like classrooms. Instead, they play a key role in shaping the identity and values of its members. This chapter aims to specific emphasise practices and ways of communication that are integral to the culture of this community, especially among its young members.

The chapter examines four significant areas, that have emerged from the interviews, shedding light on the cohort's experiences that shape their attitudes and choices concerning church leadership. Despite apparent contradictions in these areas the study found that they did not impede this group of young people in their aspiration to become ministers credentialed by the Assemblies of God.

The first section presents the *Indigenous Denominational Tradition*: offering a brief history of the Assemblies of God, with a focus on the development of credentialing processes. Given their affiliation with the Assemblies of God in the United States, a section on credential history is included to help readers understand the background and significance of the denomination's credentialing process. This section reveals how the denomination's doctrines and candidate criteria have changed over time, highlights the

movement's focus on candidates' spiritual experiences, and aids in understanding the organisation's traditions, values, and evolution. Additionally, it provides clarity on the rationale behind certain rules and regulations.

In the second section, we explore *Indigenous Family Traditions*: factors that influenced this group of young individuals at an early age, such as being raised in a Christian household and their experiences as they grew and developed. This includes learning about spiritual awakening, recounting their experiences with God, reflecting on their divine calling, sharing their supernatural conversion, and receiving prophetic words.

The third section delves into *Indigenous Church Traditions*: as they grew within the church, they became involved in various ministries due to their desire to contribute to their local churches. Throughout their journey of faith, they encountered struggles and conflicts related to their beliefs and various aspects of the church. Many experienced a sense of disconnection from the church, frustration with its leadership, personal challenges, and conflicts regarding the credentialing process.

The fourth and final section highlights *Indigenous Social Struggles*: a generational shift among many of these young individuals; with some navigating identity crises, and others concerned about future generations.

6.1 The Indigenous Denominations Tradition

6.1.1 History Assemblies of God Leadership Development Polity

The emergence of the Assemblies of God (AOG) in the United States was not an isolated event. It occurred in 1914, nearly 50 years after the Civil War, which had a significant impact on the southern region, leaving it physically and socially devastated (Miller, 2019). This conflict resulted in economic, social, moral, and racial divisions within the nation, affecting religious unity as well. Despite sharing the same Bible and praying to the same God, both soldiers and civilians found themselves in opposition

during the war (Miller, 2019:1). The three largest religious denominations of that era—the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches—were all divided on the issue of slavery (2019:2).

Moreover, the consequences of European industrialisation and migration had noticeable social and economic impacts in the post-war era. By 1900, approximately forty percent of the American population resided in cities with a population of 4,000 or more (Menzies, 1971:18). This substantial influx of people contributed to the formation of ghettos in many rapidly growing cities (1971:18). Consequently, these social changes led to a decline in public morality within the United States.

Major Evangelical denominations engaged in significant theological debates, including discussions on issues like slavery and racial equality. The influence of William Wilberforce's victory against slavery in the British parliament in 1801 had repercussions in America, as evidenced by his correspondence with Presidents Madison and Jefferson, urging them to join the efforts to end slavery (Metaxas, 2007:216). These theological debates diverted attention and energy away from addressing the pressing needs of a nation in distress (Menzies, 1971:33). It was within this church segment, driven by spiritual concerns, that the desire for revival began to emerge (1971:33).

Methodism's influence in the late 18th and early 19th centuries spread throughout the country, particularly through teachings on perfection and holiness. By 1840, perfectionism had become a central theme in American social, intellectual, and religious life. The teachings of perfectionism also influenced various reform movements, such as women's rights and the abolition of slavery (Synan, 1997:17). The post-Civil War years witnessed a moral decline in America (Synan, 1997:23), with the southern United States being the first region to experience a religious revival after the war (1997:23).

Before 1900, sporadic, charismatic manifestations, occurred in certain parts of the country and around the world. Early Pentecostal pioneers broke racial and gender barriers, embracing preaching ministry. These pioneers believed that entering ministry only required a divine call, a willingness to pray, step out in faith, and a determination to fulfil God's calling (McGee, 2004:12).

By 1914, early Pentecostals found themselves marginalised within organised Christianity (Menzies, 1971:80). This was influenced by several factors, including the emphasis on a "tongue-speaking experience" that did not align with mainstream evangelical beliefs of the time. The emotionalism displayed in Pentecostal meetings often faced criticism (1971:80). The movement associated with the lower social class and lacked influential figures for credibility (1971:80). Media reports often highlighted extreme manifestations exhibited by some participants. Despite these challenges, Pentecostals began organizing themselves. By the early 20th century, some established Pentecostal groups with structured organisations included the Church of God, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, and the Church of God in Christ (Synan,1997:179).

Calls for a unified organisation that could serve as a denominational home for like-minded individuals started to emerge (Synan1997:179). In the December 20, 1913, edition of "Word and Witnessed", a call was made for a General Council to convene in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the following April. This council aimed to bring together Pentecostal Saints and churches of God in Christ to address their share of challenges. (1997:183). The meeting's agenda focused on five main subjects for discussion:

- That we may get a better understanding of what God would have us teach, that we may do away with so many divisions, both in doctrines and in the various names under which are Pentecostal people are working and incorporating.

- That we may know how to conserve the work that we may all build up and not tear down, both in home in foreign lands.
- That we may get a better understanding of the needs of each foreign field and may know how to place our money in such a way that one mission or missionary shall not suffer, while another, not any more worthy, lives in luxuries.
- Many of the saints have felt the need of chartering the churches of God in Christ, putting them on a legal basis, and thus obeying the laws of the land.
- To lay before the body for a general Bible training school with a literary department for our people (Menzies 1971:94)

The first session of the General Council opened on April 2 1914, with over 300 delegates in attendance. Although the original intent was not to establish a new denomination, a resolution, titled “Preamble and Resolution of Constitution” was introduced and passed, leading to the creation of The General Council of the Assemblies of God (Synan, 1971:155).

During this historic meeting, several important actions were taken. Temporary officers were appointed, a resolutions committee was formed, and the principle of voluntary cooperation with established churches, ensuring the sovereignty of local churches, was affirmed. Incorporation under the name General Council of the Assemblies of God was approved, and an Executive Presbytery, consisting of twelve men, was elected. Additionally, a General Chairman, known as General Superintendent, and a Secretary-Treasurer were chosen. The preamble outlined the general principles of shared beliefs, with the Bible serving as a sufficient rule for faith and practice. Two existing papers were designated as the official organs of the fellowship. Furthermore, two existing schools were recognised as institutions for ministry instruction. Provisions

were also made for the formation of district councils, and a credentials committee was appointed to handle ministerial recognition requests from individuals seeking affiliation with the Assemblies of God. The first session of the General Council concluded on April 12, 1914 (Menzies, 1971:97-105).

6.1.2 History of The AOG Credentialing Process

The AG credentialing system has its roots in the Pentecostal revival of the early 20th century, a period characterised by an emphasis on Spirit-led ministry and the empowerment of lay leaders. As the movement grew, the need for a structured process to maintain theological consistency and organisational unity became apparent.

The credentialing process was established to address these needs, balancing the Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual gifts and divine calling with practical measures for equipping and supporting ministers. Over time, the process evolved to include more formal education and training requirements, reflecting the denomination's commitment to both spiritual and intellectual preparation for ministry.

During the inaugural General Council of the AOG held in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1914, several significant events unfolded. One of these was the establishment of the credentials committee, tasked with granting recognition to individuals seeking affiliation with this newly reformed church (Menzies 1971:05). Notably, the early stages of Pentecostalism witnessed the emergence of women in ministry, primarily in supportive roles in spreading the Gospel (McGee 2004:116). Initially, ordination was only granted to women serving as missionaries and evangelist. It wasn't until twenty years later that the General Council of the AOG authorised the ordination of women as pastors. (2004:117). Being an ordained minister bestowed certain privileges within this new movement. Both ordained ministers and lay church delegates participated in the

authoritative General Council sessions, which served as the highest governing body of the movement (2004:118). Possessing a credential certificate was significant for recognition and standing in AOG church leadership.

The General Council of the AOG initially recognised three credential categories: ordained ministers, elders and licentiates who were beginners. Women were granted licenses to preach, provided they met the criteria outlined in the General Council bylaws (GC Minutes 1937:17). Over the years, the credentialing processes evolved, with additional criteria for ordination being added to the GC bylaws. One of the initial requirements was that all candidates must first serve as licensed ministers for two years. Only those who demonstrated steadfastness and efficiency were eligible for ordination into full ministry, either through a district council or by a mature local assembly through a Council of ministers (GC Minutes 1914:20)

During the 1927 General Council held in Springfield, Missouri the assembly adopted a revised constitution and bylaws. In Article V, Section 2 of the Bylaws, it was explicitly stated that a clear demonstration of being called was required for individuals to qualify for a license credential. (GC Minutes 1927:16). A key recommendation was made to district leaders, urging them to establish a committee responsible for examining candidates' character, adherence to sound doctrine, Christian experience, ministerial abilities, and previous success. Only upon satisfying these requirements would the district council proceed with ordination. (GC Minutes 1914:21). It was within the context of Christian experience that credential candidates shared their personal journey and their calling to ministry as part of the evaluation process.

By 1955, there were three distinct categories of credentials available: ordained minister, licensed minister, and Christian worker or exhorter. The latter two designations were overseen by the districts, and it was mandatory for all applicants to provide

testimony of having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2:4. Additionally, applicants had to be at least 23 years old (GC Minutes 1955:67). During the 1973 General Council held in Miami, Florida, a motion was passed to introduce a specialised ministry credential for individuals involved in Christian education, youth work, music, and other related ministries (GC Minutes 1973:14). A resolution (Resolution 21) was subsequently approved during the 1977 General Council session marking the first instance where educational requirements were incorporated as a criterion for obtaining credentials. All individuals seeking credentials were now required to have successfully completed the prescribe courses offered by the Berean School of the Bible to qualify (GC Minutes 1977:87).

During the 1980s, the General Council Bylaws became more explicit, outlining the degree and qualifications necessary for the three distinct types of credentials: Christian worker, License, and Ordained.

- a) Christian Worker – Efficient helpers in gospel work who devote a part of their time to Christian service and whenever possible remain under the supervision of a pastor, may be recognised as Christian workers. They shall preach at least 12 times a year or be actively engaged in some other aspect of ministry, except in case of ill health or infirmity.
- b) License – Qualifications for licensure shall be into categories:
 - a) Preaching ministry – Clear evidence of a *divine call*, practical experience in preaching, together with an evident purpose to devote one's time to preaching the gospel. They shall preach at least 15 times a year, except in case of ill health or infirmity.

- b) Specialized ministry – An evident purpose to devote one’s time to a specialised ministry such as Christian education, music, or other full-time ministries.
- c) Ordination – Qualifications for ordination are outlined in the New Testament Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9)
 - a) Applicants must be 23 years of age or older.
 - b) They must have met all the requirements in making application and in completing the prescribed application form.
 - c) No person may be ordained to the ministry until he shall have held a license to preach and shall have been engaged in active work as a pastor, evangelist, or some other recognize full-time ministry for at least two full consecutive years.
 - d) Applicants must be residence of or hold credentials in the district where they make application and appear before it’s credentials committee.
 - e) In order to maintain active status, ordained ministers must preach at least 15 times each year. (GC By-Laws 1981:114-115)

Doing the 1991 General Council held in Portland, Oregon, a resolution was passed, stipulating that all three categorize credentials - namely, ordained, licensed and Christian worker - be issued by the General Council. However, the responsibility of evaluating and approving candidates for these credentials remained with the districts (GC Minutes 1991:96). This arrangement continues to be in effect at present. This brief introduction to the history of the Assemblies of God's policies and its ministerial credentialing procedures is as significant as other additional factors, such as an individual's personal experience with God and its influence on ecclesiastical leadership processes.

6.1.3 Purpose of the Credentialing Process in the Assemblies of God

The Assemblies of God (AG) credentialing process serves as a formal system for recognising and equipping individuals who are called to ministry within the denomination. This process includes specific steps designed to evaluate and affirm the ministerial readiness, theological soundness, and spiritual maturity of candidates. Key components of the process include:

1. **Educational Requirements:** Candidates must complete ministerial training, often through accredited Bible colleges, seminaries, or ministerial internship programs. This ensures a strong foundation in biblical knowledge, Pentecostal theology, and practical ministry skills.
2. **Spiritual Assessment:** Candidates undergo an evaluation of their personal faith, spiritual experiences, and sense of calling. This step ensures alignment with AG doctrinal beliefs and values.
3. **Practical Ministry Experience:** Many candidates are required to engage in supervised ministry work, such as internships or mentorships, which provide real-world experience in pastoral leadership, preaching, and community service.
4. **Examination and Credentialing:** Finally, candidates must pass an examination and receive approval from church leaders, confirming their readiness to serve in official ministerial roles.

The credentialing process aims to uphold the integrity and effectiveness of AG ministry by ensuring that ministers are theologically prepared, spiritually mature, and practically equipped to lead congregations and fulfill their calling.

6.1.4 Compatibility with the Call to Ministry

In Pentecostal theology, the call to ministry is often understood as a supernatural experience, marked by a sense of divine direction and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. This subjective experience is validated through personal conviction, spiritual fruit, and confirmation by the church community.

The AG credentialing process complements this understanding by providing a framework for recognizing and affirming a divine call. While the call is initiated by God, the credentialing process offers:

1. **Validation:** By requiring spiritual assessment and community affirmation, the process confirms the authenticity of a candidate's calling.
2. **Preparation:** Educational and practical requirements ensure that candidates are equipped to fulfill their calling effectively.
3. **Accountability:** The examination and approval process establishes accountability, ensuring that ministers uphold the doctrinal and ethical standards of the AG.

However, some tension may arise between the formal structure of credentialing and the more organic, Spirit-led nature of calling as perceived in Pentecostal traditions. This tension is particularly relevant for individuals who feel called but may not meet all institutional requirements, raising questions about inclusivity and adaptability within the process.

6.1.5 Perspectives from the Research Cohort

Among our research cohort of YPLM, the credentialing process is viewed through various lenses influenced by cultural, spiritual, and social factors. For this cohort:

1. **Interpretation of Calling:** Many young Hispanic Pentecostals perceive their call to ministry as a deeply personal and spiritual experience, often tied to moments of supernatural encounter, prophetic affirmation, or community recognition.
2. **Perceptions of Credentialing:** While some view the credentialing process as a necessary affirmation of their calling, others may see it as overly institutional or restrictive, particularly if they feel their calling transcends formal qualifications.
3. **Cultural Influences:** Hispanic cultural values, such as respect for authority and communal affirmation, may align well with the AG's emphasis on community validation. However, socioeconomic barriers, such as access to education, could pose challenges for meeting credentialing requirements.

6.2 Biblical Qualifications of Eldership

The Assemblies of God, while characterised by distinct Pentecostal beliefs and practices, maintain a strong commitment to the biblical standards for eldership as outlined in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. The qualifications for eldership in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus emphasise moral character, family leadership, spiritual maturity, teaching ability, and relational qualities. Elders must live lives above reproach, demonstrating self-control, integrity, and faithfulness, particularly in marriage and family leadership. Managing their households well, with faithful and respectful children, reflects their capacity to lead the broader church community.

Spiritual maturity is essential, requiring elders to be seasoned in their faith, disciplined, and grounded in sound doctrine. This enables them to instruct the congregation, refute

error, and maintain the church's theological integrity. Teaching ability is vital for equipping believers, while relational qualities, such as being hospitable, kind, gentle, and peaceable, foster unity and trust within the church and the wider community.

These standards highlight the high calling of elders as spiritual shepherds who model Christ-like character, provide sound teaching, and lead with humility and wisdom, guiding the church toward maturity and unity in faith.

6.2.1 1 Tim. 3:1-7

The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to identify specific qualities in those being considered for church leadership. These individuals must exemplify moderation, self-control, and a gentle, peaceable nature, avoiding aggression, unnecessary conflict, and greed. Elders are also expected to display strong family leadership, managing their households effectively with children who are obedient and respectful. Spiritual maturity is essential, as leaders must not be recent converts who may fall into pride. Furthermore, they must uphold a good reputation with those outside the church, reflecting Christ-like character and earning the respect of the wider community.

6.2.2 Titus 1:5-9

Paul's instructions to Titus regarding leadership qualifications in Titus 1:5–9 largely align with his guidance to 1 Timothy 3:1–7, but there are notable differences in emphasis and details. Key distinctions include:

- **Children's Behaviour:**
 - *Titus*: Elders' children must be *believers* and not accused of rebellion (Titus 1:6).

- *1 Timothy*: Focuses on managing the household well, with obedient and respectful children (1 Timothy 3:4), without requiring their faith commitment.
- **Character Traits:**
 - *Titus*: Highlights *not arrogant* and *not quick-tempered*, stressing humility and patience.
 - Adds a qualification to be *lovers of what is good*, a trait not directly mentioned in 1 Timothy.
- **Moral and Spiritual Conduct:**
 - *Titus*: Emphasises being *upright* and *holy*, adding spiritual depth.
- **Discipline:**
 - *Titus*: Explicitly mentions *discipline*, reflecting self-restraint and consistency, whereas in Timothy it is generalised as self-control.
- **Sound Doctrine:**
 - *Titus*: Stronger focus on holding firmly to the Word to teach truth and *refute error* (Titus 1:9), compared to the general “able to teach” in 1 Timothy.

Paul’s instructions in Titus place greater emphasis on the spiritual condition of the elder’s children, humility and patience, moral conduct, self-discipline, and the responsibility to defend sound doctrine. These standards reflect the high calling and responsibility of church elders to exemplify Christ-like character, provide sound teaching, and serve as spiritual shepherds for the church community.

6.3 The Indigenous Family Traditions

Different life experiences shape the spiritual awareness of the YPLM cohort during their church leadership formation. Primary data highlights the important role of these experiences in inspiring them to become credentialed ministers within the AOG. Many of these experiences originate within the home and family. When children are raised in a Pentecostal family environment, the language they hear at home—whether through preaching or singing—shapes their personalities.

A key aspect of their decision-making process is their experience with the call of God, central to the Pentecostal experience. However, other factors within the community also influence a person's spiritual consciousness. These internal factors are native to that environment, and affect those who live, participate, and are active within that community. They become part of their beliefs, speech, and all expressions.

Robert Wuthnow's book, "After The Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion," explores the evolving experiences of young adults in America. While Wuthnow's research primarily examines broader religious and spiritual aspects among young adults rather than specifically focusing on those who claim supernatural experiences, it still provides valuable insights. This researcher interprets Wuthnow's work as allowing for further exploration of internal and indigenous influences within the Latino Pentecostal community that shape the spirituality of young individuals.

Wuthnow's study focuses on three core inquiries: First, he delves into the religious and spiritual aspects of individuals, aged 18 to 23, seeking to comprehend the factors contributing to their beliefs and practices. Second, he investigates the role of social influences in shaping the lives of young adults during this developmental phase. Lastly, he explores how the religious and spiritual orientations of individuals either

undergo transformation or remain consistent as they transition from their teenage years into their twenties (Wuthnow, 2009:3).

While the age group in Wuthnow's research may be slightly younger than the sample in our current study, the core questions raised in his book remain highly relevant. Our primary aim is to investigate the factors that influence young Pentecostal Latino/a millennials in their decision to become church leaders by pursuing ordination within the Assemblies of God (AOG). Understanding the context of their beliefs and practices can provide essential background information for interpreting the attitudes of our cohort of Young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials toward the call of God and how it shapes their vocational aspirations within the AOG.

One significant aspect explored in this research is the social context of religious behaviour among our cohort of YPLM. It offers valuable insights into the influence of social factors as they progress through different life stages, as emphasised by Wuthnow (2009:4).

Social influences, including family dynamics, interactions with peers, cultural traditions, and broader societal norms, significantly shape an individual's religious outlook. By examining these social factors, our research can gain a deeper understanding of how the religious behaviour of young Latinos evolves over time.

Wuthnow's emphasis on the impact of the social environment aligns with the assumptions outlined in our research (section 1.7.1), which recognises that religious attitudes and behaviours are not solely the result of personal convictions but are heavily influenced by the surrounding social milieu. YPLM experiences a complex interplay between their individual beliefs and broader social forces. This perspective enriches our understanding of the dynamics at play within this cohort.

The third question raised by Wuthnow focuses on the behavioural changes that occur as young individuals transition from their teenage years to their twenties, considering the potential role of age in influencing shifts in religious practices and beliefs (2009:4). While our primary data does not explicitly confirm or reject Wuthnow's assertion that religious behaviour is solely tied to age, it is essential to address this aspect in connection with our research.

Wuthnow's book resonates with the experiences of YPLM as they embark on their journey towards practical ministry. It explores various issues that hold significant relevance to this demographic, shedding light on statistical data related to the social realities that impact our young people.

6.3.1 Early Faith Awareness

Does faith upbringing influence YPLM's attitude towards church leadership? This particular experience varied among our cohort members. Not all were raised in church; one grew up Catholic. However, those raised in Pentecostal Christian homes expressed that it impacted their faith. Being raised in a Pentecostal home can be an influential factor in YPLM church leadership future.

Growing up in a Christian household, especially with grandparents who were pastors had a significant influence on YPLM-2's faith. This environment provided a foundation of religious knowledge and understanding from an early age. The exposure to teachings about Jesus, and the inner workings of the church, likely fostered a spiritual identity and understanding of church operations, shaping her beliefs and practices. This early and consistent engagement with faith related activities and conversations created a robust framework for her spiritual development and leadership aspirations within the church. YPLM-2 said:

I grew up in a Christian household, my grandparents are pastors in Cuba. “I grew up knowing about Jesus and about the church and how it worked”.

Having a close relative, who was a committed Christian significantly influence YPLM-13’s faith. Her aunt Maria played a crucial role in introducing and maintaining the family’s connection to the church. By bringing everyone, including her mother to church she became a central figure in their spiritual journey. YPLM-13 said:

“I’ve had my aunt which is the oldest of my mum sisters, my aunt Maria was the one that kind of brought everybody, to church and brought my mom to church and she has been my mentor and still is”.

This close relationship with a dedicated Christian relative likely reinforced YPLM-13’s faith by providing a positive role model and a source of spiritual encouragement. Aunt Maria’s actions and mentorship helped shape their understanding of their faith, deepening their commitment and engagement within their church.

While growing up, most of them went through personal crises within their families, triggering periods of faith crisis. YPLM-1’s decision to leave his family and move to Florida reflects a period of personal crisis, and a desire for independence. He said, *“I wanted to just kind of do my own thing”*. This statement indicates a rebellion against the structured faith centred environment he was raised in. YPLM-1 said:

“I wanted to just kind of do my own thing. Then, at the age of 19, I decided to move to Florida where my dad lives, who does not serve the Lord and isn’t as strict as my mother was”.

At 19, the choice to live with his father, who does not serve the Lord and is less strict than his mother, signifies a conscience move away from his religious upbringing. The lack of religious guidance in his new environment may have contributed to his decision not to serve God, as they explored a lifestyle contrary to his previous faith-based one.

Surveys find that religious change begins early in life. Most who decided to leave their childhood faith say they did so before reaching age 24 (Faith in Flux: 2011). This period, typically encompassing late adolescence and early adulthood, is marked by significant personal development and exploration. During these formative years, individuals are more likely to question and reevaluate the beliefs and values instilled in them during childhood. Factors such as exposure to diverse viewpoints, increased autonomy, and life transitions, can all contribute to shifts in religious identity and practice.

Another characteristic of faith upbringing was that all of them, at some point, had a faith supporter - someone who encouraged them in their journey of faith. YPLM-1 testified:

“My cousin, who I was living with at the time, introduced me to a Christian Church and I started going there and that’s really where God encountered me”.

Having a faith supporter played an important role on YPLM-1’s spiritual journey. His statements, highlights the impact that supportive relationships can have on one’s faith development. This cousin acted as a bridge, connecting the individual to a faith community at a pivotal moment in his life. This faith supporter provided guidance, encouragement, and a tangible example of living out one’s faith.

Others, like YPLM-6, believed that God guides people in their faith is by putting others by their side. He said:

“Throughout my life, there have been key people that God has placed. And I see it now, you know. Because that’s how God shows your way. And there were certain people that God will put, you know, along my way to, to guide me to his path”.

The statement made by YPLM-6 emphasise the belief that God strategically places individuals in lives to provide guidance and support. This perspective highlights the

conscious process of this young person of divine intervention through relationships. It is important to note that he recognises that these relationships were not random, but divinely orchestrated to help him stay on his spiritual path.

6.3.1.1 Early Faith Awareness Testimonies

The following are twenty-one additional expressions of testimonies of cohort members' early faith awareness. Each has details that provide different insights into their upbringing:

YPLM-1 *"I grew up in a Christian home, with a very strict mum"*. This statement provides five insights into his upbringing: religious foundation, parental influence, discipline and structure, impact on faith development and cultural context. It reflects an upbringing rooted in Christian values, characterised by significant parental control and discipline. This environment likely played a pivotal role in shaping his beliefs and practices.

YPLM-2 *"I grew up in a Christian household. My grandparents were pastors in Cuba. So, I grew up knowing about Jesus and about church and how it works"*. This testimony provides various insights: religious foundation, influence of pastoral grandparents, early religious education, exposure to church operations, and cultural and family identity. It indicates an upbringing embedded in Christian teachings and practices, heavily influenced by the pastoral leadership of her grandparents. This environment provided a thorough understanding of religious beliefs and church operations, shaping her spiritual foundation and identity.

YPLM-3 *"I moved here in the 1990s with my family, my grandfather, and his wife and a group of eight members of the Disciples of Christ Church who came here to plant a church"*. This testimony shares six insights: religious environment, community and family influence, mission, oriented, upbringing, early exposure to leadership and church

operations call, cultural and social adaptation, and the role of extended family. It reveals an upbringing embedded in religious mission's work, family ties, and early involvement in church activities. It reflects a background of active faith practice, community engagement, and the influence of multiple generations on his spiritual growth.

YPLM-4 *"When I was very young, back at the church where I was, our pastor suggested credentials for leaders of the church"*. This statement provides five insights into early faith awareness: early involvement in church, exposure to church leadership, encouragement of leadership potential, supportive church community, and mentorship and guidance. It reveals an upbringing characterised by active participation in church life, exposure to leadership concepts, and a supportive community that encouraged the development of leadership skills and potential.

YPLM-7. *"I was born to missionary parents. My parents had become U.S. missionaries right after they got married and soon after they had me. So my background has been in the Assemblies of God"*. This testimony provides the following insights: missionary family, early immersion in faith, Assemblies of God affiliation, commitment and sacrifice, exposure to diverse experiences, and religious identity. It reveals an upbringing characterised by deep religious roots, early and continuous immersion in mission work, and an association with the Assemblies of God denomination. This background likely played a significant role in shaping his faith, values, and worldview.

YPLM-8 *"I was born to a very Catholic family. My grandma is very Catholic and so that's what we did our whole life. When we moved to the United States, I continued to go to Catholic church until we moved to a city called Cape Coral"*. This statement provides six insights: Catholic background, family influence, consistent religious practice, adaptation and continuity, community involvement, and cultural and religious identity. It reveals an upbringing characterised by a Catholic faith, significant family

influence, consistent religious practice, adaptation to new environments while maintaining religious continuity, and a deep-rooted cultural and religious identity. This background likely had a significant impact on the individual's beliefs, values, and sense of community.

YPLM-9 *"My mother was a part of Bible Institute, and so I didn't know too much about it as a teenager, but she would talk to me about it, learning the Word and things of that nature. Obviously, being a part of Iglesia El Calvario at the time, I knew about it, but I was very young, so I didn't know too much. I've been a part of the district as attending church for 13 years"*. This statement provides the following insights: influence of a religious parent, exposure to religious education, church affiliation, youth understanding, long-term church involvement, and gradual religious growth. It reveals an upbringing characterised by exposure to religious education through a dedicated parent, early involvement in a church community, limited understanding in youth due to age, and a long-term commitment to his faith in church. This background likely fostered a gradual but deepening engagement with his religious beliefs and practices.

YPLM-10 *"I grew up in church. I grew up in M.I. in Puerto Rico for 5 years. I was born in church; my mum and dad were very religious. My brother, my sister and I grew up in church. Even in Queens, we went to John 3:16 Astoria. The Pastor is Nathanael Del Toro"*. This statement shares the following insights: religious foundation, parental influence, consistent church involvement, community and church identity, family-oriented faith practice, exposure to religious leadership, and cultural and geographical transition. It reveals an upbringing rooted in religious practices, with parental influence, consistent church involvement across different locations, a sense of church community, and family-oriented faith activities. This background provided a

stable and immersive religious environment that shaped the individual's spiritual identity and values.

YPLM-11 *"We were from a Catholic background, we were Catholic. At 10 years old, my family decide to follow Christ, and we got baptised as a family, and we began serving the Lord together. Since the age of 10, we've been involved in church, always serving God "*. This testimony provides the following insights: initial Catholic upbringing, significant religious transition, family unity in faith, active Church, involvement, development of a new religious identity, and commitment to service. It reveals an upbringing that began with a Catholic foundation but experienced a significant transition to the Christian faith at the age of 10. This shift involved a collective family commitment to following Christ, active and ongoing church involvement, and an emphasis on serving God together as a family. This background provided a cohesive and active religious environment that shaped the individual's spiritual development and identity.

YPLM-12 *"I was born into the church, always been a Christian, and when we moved here, we moved to an Assemblies of God church where I was exposed to the beautiful relationship that is to have a relationship with Christ."* This testimony provides the following insights on early faith awareness: lifelong religious identity, early and continuous church involvement, exposure to Assemblies of God, emphasis on personal relationship with Christ, impact on church environment, and positive religious experience. It reveals an upbringing characterised by a lifelong Christian identity and early continuous involvement in church. This background provided a stable, positive, and relational religious environment that significantly shaped the individual's spiritual development and understanding of faith.

YPLM-12 *“I remember at the age of 11 and 12 years old I was already reading the Bible every morning, already desiring to be a leader and to be called”*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: early religious engagement, self-motivated spirituality, aspiration for leadership, supportive environment, sense of calling, and development of spiritual discipline. It reveals an upbringing characterised by early and self-motivated engagement with faith, a supportive environment for spiritual practices, and emphasis on leadership and calling within the religious context. This background likely fostered a deep and proactive approach to the individual’s religious life and aspirations for leadership within their faith community.

YPLM-13 *“I was born and raised in a Pentecostal church in 1993. My mum raised me in church my entire life and being raised in church I’ve always known the gospel. It wasn’t until I was 12 years old that I fully gave my whole life and everything to the Lord and said I want to be serious with God. And I’ve been serious with God ever since”*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: Pentecostal background, religious family environment, early exposure to the gospel, personal spiritual milestones, commitment to faith, and influence of a religious role model. It reveals an upbringing embedded in the Pentecostal tradition, with influence from a religious family environment. This background provided a robust foundation for the individual’s spiritual development and long-term dedication to their faith.

YPLM-14 *“I accepted Jesus at 6 years old, my parents met the Lord before I was born so I was raised in church. Our first church was La Roca with Pastor Bonilla so that is where I accepted Jesus. At 8 years old, my parents went on to pastor and founded our church”*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: early conversion experience, religious family background, church involvement from birth, parental leadership in faith, exposure to ministry, and stable and supportive religious

environment. It reveals an upbringing characterised by early and deep engagement with faith, consistent church involvement, and significant parental influence and leadership in religious activities. This background provided a nurturing and stable environment for the individual's spiritual development, with early exposure to concepts of faith and ministry.

YPLM-15 (TRANSLATION TO ENGLISH) *"My grandparents were Catholic. But then they started taking me to a Christian church early in my life. I used to go to vacation Bible school to hear the word of God. That's where I gave my heart to Jesus when I was 13 years old"*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: Catholic heritage, transition to a different Christian tradition, early exposure to Protestant Christianity, participation in vacation Bible school, personal spiritual decision, and influence of grandparents. The statement reveals an upbringing characterised by a transition from a Catholic heritage to active involvement in a Protestant Christian church, facilitated by the grandparents.

YPLM-16 *"I was familiar with the credential process because my grandfather he was a Superintendent in the Dominican Republic. My mother and my father are licensed ministers also from the Spanish district of the Assemblies of God. So, it's been something that I've been well-versed regarding the Assemblies of God"*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: exposure to church leadership, family involvement in ministry, Assemblies of God affiliation, understanding of church processes, influence of multiple generations, mentorship and role models, cultural and religious identity. It reveals significant exposure to church leadership and governance, a family tradition of ministry and an understanding of church processes. This background provided the individual with a robust foundation in their faith, shaped by multigenerational influences and a culturally rich religious environment.

YPLM-17 *“I’ve been active in church since I was 8 years old. Son of a pastor, musician, I’ve been part of the worship team playing drums since I was 8”*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: early and active Church involvement, influence of a pastoral parent, musical engagement, family centred religious activities, development of skills and talents, supportive environment for growth, and commitment to service. It reveals an upbringing characterised by early and active involvement in church, significant influence from a pastoral parent, engagement in musical worship. This background provided a nurturing and supportive environment for the individual’s spiritual and personal growth.

YPLM-18 (TRANLATED) *“I used to belong to the Assemblies of God in Puerto Rico. I accepted Christ at 16 years of age. When I moved here for a short while I was in an independent church, but then I came back to the Assemblies of God”*. This statement provides the following insights: initial affiliation with the Assemblies of God, conversion at a formative age, experience with different church communities, return to original denomination, adaptability and exploration, and cultural in geographical transition. It reveals an upbringing rooted in the Assemblies of God denomination, marked by a significant conversion experience at 16 and characterised by adaptability and exploration of different church communities. This background suggests a blend of stability within their initial religious environment and openness to diverse faith experiences.

YPLM-23 *“I was born and raised in the church. I have uncles from my grandfather’s side that are ministers. I’ve always been close to leadership from my parents, etc... So, for me Pastoring or leadership wasn’t something so distant. During my upbringing I seen it as something close to me”*. This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: church involvement, family tradition of ministry, proximity to leadership, normalisation of leadership roles, influence of role models,

encouragement and support, and perception of leadership as achievable. It reveals an upbringing characterized by role models, support, and a sense of familiarity with leadership, fostering an environment where pursuing leadership roles within the church was seen as an attainable and natural.

YPLM-28 *“I was born in a Christian home. My mother’s uncle is a pastor. As well, as my father’s sister is a pastor. My parents were pastors in PR, and they came to Tampa, I went to a Christian school, so I was very knowledgeable, but I wasn’t prepared.”* This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: Christian family background, extended family in ministry, parents as pastors, religious education, knowledgeable but unprepared, cultural transition, and supportive religious environment. It reveals an upbringing embedded in Christian faith and ministry, with family involvement in church leadership and formal religious education. Despite being knowledgeable about faith, this young person felt unprepared, possibly due to a lack of practical experience or personal readiness.

YPLM-31 *“I grew up in church. My grandmother, she’s a pastor. So as a young person, I was very involved in church”.* This statement provides the following insights into early faith awareness: Church-centred upbringing, influence of a pastor grandparent, early involvement in church activities, role modelling and mentorship, intergenerational faith transmission, and supportive faith environment. The individual’s early and active involvement in church activities suggests a supportive and faith-oriented family environment that fostered a commitment to religious participation and spiritual development.

YPLM-3 *“I was first raised. I was baptised Catholic. I was presented as a Catholic in Puerto Rico”.* This statement provides the following insights into early faith

awareness: Catholic background, early religious rituals, cultural and geographic context, foundation in Catholicism. It reveals an upbringing rooted in the Catholic faith, with early involvement in significant religious rituals, such as baptism and presentation. The cultural context of Puerto Rico likely influenced the individual's, early religious experiences and connection to the Catholic community. This background provided a foundational understanding of Catholicism and its practices.

6.3.2 Learning the God Language

Listening to a young person articulate how they perceive the voice of God in different encounters suggests that they acquired this understanding within a specific setting. This environment might have been their upbringing in a Christian household or through the guidance of church leaders like pastors and ministers in the congregation. These expressions and modes of communication are ingrained within Pentecostal culture, where they are considered acceptable and commonplace. During interviews with candidates for ministry initiation, it is not unusual to hear accounts of how individuals experienced God's calling to embrace this new path in ministry.

6.3.2.1 Testimonials

The following segments are the testimonies supporting the call experience:

YPLM-2 claims a personal and gradual realisation of God's calling to ministry through the experiences within a leadership team. She notes that the leadership team began to listen to her for guidance and pastoral care, recognising her leadership qualities. The reference to a trying time indicates that the period was challenging, which often prompts individuals to seek deeper spiritual insight and understanding. She describes an internal experience, such as "feeling a call" and a "weight", which often describes those who believe they are being called by God to ministry. Also, the phrase, "the calling that God had already said, was mine", suggest a pre-existing sense of divine appointment.

This is her testimony: *“In the leadership team, they just gradually and naturally just looked to me for leadership and to be pastored by me. It was a very trying time but in those first six months which was our trial run, I really felt a call on and a weight on my heart to take the calling that God had already said was mine”*.

YPLM-24 asserts a clear and specific calling from God to a particular ministry focus. These are her words: “I know that I have been called to work with young people and young adults. I have been trying to prepare myself based upon that. Such as going to school, going to institute”. This suggests a sense of purpose and direction attributed to divine guidance. She demonstrates a commitment to her perceived calling by actively seeking education and training. This preparation indicates dedication and a proactive approach to fulfilling her divine calling. The actions taking are practical and rational steps for someone preparing for ministry work.

YPLM-25 recalls the year in the context of his calling. This recollection suggests that the event was significant and impactful, leaving a lasting impression. These are his words: *“I received my calling in 2006. In those times we would have youth convention before youth camp. Youth convention used to be in the spring. I felt a tugging of my heart that there was more to my life purpose. The fall of that year I went to Ignite¹⁷ I knew I could sense in my spirit that I was called to ministry”*. The fact that he identifies a specific year and context when he receives his calling, indicates a memorable and significant moment in his life, emphasising the importance of this event. The description of sensing in his spirit the certainty of knowing he was called to ministry emphasises the personal significance of the experience. This additional detail strengthens the overall

¹⁷ Ignite Ministry is a residential youth ministry where young people sign up for at least one of their time to full time ministry. This ministry was founded by Rev. Mark Vega and his wife Lisa. The ministry central location is in Gainesville Florida, USA.

narrative of a divine calling, characterized by clear, timing, context, and a spiritual conviction.

YPLM-28 describes a gradual, ongoing experience of feeling God's touch. This suggests a continuous and evolving interaction with God rather than a single isolated event. These are her words: *"Overtime I felt God touching my heart, but there was a fear and lack of knowledge and ability to pray and lead and preach"*. Not only does she express a gradual experience with God, but it also comes accompanied by personal struggles with fear and a lack of skills. This combination of divine calling and human vulnerability is a common narrative in spiritual journeys.

YPLM-1 States a progressive realisation and response to what he perceives as God's call. This ongoing process shows a deepening of their spiritual awareness and commitment. These are his words: *"Overtime God started tugging at my heart and I became part of the worship team I came here and God, had different plans My cousin who I was living with at the time introduced me to a church called [inaudible] Christian Church and I started going there and that's really where God encountered me, impacted me and changed my life"*. His testimony illustrates a gradual and evolving experience of divine calling, marked by active involvement in worship, and significant change in life direction, and transformative encounter with God at a new church.

YPLM-2's narrative adds context and situates the experience within a structured religious setting known for inspiring spiritual experiences. These are his words: *"So, at that youth camp, Reggie Dabbs preached, and they kept preaching this message of God only needs one person. And I remember looking around and thinking, all this is about me. I was like, God, if you're real, God, if you want something with me, just to show me. And I began to feel the presence of God"*. The statement illustrates a compelling narrative of hearing the call of God at a youth camp, inspired by a specific preacher's message.

The context, the impact of the message, and the experiential confirmation together support the individual's claim of hearing and responding to the call of God.

YPLM-3 sets the scene by mentioning his role and location, providing a professional context for the experience. These are his words: *"I was an academic advisor at the University of Central Florida, and I had a student who asked me this question, why are you running away from your call. I'll never forget this, and this is where you can call it the fear of the Lord; you can call it an Elijah moment, whatever the case may be, or a Pauline moment; So that is when I decided, okay, this God is calling me"*. The statements illustrate a powerful narrative of sensing or hearing the call of God within a professional and everyday context. The individual's description of the experience using biblical references underscores its significance and transformative impact. This narrative supports the claim of sensing or hearing the call of God through a combination of external prompting, deep internal reflection, and a decisive moment of acceptance.

6.3.3 Learning the Supernatural Experience

All the interviewees reported experiencing some form of spiritual or supernatural encounter during their conversions. These encounters instilled in them a sense of calling and commitment to God and ministry. Although an entire chapter is dedicated to reflecting on the experience of God's calling, which is the central focus of this research, their conversion stories are framed within a supernatural context. This means that if some believe their conversion to God was supernaturally led, it becomes easier to accept other manifestations or awareness of God's intervention, such as His calling to ministry.

YPLM-1 describes a narrative that is consistent with claims of supernatural experiences. He attributes his life change to a direct encounter with God, which occurred in the context of attending church. He states, *"My cousin who I was living with at the time introduced me to a church. I started attending there and that's really where God encountered me,*

impacted me and changed my life". Being introduced to a religious community can be a precursor to spiritual experiences, as it often involves exposure to new beliefs and practices. These communities frequently foster an environment where individuals are open to and seeking spiritual encounters.

YPLM-3's testimony reveals a journey from initial avoidance and lack of clarity to a recognition and acceptance of a supernatural calling. These are his words:

"I had a student who asked me this question, why are you running away from your call? I didn't have an answer to that obviously. And this is where you can call it the fear of the Lord; You can call it an Elijah moment, whatever the case may be, or a Pauline moment All I know is that God was speaking through this young lady and she said, you can run away from your calling, but your calling will always show. So that is when I decided, okay, this is God calling me, I should answer his call"

This narrative shows YPLM-3's awareness of the supernatural and deep connection to biblical stories. He uses biblical references to frame his experience, comparing it to significant moments of divine callings. His words indicate a belief in supernatural intervention and guidance.

YPLM-1's narrative illustrates a progression from engagement with a new spiritual community to a supernatural experience. *"My cousin who I was living with at the time introduced me to a Christian Church and I started going there and that's really where God encountered me, impacted me and changed my life"*. This was the first step in his learning process about the supernatural.

YPLM-6's statements reflect her journey toward an awareness of the supernatural, marked by key moments of divine intervention: *"I was not raised in Church; in my house everybody was for themselves. I have been exposed to a lot of things that kids are not supposed to be exposed. There were certain people that God would put, you know, along my way to, to gear me to His path; I knew that there was a bigger*

purpose for me, I heard this voice and that was my turning point, I said, you know what, I need to change". These statements reveal a journey from a challenging and spiritually disconnected upbringing to moments of divine intervention and realisation, culminating in a direct supernatural encounter that prompts personal transformation.

6.3.4 Prophetically Inspire

YPLM-21's statements reflect a struggle with a prophetically inspired moment, highlighting the tension between personal desires and perceived divine calling: "*I received a prophecy that I was not to go to law school outside of Florida and that I was called to be a pastor I have seen my parents be pastors and I know the toll that it takes so I never wanted to be a pastor. So, when I received that prophecy, I was very much against it*". This testimony reveals divine direction versus personal desires. Also, the resistance is informed by the individual's awareness of the demands and sacrifices associated with being a pastor, as observed in his parents' experience.

6.4 Indigenous Church Traditions

6.4.1 Church Ministry Engagement

Another key factor in the formation of this group of young people is their early involvement in church matters. It is uncommon to see young individuals, even in their teenage years, actively participating in leadership tasks within the church. This internal dynamic of ministerial practice helps develop character, passion, and love for people within the church context. Examining the active participation of young individuals in practical church activities can help us understand why they remain involved as they enter the ministry and become church leaders. Within our research cohort group, many young people have chosen to embrace ministry at an early age.

In “Souls in Transitions” Christian Smith explores the religious and spiritual journeys of individuals aged 18 to 23. The book examines the impact of life transitions on their faith, religious practices, beliefs, affiliations, and commitments. (Smith, 2009:3). Smith addresses several important questions relevant to this research, particularly: How important is religion for young people?

This question is significant within the scope of this research, as it explores the impact of social and cultural changes on the perspectives and priorities of the younger generation. One such priority is the decision by our cohort of YPLM to enter the ministry and embrace the credentialing process with the AOG at a young age. Understanding the role of religion in the lives of young individuals in a rapidly changing world is essential. Societal and cultural changes often challenge traditional beliefs and values, leading to shifts in priorities and perspectives among young people.

In this research, the significance of Smith’s book lies in his identification of factors that emerge during early stages and influence the development of the religious perspectives as young people grow older (Smith, 2007:4). The questions raised by Smith about these formative factors were used during the interviews conducted for this study. By incorporating these inquiries, the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how these specific factors contribute to the religious journeys and decisions of the YPLM.

Some of the pertinent issues raised in this research, in line with Smith’s view, include the level of religious engagement, belief in God, the significance of the Bible, the concept of life after death, and other factors used for measurement. These issues resonate with our cohort of YPLM as they wrestle with these questions.

However, Smith’s research, like other literature addressing issues faced by the younger generation, notably omits the “Latino factor” in his statistical analysis. It is

crucial to acknowledge and account for the social reality and experiences of the Latino population when generalising about young generations. Unfortunately, Smith's perspective seems to overlook this important aspect, potentially leading to incomplete or skewed conclusions.

The Latino community constitutes a significant and diverse demographic within the younger generation, and their unique cultural, historical, and social background plays a vital role in shaping their experiences and perspectives. By not incorporating this factor into his statistical research, Smith's findings may not fully capture the complexities and the nuances specific to this community.

Smith recognises the significance of religious social relationships in shaping the religious lives of Americans emerging adults. He emphasises the importance of religion, friendships, and group involvements as crucial aspects influencing the religious journeys of this demographic (2009:128). Smith's insights into the social influences on spirituality among millennials serve as a valuable foundation for our research, which explores how these influences similarly impact YPLM attitudes towards church leadership.

6.4.1.1 Testimonials Of Early Church Ministry Involvement

Early exposure to leadership roles offers young individuals with hands-on experience in managing responsibilities and making decisions. This mentorship helped YPLM-19 develop leadership skills, understand the nuances of ministry, and receive emotional and spiritual support. He expressed it this way: YPLM-19 *"I started leading the youth at age 17, I was under my youth pastor pretty much as his right hand and around 19 or 20 he stepped down from leadership and I took over. And then my pastor encouraged me to go get my credentials for the position that I was in"*. Transitioning into a leadership position at a young age demonstrates the trust and confidence the church community places in young ministers.

YPLM-20's testimony reveals the impact on young ministers through early church ministry involvement: *"I started at 18 years old, I accepted the lord at 18, and I immediately became a bible campus crusade for Christ, I became president of my ministry and began from there"*. Early church involvement has a significant positive impact on young ministers. It accelerates their spiritual maturation, builds confidence, and contributes to holistic development.

Early church ministry involvement is the testimony of YPLM-21 *"I had served, leading small groups and leading a dance team, I was always in leadership positions"*. This service shaped his interpersonal skills engaging with diverse group members. Being in charge of groups and activities instils a sense of responsibility and accountability. Often early church involvement leads to a deeper understanding of one's faith.

YPLM-22's testimony reveals the positive impact of early church ministry involvement. The pastor's direct approach demonstrates trust and confidence in the individuals' abilities. This impacts his perception of his own leadership potential. He said: *"Pastor Angel told me that the youth pastor was leaving, at the time and he asked me if I could help him fill that position. I said "ok"*. The urgency implied created opportunities for YPLM-22 to grow by serving.

YPLM-24's early church ministry involvement impacted her life in key areas: new challenges and opportunities and adaptability and flexibility. These are her words: *"I have been working with the youth for a couple of years in my church, and then I transitioned to working with young adults in 2006"*. The involvement in early church, ministry, transitioning from youth to young adult work, has a significant positive impact on YPLM-24's personal and spiritual growth and adaptability.

6.4.1.2 *Desire to Collaborate*

Nearly all participants in our cohort expressed a willingness and desire to collaborate and contribute to the Latino church. However, many felt excluded from the established religious structures. This issue highlights the differences between millennials and other generations, presenting two distinctive perspectives on collaboration.

First, communication between YPLM and other generations need to be understood for effective collaboration. YPLM-5 stated:

“Latino millennials love to be part of a group, they want their voices to be heard; they don’t want credit, positions, nor stage”.

Understanding how millennials interact with other generations and integrating them into existing environments, will require understanding, and compromise (Luttrell and McGrath, 2015: ix). For collaboration to be successful, leaders from different generations must acknowledge the differences between them. There seems to be a communication barrier between millennials and other generations leading to misunderstanding of intentions. YPLM- 5- also noted:

“Be more intentional with giving Millennials genuine contribution opportunities, places to share their voices, create a sense of value around their generation”.

This request could be misinterpreted by ecclesiastical authorities as a desire to take over or replace current leaders. Luttrell and McGrath address this issue, stating, “this generation is considered proactive in challenging the status quo as they work to become leaders themselves” (2015:40). This challenge in collaboration and understanding between generations could significantly impact young Latinos’ journey to becoming church leaders.

The second perspective on collaboration pertains to its definition. While YPLM are eager to collaborate and participate within organised structures, their concept of

collaboration differs. Luttrell and McGrath describe millennials' collaboration as being on a team, rather than working in a team. Working in a team means contributing as part of the whole, whereas working on a team involves being part of a larger group, each member with separate responsibilities (2015: 81-82). This approach acknowledges everyone's effort, regardless of the team's overall outcomes. This perspective aligns with some comments from our cohort. For instance, YPYM-5 remarked:

"Millennials are not concerned with painting the picture, instead they just want to put in the frame. Millennials want to be content creators, game changers. They will be engaged when there is a millennial congregation that speaks their language and models value their system. Millennials create networks organically; they talk to each other; they gather, and they share ideas and frustrations".

To speak their language and value their system likely means aligning with their definition of the social world.

YPLM-16 commented on the importance of having well-defined ministry concepts from leadership. He said:

"I believe sometimes with leadership though the blueprint per se isn't truly defined. So, if I invited you into my house, it's not simply just the invitation, but it's how to get there. I think that the youth are willing to do new things, the youth are hungry in this world, and that's why they are so connected to so many different things".

6.4.2 Facing Church and Faith Struggles

Formation experiences encompass more than just positive aspects and doctrinal or theological benefits. They also include controversies, faith crises, struggles with leadership, and various challenges within the church leadership formation process. These internal battles, along with other dynamics highlighted in the research data, have shaped and influenced church leadership among this group of young people.

The primary data reveals that some of the Young Latinos interviewed were conscious of living without meaning, and being rebellious, or simply not being interested in God.

6.4.2.1 Testimonials

YPLM-3 shares a personal journey of faith, including a period of doubt during college. This can be highly relatable to youth who are experiencing similar struggles, simultaneously; it also validates their feelings and showing that questioning is a part of the faith journey: *“I was baptised and then I, there was just a period in my life in college where I questioned, I questioned God’s existence. I questioned the veracity of scriptur; the truthfulness of the scripture, the historicity of the scripture because of my undergraduate degree. I’m a history major with a minor in psychology and political science”*. The honesty in the statement can inspire Youth to be genuine about their doubts, and seek answers, which can lead to a more resilient and informed faith.

YPLM-1’s testimony reveals the conflict between a strict religious upbringing, and a desire for independence and self-discovery. The struggle between parental influences and the development stage of adolescence further complicates their faith journey, leading to a period of questioning and exploration: *“Although I grew up in a Christian home, with the very strict mum, when I got to high school age, I wanted to just kind of do my own thing. At the age of 19, I decided to move to Florida where my dad lives, who doesn’t serve the Lord and isn’t as strict.”* This individual was seeking a more authentic and personal faith experience, different from the one imposed by their strict upbringing.

YPLM-29 mentions attending church when they were younger but never seeing what it looked like in daily life: *“I went to church when I was younger, but I never saw what that looked like in my daily life, serving God and seeing people my age living*

righteously outside of whatever church meeting we had on campus”. This suggests a struggle with understanding how faith should influence everyday actions and decisions. This lack of practical application of faith in daily life can lead youth to a feeling of disconnection and questioning the relevance of church teachings.

YPLM-1’s statements reveal a common feeling during late adolescence and early adulthood when individuals seek to establish their own identities separate from parental or institutional influences: *“I wanted to just kind of do my own thing at the age of 19. I decided to move to Florida where my dad lives, who doesn’t serve the Lord and isn’t as strict. So, I figured I can, uh, just kind of live my life, do what I want to do better”*. This period of exploration can lead to both challenges and opportunities in terms of faith development, as he navigates the balance between personal autonomy and spiritual beliefs.

6.4.3 Church Challenges

Part of the data from this research will highlight the frustrations and struggles of a group of young people with their respective congregations and denominations. These struggles include generational clashes and a lack of clear and defined communication. Additionally, concerns about the character of leaders in higher positions are evident. Despite these conflicts, the group remained steadfast in their pursuit of church leadership, embracing the journey towards ordination within the Assemblies of God. For instance, YPLM-5 testified: *“I’ve recently been struggling a lot. I’m seeing certain things within millennial Christian, particularly Latino leadership that are scary for me. People losing interest in ministry due of frustrations with the church; frustrations with our models of ministry, people holding on to hope, but feeling like there’s not a lot of hope in front of us; when we talk about youth ministry in middle school and high school, there are no more millennials”*. This testimony reveals that many millennial leaders are losing interest

in ministry due to frustrations with the church and its models of ministry. This disillusionment can lead to burnout and a decline in active participation in church leadership.

When contextualising the leadership formation of these young people within the Hispanic reality in the United States, additional struggles affecting the youth directly and indirectly become apparent. Daniel Rodríguez, in his book, “A Future of the Latino Church”, addresses some of the crises faced by the Hispanic church in the United States that impact the formative awareness of church leaders.

Rodríguez draws parallels between the biblical narratives of the Israelites’ bondage in Egypt and the experiences of Hellenist Jews depicted in the book of Acts, using them as a framework for comparison with the Latino population in the United States. He argues that Latinos face neglect and disregard not only from the political realm but also within Latino churches themselves, which tend to uphold the cultural norms of the first generation (Rodríguez, 2011:34).

One significant obstacle hindering the development of church leaders among young people is the gap between young individuals and well-established church institutions. This problem of feeling unnoticed and disregarded, even within the Latino church community, is backed by first-hand accounts gathered from interviews with key individuals. Several factors contribute to this struggle.

Firstly, a key challenge in church leadership development among young people is the mismatch between the traditional structures and practices of many religious organisations and the preferences of the younger generation. Young leaders often bring fresh ideas and a desire for more dynamic and relevant approaches to ministry. However, they may face resistance from established institutions rooted in long-standing traditions.

YPLM-2 reflects one of these struggles: *“I didn’t want to be rebellious or deny that this really wasn’t the ideal thing for me. I struggled a lot with it because I don’t like systems so much because they’ve disappointed me.* This statement expresses a clear discomfort with systems and organisations due to past disappointments. This discomfort can create a significant barrier to embracing and working within the structure environment often found in church leadership roles.

Secondly, the priorities and values of young church leaders may differ from those of older generations within these organisations. Primary data indicates that young leaders place greater importance on social justice, inclusivity, environmental stewardship, and community engagement. They seek to address contemporary issues in more direct and proactive ways which can clash with the more conservative or cautious approaches of some religious institutions. YPLM-5 expresses his frustrations: *“I’m trying to figure out my place as a millennial within the Latino church, within the A/G; That is the struggle. The tension that I’m living within; I think millennial Latinos are feeling that they don’t have a place to go, but if they are within the Latino church, they lose their opportunity to serve and contribute in meaningful ways to have their voices heard”.*

The third factor contributing to the disconnect is the communication gap between younger generations and established organisations. Despite these differences, research indicates that the members of YPLM have found meaningful partnership roles within our fellowship. This research aims to address and bridge this gap to foster a more cohesive environment and collaboration between younger generations and religious institutions.

An important obstacle in church leadership development is the issue of training for church leaders, as discussed by Daniel Rodríguez in his chapter "The Local Church as Organic Seminary." Rodríguez argues that traditional Bible colleges, Christian universities, and seminaries may not adequately address the challenges faced by at-risk

urban communities in the United States, such as poverty, underfunded schools, unsafe environments, high dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, crime, gang-infested neighbourhoods, broken families, and hopelessness (2011:126).

The representation of Latinos in U.S. Theological seminaries is alarmingly low, comprising less than 1% of the student population. In response to this concern, Rodriguez proposes utilising the local church as a seminary. He suggests that candidates can acquire the necessary competencies for leadership roles at the grassroots level, bypassing the traditional two to seven years of seminary training (2011:126).

While Rodriguez acknowledges and discusses the broader social challenges faced by Latinos and their impact on the Latino church, he does not explicitly link these challenges to the attitudes and decisions of young Latinos concerning leadership development within the church. In other words, although he addresses the larger issues surrounding the Latino community, he does not directly explore how these factors specifically influence the decisions and attitudes of young Latinos when it comes to seeking leadership roles within their own churches.

Another important aspect of this research, which Rodriguez does include in his presentation is the difference between Latinos born in the U.S. and those born in Latin America. Foreign-born Latinos, like immigrants in general, tend to marry within their ethnic or racial groups (2011: 83). This is not the case with Latinos born in the United States. Thirty-two percent of second-generation and fifty-seven percent of third-plus generation Latinos marry outside of their ethnic or racial group (2011:83). If this trend continues, it will have an immediate impact on the Latino church that only caters to first-generation groups. It would be interesting to know if these differences between the two Latino groups go beyond the family scenario and influence aspirations towards ecclesiastical leadership within the Latino church.

6.4.3.1 Disconnect and Disaffiliation

The theme of religious disconnects and disaffiliation among Latino/a younger generations was evident from both primary and secondary sources. Several reasons were shared by the cohort, highlighting how these feelings impact their religious views and faith. The gap between younger generations and church denominations continues to widen.

Religious apathy and disaffiliation attitudes significantly affect YPLM's perspective towards church leadership. As these feelings increase, the desire to become church ministers diminishes. One contributing factor is the sense of not being accepted by the Latino church. The younger generation feels that the church does not understand them, viewing this as a challenge. Cohort members expressed that the church should be creating attractive environments where younger Latinos feel accepted and have opportunities to develop their leadership skills. When asked about working with the Latino church in its current state, one participant, YPLM-3, responded, *"Probably not, because of the restrictions, regulations, legality, legalism, all these types of things that I grew up with personally. But if we're talking about ministry, like for example, Elevation Church or Craig Groeschel; maybe, maybe"*.

Daniel Rodriguez questions why many Hispanic church leaders resist changes that have proven to help other churches grow significantly without compromising the gospel (2011:150). Cultural and theological resistance play major roles in the disconnect between YPLM and the Latino church. One persistent hurdle is the opposition among some church groups to expanding programmes and services in English to better serve the second and third generation. Instead, they choose to accommodate the first generation and those native-born Latinos. Many church leaders believe incorporating English

language programmes and ministries would undermine the efforts, values, and language practices of the immigrant generation (Maldonado, 1999:223).

Another contributing factor to the disconnect is a faith crisis among young Latinos. Questions and doubts about their religious upbringing could be causing this disconnect, affecting their attitudes towards ecclesiastical leadership. A “Faith in Flux” survey found that more than seven-in-ten former Catholics and Protestants who are now unaffiliated gradually drifted away from the faith (2011). Some cohort members had similar experiences. For example, YPLM-2 said,

I grew up knowing about Jesus and about the church and how it worked. I saw my parents argue and in discussions. I saw them like not being good examples to me. So, I kind of just left my relationship with Jesus, I’m always kind of been independent because that trust was kind of damaged. So I was like, I can’t really trust you”.

YPLM-3 shared:

I’m a history major with a minor in psychology and political science. There was just a period in my life in college where I questioned, I questioned God’s existence. I questioned the veracity of scripture, the truthfulness of the scripture, the ‘historicity of the scripture because of my undergraduate degree.

The faith crisis undeniably affects YPLM’s desire to pursue church leadership. There appears to be a lack of forums for the younger generation to discuss questions of faith, the Bible and theology. Historically, the Latino church offered Sunday schools as a teaching platform, but this is no longer common.

One participant suggested that *religion is part of the values inherited from parents*. YPLM-1 noted, that young people question their parents’ ideals and parents were more committed to institutions for longer periods:

“Young people question the ideals of their parents. Parents committed to institutions for longer periods of time”

The Latino population in the U.S. is highly religious, with approximately 80% identifying as Christians (Pew Research Centre 2014). As of 2016, there were 57.5 million Hispanics in the U.S. with 55% identifying as Catholics, 22% as Protestants, 18% as unaffiliated and 5% as other religions (Pew, 2014).

Within these numbers, 28% of Latino Millennials are less religious than older U.S. Latinos, similar to their American counterparts at 31% (Martinez and Lipka 2014). About 31% attend religious services weekly, compared to 59% of Latinos overall. There is a 13-point gap between Latinos Millennials and Latinos overall regarding how many say religion is “very important” in their lives (47% vs. 60%).

When asked what religious organisations can do attract and improve relations with younger generations cohort participants had several suggestions. YPLM-1 said, *opportunities must be given; they want a space at the table; they want a say and for their opinions to matter*. YPLM-2 noted, *one thing is what the organisation does at the district level and another is what happens at local church levels; my local church routine today is boring*. YPLM-6 mentioned, *they give the opportunity as long as*

you’re proving yourself. There are a lot of old people. YPLM-5 said, *“there could be millennial’s attendance but not necessarily millennial’s engagement”*.

Regarding the desirability of ministry and the prospect of full-time ministry in their future, opinions were not optimistic. YPLM- 3 said, *“Depends on how you define ministry if it means what Pentecostals did back in the day, probably not. The word ‘pastor’ has a scary connotation*. YPLM-5 noted, *“what is taking place in Latino churches doesn’t connect to millennials’ cultural reality. Millennials don’t stick around long enough to see change happens because they feel there is no opportunity to bring change. Millennials will create their own reality if they don’t see change. Different from the older generation’s definition*. YPLM-6 added, *“now is different. You have to start*

from scratch. There's no financial stability. People have to make a living. Ministry is not paying as much". YPLM-5 concluded, "Everything is being questioned from the way people do church and missions".

6.4.3.2 Testimonials /Frustrations with Church Leadership

Some young people's mistrust of church leaders stems from their observations of parental conflicts and perceived failures. Early experiences with authority figures at home shape their attitudes towards authority figures in other settings, including the church. YPLM-2 exemplifies this sentiment, stating, *"I think I saw a lot of my parents' failures and that's why I kind of mistrusted leadership. I mistrusted authority because I saw my parents arguing. I saw them not being good examples to me".*

6.4.3.3 Unfamiliarity with Credentialing Process

One of the claims this research makes is that knowledge on ecclesiastical processes influenced the research's cohort YPLM decisions regarding church leadership. When members of this cohort were asked about their peers' awareness of the credentialing process, YPLM-3 stated, *"I would say that they don't know that there is a process. They didn't even know that there was an application process or a candidacy process. They don't know anything".*

When asked if a credential validates leadership, YPLM-8 responded, *I validate leadership as one who supervises, loves serving people, the person who can guide you through many things, with organisational skills that correct with grace.* Several YPLM members, when asked how many young people they knew were applying to become church ministers, echoed similar sentiments. YPLM- 3- said, *"Some have no knowledge that there is an ecclesiastical leadership process; the requirements of the application process are complicated; the information required to be written on a piece of paper is very sensitive especially in the social media world we live in".*

When asked if they heard their peers talking about ministerial credentials¹⁸, YPLM-7 responded, *“I don’t think so. I don’t hear it too often, only a handful. I don’t hear that talk”*.

Participants desiring ordination must adhere to social processes such as adopting norms, values, behaviours and social skills appropriate for church leadership. They will also make decisions based on whether they feel it is beneficial for them and will help them relate to people who are important to them (Maio & Haddock, 2015:82). YPLM- 1 – said, *“Today everything is motivated by why is this important? What effect does this have? What are the benefits for me and others?”*. YPLM-3 mentioned historical churches improving in attracting young people to their ministerial ranks. He said, *“The United Methodist church has more young people applying daily because their process is clear, concise and includes internship and apprenticeship. They’re not using 18th century language”*.

YPLM- 2 said, *“I received my credentials out of obedience, but I didn’t know if I wanted credentials. I don’t like systems and organisations that much because they have disappointed me. I like more freedom and spontaneity”*. When asked if a credential validates leadership, YPLM-2 answered, *“it does in the eyes of the world; I think I could be a leader without them. I felt like the leader before getting them; credentials for me are being part of something bigger than me and submitting to it”*. Regarding the opinion of her peers about her credentials, she said, *“It’s negative, they don’t see the value of it; they ask me, ‘why you need one?’ We are a generation that wants to be so out of the box, and we are not going to follow what you did. Others say that is good for you but not for me; it’s not something that is praised or celebrated”*. YPLM-3 also highlighted

¹⁸ Credentials is the official certificate given to those ministers who comply with the requirements established by the Constitution and By-Laws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

financial and procedural concerns, saying, “*first the financial aspect; then the application process was fear-driven*”.

6.5 Indigenous Social Struggles

The findings from this research revealed that, in addition to the influences shaping the personalities of these young individuals towards assuming roles as church leaders and pursuing ministerial positions within the Assemblies of God, they also expressed their struggles and discontentment with societal matters.

6.5.1 Struggles With Life Issues

There is an apparent gap in the church’s approach to guiding young people through real-life challenges. By not addressing these issues openly, the church may inadvertently leave young individuals without the necessary support and guidance. YPLM-2 mentions feeling guilty about her struggle, even though she was not rebellious or defiant towards her faith. She expressed, “*I did struggle with pornography when I was little, like 12, 13, 14, in middle school, years six and seven, because that was never something that was clear in the church. That was never something that it was the deeper questions that I had. Nobody sat with me about them. So I kind of just deviated, but it was never, it was a painful struggle because I was never a rebellious with it. I was never like, oh, forget God. I always felt guilty*”. This guilt indicates an internal conflict where she was trying to reconcile her actions with her religious beliefs.

6.5.2 Generational Shift

Howe and Strauss, in the last sections of their book *Millennials Rising*, introduce a timetable on the future of millennials (2000: 307-324). They take the reader through a futuristic panorama of the journey millennials will undergo from their teen years to when they reach 60 years of age, highlighting the impact they will have on American society. Since this research study focuses on YPLM under the age of forty, some of their

predictions are relevant to our study. Although the authors do not single out any specific ethnic group and their statistics are generalisations, which this researcher disagree with, some of their predictions hold true among our Latino cohort. Taking their premise at face value, this is how they see millennials, such as our cohort of YPLM, when they reach the age of forty:

They predict millennials will dominate the teaching professions early in the decade and school boards and juries late in the decade. Little social argument will be tolerated. By 2025, millennials will comprise roughly 20 percent of national leaders. They will be at their peak of cultural influence, as producers, writers, and performers of the pop-culture for their successors in youth. The “browning of America” (ethnic diversity) will be accepted as fact. In the workplace, they will add stress-reducing structures, even at the cost of innovation. They will start shaping a new child generation and correct what they consider the boomers’ stress-inducing parenting “mistakes”, by imposing less structure and allowing more freedom (307-324).

Some of Howe and Strauss’s predictions on millennials, written twenty years, have become a reality today. Our cohort of YPLM is proof of that. The primary data reflects that they are more open to ideas and practices that older church leaders would never have accepted. A particular concern surfaced in our primary data regarding the place YPLM will have in the church. Howe and Strauss stated that the way young people do and think about things today differs from older generations in many areas, such as attitudes towards family, careers, risk, romance, politics, and religion, together with their behavioural tendencies like job choice, test scores, health, risk, crime, sex, and drugs (Howe and Strauss, 2000:43). One of our interviewees (YPLM-1) said regarding this topic:

“Cultural demands are different now. You see more delayed commitments and decisions; moving from parents’ home, getting married; they are still figuring out their life”

Understanding the attitudes of our YPLM is challenging but worthwhile. Finding YPLM today pursuing church leadership and embracing ordination process amidst this generational shift, where doing and thinking is different, is just amazing.

Another idea emerged in one of our interviews and is mentioned in the literature is the willingness of these young people to improve, add to, and make institutions better. For example, some cohort members suggested that the titles and positions in the church needed to be reviewed. One member (YPLM-3) noted, we’re *seeing a shift in the word “pastor” by the new churches that are being established today*. According to Howe and Strauss, millennials are not in a mission to tear down old institutions that don’t work but to build new ones that do (Howe and Strauss, 2000:7).

Another comment made by YPLM-3 regarding changes that can improve the church in the eyes of the younger generation was on words and vocabulary used by church leaders. He said:

“We’re seeing that with church names. A shift in vocabulary. Also, a definition of how to serve God using your gifts and talents in whichever way God has created you to be. That’s what I think ministry should be defined as. Not necessarily with the ecumenical traditional. And I’m not saying to cut away the tradition, but how do we explain tradition using millennial language? So, for example, instead of a ministry like a minister, people are saying small groups. Small groups are probably the new buzzword for ministry because small groups can be anything like meeting in a house, meeting at a coffee shop or going into a prison or you name it”.

The generational shift described by both primary and secondary sources can positively contribute to the future of the Latino church and churches in general. There is a need for a leadership transition on the part of denominational leaders to give space to a new generation of leaders that are ready, educated, and patiently waiting to participate in

the future of the church. The problem with those in ecclesiastical positions who are in their sixties, seventies, and older is that they are often immovable. Unless there is a voluntary spirit of yielding for the sake of the future generation, religious organizations will continue to decrease in influence. Denominations have articulated rules in their constitution and bylaws that make it difficult for a generational shift. It's not exclusion we are suggesting but creating space where all generations can work together for the future of the church.

6.5.3 Identity Crisis

Growing up Latino in the U.S., especially during adolescent years is a difficult and complicated experience for many. Latino Millennials face the pressure of forging an identity in a context that has been racially and culturally conflicting, (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997: 114). The term "identity" is complex, as race and ethnicity are social constructs. An individual's racial or ethnic category is not based on biology, but rather on the intersection of individual social identity and the very structure of society (Mulder, Ramos & Marti, 2017:61). Latinos are more likely to identify with their ethnic identity more readily in later generations (Telles & Ortiz, 2008:236).

Since the ethnic-racial dynamics in Latino Protestant churches remain unresolved, it is no surprise that the younger generation struggles with their Latino identity. For decades, being Latino was synonymous with being Catholic. Today, Latino Protestant congregations struggle as they forge their own identity.

One factor that adds to the crisis is the language barrier. A majority (52%) of the nation's 16 million Latino children are now "second generation", meaning they are the U.S.-born sons and daughters of at least one foreign-born parent, typically someone who came to this country as an immigrant (Fry & Passel, 2009). This also means that 48% of them (about 7 million) were born in Latin America. For that 48% born in Latin America,

the language challenge is significant. From the moment immigrants decide to move to a new country, it often takes 8-10 years to master a second language and a new culture. (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, Gallardo- Cooper, 2002).

The struggle of identity surfaced in interviews with primary sources when asked how they view the Latino church. There is an internal crisis among young Latinos as they leave the Latino church and settle for an Anglo-American church, mainly due to language but also for other reasons as well. When asked about the concerns YPLM leaders have, YPLM-5 responded:

“They are losing interest in ministry and hope in the church. They don’t have a place to go. They are frustrated with the Latino church. Then they leave for the American churches. While there they experience an identity crisis. They don’t fit and they don’t belong. They miss aspects of Latino culture. They feel like they always have to make a negotiation where they are. They are always at a place of loss, regardless of where they go. If they go to the American church, they lose cultural identity; if they go to the Latino church, they lose the opportunity to serve and contribute in meaningful ways”.

These statements reflect the struggle to fit in and feel a sense of belonging, as these churches may not fully embrace or understand Latino cultural nuances. This alienation can lead to a weakened sense of identity and community, making it difficult for them to find their place and voice in church leadership.

6.5.4 Concerned with the Next Generation

Members of the research cohort shared their concern about engaging with and ministering to their peers (Millennials) and the subsequent generation (Gen Z). There is a need to make the church culturally relevant to younger generations. This includes integrating aspects of Latino culture and addressing the unique social, economic and spiritual challenges that millennials and Gen Z face. This was YPLM-5’s expressions on this matter: *“I’m concerned about my millennial peers and Gen z, the generation that’s coming after me and how we’re ministering to them”*. The concern of young Latino

church leaders about ministering to Millennials and Gen Z is important for the church's future.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, significant factors rooted within the Pentecostal community were uncovered. These factors play pivotal roles in shaping character, providing a language to articulate experiences with God, and offering an understanding of religious principles YPLM with aspirations for leadership within the church. The chapter delves into the influence of various elements such as denomination, familial upbringing, active participation in church activities, and the broader societal context. Each of these factors uniquely contributes to the development and preparation of emerging leaders within the Pentecostal tradition.

This chapter explores the relationship between age and the involvement of young people in the church experience, specifically focusing on the research cohort members of YPLM. It provides a historical overview of the denomination to which they belong, highlighting the development of the credentialing process relevant to their membership.

A brief review of Swinton and Mowatt's book posits that practical theology involves God's actions in the world alongside the actions of the church. The practical pastoral theology guiding this cohort and the Pentecostal community emphasise the experience of a God who speaks and manifests Himself with believers interpreting, and assimilating manifestations.

Additionally, the chapter considers factors emerging during the youth stage of the cohort as they define their calling to church leadership. It examines the challenges this group faces in their faith journey, referencing Daniel Rodríguez's "The Future of the Latino Church," and "After the Baby Boomers," which describes youth faith formation processes.

The chapter concludes with testimonies from cohort members, revealing stages in the formation of church leaders. Influential factors mentioned include growing up in a Christian home, experiencing conversion, early involvement in the church, and in some cases, receiving an inspiring prophetic word. However, these young individuals also experienced frustration with church leadership, intimate life struggles, conflicts of faith, concerns about newer generations, and shared experiences of God's calling.

In summary, the chapter demonstrates that the young people in this research are shaping their capacity for church leadership, influenced by a variety of factors such as church traditions, adopted theologies, growth experiences, personal struggles, and encounters with God. These influences manifest in diverse forms and are understood and assimilated by them.

CHAPTER 7.

LEADERSHIP CONVERSION AND LATINO/A SOCIAL REALITIES

7.1 U.S. Latino Realities

Up to this point, several aspects influencing the conversion experience of the cohort of young people have been considered. First, the spiritual experience with the Holy Spirit and the call of God. Second, the theological formation, and the ethos of the Pentecostal community to which they belong. Third, in the last chapter, the inherent factors acquired through experiences within the Church community were examined.

This chapter describes and analyses the social impact on the Latino population in the United States. While not all the social indicators in this section directly impact the cohort, the focus is on illustrating that despite the challenges faced by Latino groups, they consistently report experiencing and responding to a calling from God. The social context surrounding young Latino/a individuals significantly informs this research, providing a backdrop to their experiences and spiritual journeys.

Additionally, this chapter offers an overview of the general social context of Latinos in the United States, highlighting the lived experiences and realities faced by our cohort of YPLM. It begins with general statistics about the Latino population, followed by social statistics specific to young Millennials within this group. The final portion presents data related to youth within the FMD.

The continuous growth of the Latino/a population has significantly impacted the FMD of the Assemblies of God (AOG), by bringing more young individuals into this community. According to a study by Antonio Flores at the Pew Research Centre, the Latino population reached nearly 58 million in 2016, making it the primary driver of U.S demographic growth since 2000 (Flores, 2017). While the growth rate has slowed in

recent years, Latinos still constitute 18% of the nation's total population, making them the second-largest racial or ethnic group after whites (2017).

In 1970, the Latino population was 9.6 million, which increased by 51% to 14.5 million within a decade. The growth trend continued from 1980 to 1990, reaching 22.6 million with a 51% increase. By 2000, the Latino population experienced a 57% growth, reaching 35.7 million. From 2000 to 2010, the total Latino population increased to 50.8 million representing a 42% growth rate. By 2016, the population reached 57.5 million with a 16% growth rate, marking the lowest growth percentage observed in the last forty years (40) years (See FIGURE 2).

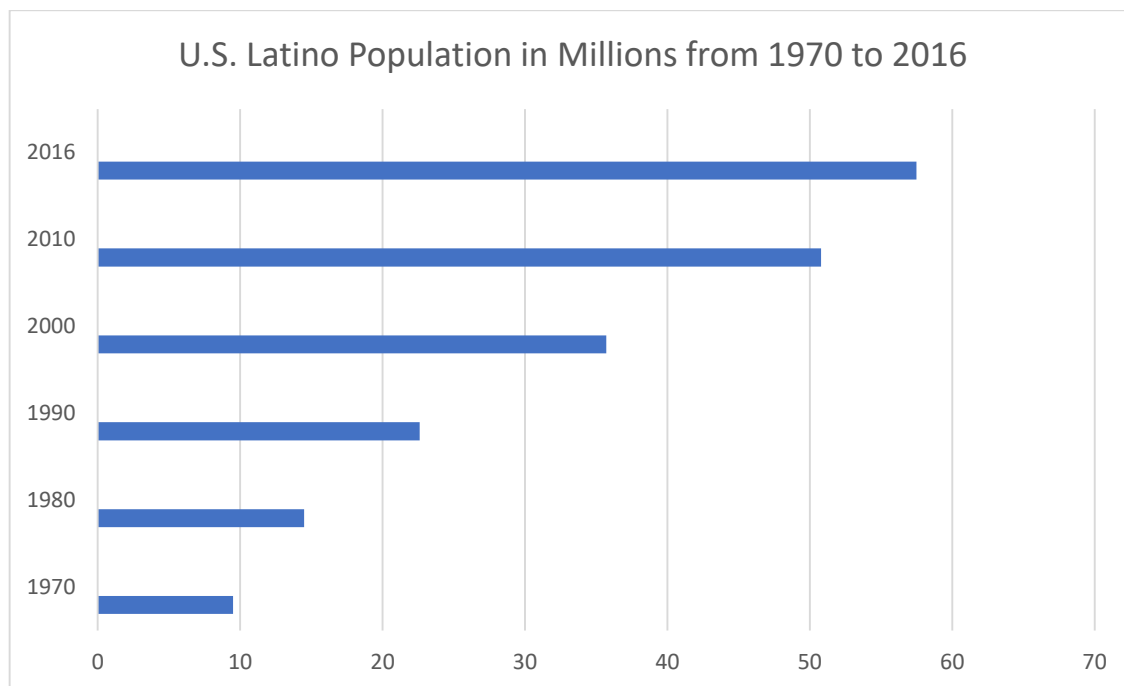


Figure 2. U.S. Latino Population in Millions from 1970 to 2016

The decrease in growth can be attributed to the stricter implementation of immigration laws, which has made it harder for immigrants to enter the United States. Additionally, a substantial number of individuals have been leaving the country (Flores,

2017). Furthermore, eight states - California, Texas, Florida, Arizona, New Mexico, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois- collectively hold 74% of the nation's Latino population (Brown & Lopez, 2013).

7.2 Age

Latinos/as constitute the youngest demographic among the largest racial and ethnic groups in the United States. According to a 2016 report by Pew, in 2015, Latinos/as had a median age of 28, which had increased from 25 in 2000. In contrast, Whites had the highest median age at 43 in 2015, followed by Asians at 36 and Blacks at 34.

The median age of the YPLM research cohort being 30 years of age¹⁹ is a significant factor that shapes the dynamics and characteristics of this group. Individuals at this age are typically in the early to mid-stages of their professional careers and are more connected to current trends. They tend to be tech-savvy and adept at integrating new technologies into their careers. Many individuals at 30 are either engaged in higher education or completing degrees.

The Pew report highlights a significant trend of rising college enrolment among Hispanics. In 2015, nearly 40% of Hispanics aged 25 and older had some college experience, a notable increase from 30% in 2000. Among U.S.-born Hispanics, 52% reported attending college, up from 41% in 2000. In contrast 27% of foreign-born Hispanics reported having some college experience, an increase from 22% in 2000.

7.2.1 Latinos/As Religious Affiliation

As of July 1, 2016, data from the Pew Research Centre indicates that there were 57.5 million Hispanics residing in the United States. Within this population, 55%

¹⁹ See Table 1 for age comparison – P.77

identified as Catholics, while 22% identified as Protestants, totalling approximately 12.7 million individuals (refer to table 5).

From the 30 cohort members, 2 came from a Catholic background.

YPLM-11 – *“My parents are originally from Brazil. They came here as immigrants. We were from a Catholic background, we were Catholic. At 10 years old, my family decide to follow Christ and we got baptized as a family and we began serving the Lord together”.*

YPLM-15 – *“My home was not Christian, but my grandparents were Catholic”*
(Translated from Spanish).

Table 4. Hispanics Protestants Overview

Hispanics	57,500,000
Hispanic Protestants	12,650,000
Hispanic Evangelicals	9,200,000*
Pentecostals	3,500,000
Assemblies of God	800,000
Spanish A/G churches	400,000

Hispanics constituted 17.8% of the country’s total population (Pew, 2016). Approximately 80% of Latinos identify as Christians, encompassing various Christian denominations such as Roman Catholic, born-again Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, or other Christian affiliations (Pew Research Centre, 2014; see TABLE 5).

Table 5. Religious Affiliation (Percentage)

Religious Affiliation	Hispanics
Catholic	55
Protestant	22
Evangelical	16*
Mainline	5
Historically Black	
Other Christian	3
Other faiths	1
Unaffiliated	18
Don't know	2

TABLE 5 presents a breakdown of Protestantism within the Hispanic population in the United States. Specifically, 22% of Hispanics identify as Protestants, accounting for 12.6 million individuals. Among these Protestants, 16% are Evangelicals, which translates to approximately 9 million individuals. Additionally, 29% of Protestants are Pentecostals totalling 3.6 million. Currently, 80% of Latino Protestants attend an Evangelical, Pentecostal, or charismatic denominational church (Espinoza, 2014). Internal research from the AOG suggests that there are over 1 million Latinos who identify with this denomination across the United States (Espinoza, 2014).

Moreover, it is observed that seven out of ten Hispanic Protestants are Evangelicals, while four out of ten Hispanic Evangelicals are Pentecostals, and one out of three Hispanic Evangelicals specifically identify as Pentecostals.

Despite the positive demographic changes favouring Latinos in the U.S., there is a noticeable decrease in the interest among young Latinos, especially those under the age

of 40, in pursuing formal religious training. Latino students make up only 5.7% of the student body, and Latino faculty members represent just 3.9% of the faculty at institutions accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States (Hernandez, Peña, Sotelo, Salazar, 2016).

7.3 Millennials' Reality

The YPLM cohort is uniquely influenced by additional social factors compared to the broader U.S. Millennial population. To enhance research and understanding, it is important to examine these specific areas. By exploring the factors that affect Millennials in general, a more holistic perspective can be gained, enriching the comprehension of the unique characteristics of our Latino cohort.

According to Pew Research Centre data from 2017, Millennials were the largest living generation in the U.S. in 2016, with 79.8 million individuals. This generation is notable for its size, higher economic well-being, increased educational attainment, and greater ethnic diversity compared to previous generations (Howe and Strauss, 2000:4). They also have a progressive political leaning, as evidenced by their support for Barack Obama in 2008 election, and exhibit the lowest level of religious observance among youth since 2009 (Keeter and Taylor, 2009).

Young Americans aged 18 to 29 demonstrate a lower level of religiosity compared to older generations. Despite this decline, Millennials still uphold traditional beliefs and engage in religious practices in specific domains. According to the Pew Research Centre, the beliefs of young adults concerning life after death, the existence of heaven, hell, and miracles closely resemble the beliefs of older individuals. (Pew Research Centre, February 17, 2010). It is challenging to encapsulate Millennials within a strict religious framework, their beliefs and practices are influenced by a variety of

social factors. There is no one-size-fits-all religious pattern that applies to everyone in this generation.

7.3.1 Millennials' Religion Affiliation

Young adults in contemporary society are less inclined to associate with any religious faith in comparison to previous generations. Approximately 25% of individuals under the age of 30 self-identify as unaffiliated, categorising themselves as “atheist”, “agnostic” or having no specific religious affiliation. This trend is reflected in the experiences of individuals like YPLM-3, who expressed: “*There was just a period in my life in college where I questioned, I questioned God's existence. I questioned the veracity of scripture, the truthfulness of the scripture, the historicity of the scripture*”. This highlights a broader trend of religious questioning and scepticism among young adults, particularly during formative years such as college, where exposure to diverse perspectives and critical thinking often leads to re-evaluation of previously held beliefs.

In contrast, roughly two-thirds (68%) of young adults still perceive themselves as adherents of a Christian denomination, with 43% specifically identifying as Protestants. Comparatively, among adults aged 30 and older, 81% align themselves with the Christian faith, and 53% identify as Protestants (Pew 2010).

7.3.2 Worship Attendance

The Pew Forum's 2007 religious landscape survey revealed that young adults exhibit less frequent attendance at religious services compared to older individuals. According to the survey findings, one third of individuals under the age of 30 reported attending worship services at least once a week, whereas 41% of adults aged 30 and above attend religious services with the same frequency. Notably, more than half of individuals aged 65 and older attended worship services at least once a week. For further insights consult TABLE 6.

Table 6. Religious Attendance

Religious Attendance		
	Attend services at least weekly	<u>N</u>
	%	
Total Population	39	35,556
Ages 18-29	33	4,242
Ages 30+	41	30,453
Ages 30-49	36	11,823
Ages 50-64	40	10,484
Ages 65+	53	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	46	30,236
Ages 18-29	43	3,163
Ages 30+	47	26,360
Unaffiliated	5	5,048
Ages 18-29	5	1,034
Ages 30+	5	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	58	9,472
Ages 18-29	55	929
Ages 30+	59	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	35	7,470
Ages 18-29	33	528
Ages 30+	35	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	59	1,995
Ages 18-29	55	356
Ages 30+	60	1,586
Catholic	41	8,054
Ages 18-29	34	926
Ages 30+	43	6,930
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life		
Question wording: Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services...more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?		

7.3.3 Religious Attitudes

The Pew Forum's 2007 findings highlight key differences in religious involvement between young adults and older generations. Less than half (45%) of adults under the age of 30 consider religion very important, compared to 54% of those aged 30-49, 59% of those aged 50-64, and 69% of those among those 65 and older.

Approximately 64% of young adults are certain of God's existence, while 73% of those aged 30 and older share this certainty. Less than half (47%) of young evangelicals interpret the Bible literally, compared to 61% of evangelicals aged 30 and older.

Both groups hold similar beliefs in concepts such as life after death (75% vs. 74%), heaven (74% each), hell (62% vs. 59%), and miracles (78% vs. 79%). Interestingly, more young Americans view their faith as the sole path to salvation compared to older Americans. However, young adults are also more open to multiple interpretations of their religion. Approximately 74% of affiliated young adults believe there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their faith, compared to 67% of affiliated adults aged 30 and older.

Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials exhibit additional religious attitudes. YPLM-28 highlights the disconnection in age groups: *“I’ve noticed that lately in FMD, a lot of the young adults have fallen out. In the 20’s age group, there’s been a disconnect. That’s a crucial age group. The college age group where you can easily lose them from the church”*.

YPLM-1 points out that many young adults are experiencing significant milestone later in life and are questioning the ideals of their parents. This period of self-discovery and figuring out life goals often leads to changes in religious attitudes. He said: *“So I think really from my culture or my age group, it's more about everything being done later and really questioning, the ideals of your parents and kind of what they lived. So I think for a lot of people my age, they're in their twenties are still trying to kind of figure out their life, forgot what they want to do with their life, and that changes a lot depending on the age and where you surround yourself around”*.

YPLM-3 emphasises the need for mentoring among this generation. While they have access to vast amounts of information through the internet, they often lack context

and guidance, leading to misinformation and a need for mentors to help navigate their spiritual journeys. He said: *“This is a generation that needs mentors. We have the research, we have Google, but I think this is the most misinformed generation because we have the answers like that, but we don't have context”*.

7.3.4 Social and Cultural Issues

Young adults exhibit higher levels of acceptance toward homosexuality and evolution compared to older individuals, while maintaining a similar conviction to older generations regarding the existence of universal standards of right and wrong (Pew, 2010). In terms of acceptance of homosexuality, nearly twice as many young adults (63%), believe society should accept homosexuality, in contrast to those 65 and older, where only 35% hold the same view (refer to TABLE 7). Additionally, approximately 52% of young adults believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Furthermore, more than half of young adults (55%) consider evolution the most compelling explanation for the development of life, in contrast to 47% of individuals in older age groups.

Another social issue affecting Millennials is the ease of access to pornography and its impact on ministerial aspirations. This issue is highlighted by a statement from YPLM-2: *“I did struggle with pornography when I was little, like 12, 13, 14, 12, 13. It was kind of like that count that broke it. But that, that like middle school, stage six, seventh grade, because that was never something that was clear in the church”*.

Millennials, having grown up with the internet, often face exposure to pornography from a young age. This early exposure can lead to struggles that persist into adulthood, affecting their personal lives and their roles in ministry. The lack of clear guidance on

this issue within the church can leave young individuals without the necessary support to navigate these challenges.

Table 7. Views of Homosexuality

Views of Homosexuality		
	Homosexuality should be accepted by society %	<u>N</u>
Total Population	50	35,556
Ages 18-29	63	4,242
Ages 30+	47	30,453
Ages 30-49	51	11,823
Ages 50-64	48	10,484
Ages 65+	35	8,146
Religiously Affiliated	46	30,236
Ages 18-29	58	3,163
Ages 30+	43	26,360
Unaffiliated	71	5,048
Ages 18-29	79	1,034
Ages 30+	67	3,913
Evangelical Protestant Churches	26	9,472
Ages 18-29	39	929
Ages 30+	24	8,352
Mainline Protestant Churches	56	7,470
Ages 18-29	69	528
Ages 30+	54	6,743
Hist. Black Protestant Churches	39	1,995
Ages 18-29	51	356
Ages 30+	36	1,586
Catholic	58	8,054
Ages 18-29	72	926
Ages 30+	55	6,930
Source: 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life		
Question wording: Now I'm going to read you a few pairs of statements. For each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right: Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society, OR homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.		

7.4 Latino Millennials

This section focuses on specific social circumstances affecting the U.S. Latino Millennial population. The objective is to highlight how this group of YPLM responds to God's call amid the daily social challenges they confront.

Latinos constitute the youngest major racial or ethnic group in the United States. Approximately eighteen million, or one-third of the nation's Latino population, are under the age of 18, while Millennials make up about 14.6 million, accounting for a quarter of all Latinos (Eileen Patten, 2016). In comparison, 26% of the Black population is under 18, while for Asians, it is 20%, and for Whites, it is 19% (Patten, 2016). The median age of Latinos in 2014 was 28 years, significantly lower than the median age of other major racial groups. In contrast, the median age among Whites in 2014 was 43, indicating an increase of 12 years since 1980. Asians had a median age of 36 in 2014, marking an increase of 8 since 1980, while the median age for Blacks increased by 9 to reach 33 in 2014 (Patten, 2016).

The Latino population in the United States has witnessed significant growth and demographic transformations. Currently, Latinos make up 22% of all children under the age of eighteen 18, marking a substantial increase from the 9% reported in 1980. As their numbers have expanded, there has been a noticeable shift in their demographic composition. Among the nation's 16 million Latino children, a majority, accounting for 52%, fall into the category of "second generation," meaning they were born in the United States to at least one parent who immigrated from another country (Fry & Passel, 2009). This signifies that 48% of Latino children, totalling around 7 million, were born in Latin American countries.

7.4.1 Familism

"Familism" is a term used to describe the identification, attachment, and loyalty that individuals hold toward their families (Hovey & King, 1996). In Latino culture, family connections are characterised by close bonds, and the family unit typically serves as the primary and initial source of support. When facing difficulties or requiring

assistance, Latinos often prioritise seeking help from their own cultural group before exploring external sources of support.

YPLM-24 expressed the influence of family by stating, *“I would say my parents. They are the biggest influence and seeing my mum also since she never had a bachelor’s degree or a degree, but she was passionate about the institute and building her own ministry and how she got to be ordained without having the opportunity to go to school or anything. Just seeing her be able to complete it, she motivated me.”*

YPLM-14 highlighted the importance of family guidance in significant life decisions, saying, *“At the age of 19, I was going to make this public commitment with the Assemblies of God. So I had a lot of conversations with my parents about this since they were the primary mentors of my life”*.

YPLM-28 acknowledged the values instilled by their parents, stating, *“I thank God that I’m financially able to pursue the institute. My parents instilled in me to be responsible with my money”*.

These statements underscore the essential role that family plays in shaping the values, motivations, and decisions of individuals within the Latino community. The influence of parents and close family members provides a foundation of support and guidance that significantly impacts personal and spiritual development.

7.4.2 Challenges

YPLM face numerous challenges that significantly impact their lives. Growing up Latino/a in the United States, especially, during adolescence, is complex and demanding as they navigate the pressure of forming an identity within a context marked by racial and cultural conflicts (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997:114). Not all challenges directly impact the research cohort, but some, like the English language, indirectly affect them since they are members of Spanish congregations in the FMD and their immediate

families are Spanish-speaking. The process of relocating to a new country, mastering a second language, and adapting to a new culture typically spans eight to ten years (Santiago- Rivera, Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). This is the story of YPLM-3: *“I am a native Puerto Rican. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico. I moved here in the 1990s with my family, my grandfather and his wife and a group of eight members of the disciples of Christ church”*.

Family separation poses a significant challenge for Latino millennials, as approximately 80% of children and youth who come to the United States experience separation from their families at some point. The statements from YPLM-6, YPLM-13, and YPLM-18 provide insights into the challenges faced by Latinos in the United States, particularly in the context of personal development and church leadership.

YPLM-6 reflects on the personal challenge of navigating post-high school life without a family role model: *"My downfall was actually not knowing what I wanted to do after high school because no one in my household finished high school." This highlights the struggle of first-generation students who lack guidance and examples of academic achievement within their families”*.

YPLM-13 comments on the expectations and standards of young Latinos: *"I don't want to sound bad, but many of them in that age group are looking for something more to their standards, to their level, to their perspective of how they're getting into the world."* This indicates that young Latinos are seeking opportunities and environments that meet their evolving standards and perspectives, which might be different from older generations.

YPLM-18 addresses the need for leadership and direction for young people: *“A young person needs direction, definitely, and the problem today is that our leaders have not decided to give direction to our youth”* This points to a perceived lack of proactive

leadership in guiding young Latinos, which is crucial for their development and integration into society.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including community engagement, mentorship programmes, and leadership development to ensure that young Latinos can navigate their personal and professional lives successfully.

7.4.3 Beliefs

Latino millennials generally display a lower level of religiosity when compared to older U.S. Latinos and align more closely with their American peers. According to Martinez and Lipka (2014), around 28% of Latino millennials identify as less religious, a figure similar to the 31% for the American population. Regarding weekly attendance at religious services, only 31% of Latino millennials report doing so, compared to 59% of the overall Latino population. Additionally, there is a 13-point difference between Latino millennials and the broader Hispanic community concerning the importance of religion in their lives. Forty-seven percent of millennials consider religion "very important," compared to 60% among Hispanics overall.

Furthermore, there has been a noticeable trend of religious switching among Latinos in the United States. As reported in 2014, seven in ten Latino adults who changed their religious affiliation before the age of 24, indicating that religious switching often occurs during early adulthood.

7.4.4 Affiliations

A significant portion of younger Latinos has shifted towards religious disaffiliation. Within the Hispanic Millennial population, approximately 28% identify as having no specific religion or as being atheist or agnostic. This percentage closely aligns with that of U.S. Millennials, which stands at 31%. In comparison, the percentages of religiously unaffiliated individuals among Hispanic adults overall and the general

American adult population are lower, with 18% of Hispanics and 20% of all U.S. adults identified as such (Martinez & Lipka, 2014).

7.5 Young Pentecostal Latinos Millennials (YPLM) in the Florida Multicultural District

Over the past decade, there has been minimal growth in the number of Millennials obtaining or applying for ministerial credentials with the Florida Multicultural District (FMD), as indicated in Table 8. At the beginning of this research journey, there were 100 credentialed ministers under the age of 40 in the FMD, representing 20% of the total 483 credentialed ministers in the district.

Table 8. FMD Under 40 Credential Ministers by age from 2013 through 2022

Ministers age	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
35-39	47	47	48	45	44	47	44	41	45	52
30-34	17	23	26	29	27	24	24	22	32	36
25-29	16	17	14	18	17	21	24	24	31	25
20-24	9	12	12	11	9	8	9	5	7	10
19 & under									3	
Total	89	99	100	103	97	100	101	92	118	123
Total FMD Ministers	447	436	483	510	523	540	548	535	576	608
%	.19	.22	.20	.20	.18	.18	.18	.17	.20	.20

TABLE 8 illustrates the trend of ministers aged 39 and under within FMD. The percentage change in this category has been relatively insignificant over the past ten years. Prior to 2012, FMD's territorial jurisdiction included Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. However, in 2012 a new AOG Latino

district was established, incorporating these states and resulting in FMD relinquishing 53 credential ministers. Consequently, FMD's new territory became solely the state of Florida.

The significance of having a minister's credential from an ecclesiastical organization for Latino/a Millennials is an important aspect to consider. Robert Wuthnow argues that unless religious leaders begin to take younger adults more seriously, the future of American religion may be uncertain (Wuthnow, 2007). The number of young YPLM under 40 who possess an AOG credential with the FMD has varied between 89-123 people in the last 10 years. This figure represents approximately 20% of the total ministerial body within FMD.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides the social background of the YPLM involved in this research, focusing on their dedication and persistence in church leadership despite the challenges within the Latino social context in the United States. Several key social indicators are highlighted, including the population growth of the Latino community. Despite strict immigration laws, the Latino population has grown noticeable in recent years. Additionally, Latinos constitute the youngest demographic compared to other ethnic groups, contributing to the rising enrolment of young Latinos in universities. It is worth noting that Latinos tend to identify less with specific Christian denominations.

To place the Latino/a cohort within the Millennial context of the United States, it's important to mention that Millennials represented the largest generation in terms of population in 2016, with 79.8 million individuals. Generally, Millennials exhibit lower levels of religiosity compared to older generations. Categorising all Millennials within a religious framework is challenging due to the diverse range of beliefs and practices within this group. Millennials are less likely to affiliate with religions compared to

previous generations, which is reflected in their attendance at religious services. Within this demographic, there is a noticeable decrease in religious participation, and their theological beliefs tend to be less traditional, including beliefs in God and the Bible as the word of God. This generation is generally more accepting of concepts like homosexuality, abortion, and evolution.

Concerning Latino Millennials, they make up one-third of the Latino population and place significant emphasis on family within Hispanic society. However, they face numerous challenges, including issues related to identity, adaptation to being Latino in the United States (especially during adolescence), and coping with contemporary social and cultural pressures. They navigate a bilingual environment, switching between Spanish and English in their homes and churches. Many of them have experienced crises related to relocating from their home countries.

Latino Millennials exhibit lower church attendance compared to older generations, aligning closely with their peers in the United States. This trend reflects a growing disaffiliation from religious institutions.

All these social realities significantly influence and impact the group of young people who have chosen to embrace church leadership and are undergoing a credentialing process with the Assemblies of God.

CHAPTER 8.

FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTION

8.0 Introduction

This research contributes to the discourse on church leadership from the perspective of young Pentecostals Latino/a Millennials within the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God. It builds upon Lewis R. Rambo's concept of conversion, as presented in his book *Understanding Religious Conversion*, which examines conversion through a religious lens. Expanding on Rambo's framework, this study shifts the focus to the process of conversion as it pertains to Pentecostal leadership among Young Pentecostal Latino/a Millennials (YPLM). By framing Pentecostal leadership as a form of conversion experience, the study makes a significant contribution to Practical Theology.

The research provides an in-depth exploration of leadership conversion among these young Pentecostals, analysing the factors that influence their decisions to pursue church leadership by becoming credentialed ministers with the Assemblies of God. Through interviews, the study identifies key themes and topics that shape their choices. Despite the challenges and concerns faced by the Latino/a cohort, these obstacles did not hinder their commitment to becoming church leaders and obtaining ministerial credentials.

This chapter presents an overview of the research, presenting its objectives, findings, and contributions. It is structured into six sections: research findings, the addressed research question, contributions to knowledge, research limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

8.1 Research Findings

At the outset of this research, the FMD had 100 young individuals under the age of 40 with credentials and on the path to ordination, which is the highest level of credentials within the denomination. From this group, 30 young individuals were interviewed.

Given that the youth population of the Florida Multicultural District (FMD) comprises thousands of young people, the researcher was particularly interested in identifying and understanding the factors that influenced them to pursue credentialed ministry with the Assemblies of God. This curiosity served as the catalyst for this project.

The introduction of this project outlined three main objectives:

- To carefully examine the various factors that contributed to the decision of the research cohort to become church leaders as credentialed ministers with the Assemblies of God. This includes exploring their personal, cultural, and religious backgrounds that shape their career choices.
- To explain the basic beliefs and teachings of their Pentecostal traditions and the effect in their spiritual experience.
- To understand how this group fits into the larger Hispanic community in the United States. This involves looking at the unique social challenges and dynamics that affect them, providing insight into how culture, society, and personal choices interact among Hispanics.

The following section will outline the factors that contributed to the research cohort's decision to pursue ministerial credentials from the Assemblies of God, leading them to become church leaders.

This group of young individuals, already part of a faith community, experienced moments that propelled them to commit to a higher level of service and dedication to God. Lewis R. Rambo describes this as a conversion experience—a religious transformation that occurs within individuals who already have some form of relationship with God. According to Rambo (1993:23), such an experience unfolds through a combination of events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations. This research demonstrates that these young people underwent a "charismatic/ spiritual leadership conversion," which resulted from spiritual moments where they perceived God speaking to them through various people and circumstances.

Since the religious experience is invisible to outsiders, mysteriously sacred to insiders, and a matter of debate among those who share the same tradition, it is methodologically difficult to establish (1993:32). According to Rambo, religious analysis does not require belief but does require respect, as religious processes involve a multiplicity of ideas, institutions, myths, rituals, and symbols (1993:32).

8.1.1 Factors of Supernatural Spiritual Experience

The decisions of these young individuals to enter church ministry and obtain ministerial credentials from the Assemblies of God are grounded in a firm belief that they have been called by God. During the interviews, it became evident that the expressions and narratives shared by this group were influenced by their Pentecostal doctrinal theological upbringing. Within their stories, there was a seamless integration of phrases and experiences rooted in Pentecostal teachings. Notably, their narratives flowed organically; they spoke with a sense of conviction and assurance, without feeling the need to justify or overly explain their experiences. This suggests an internalisation of their faith and theological framework, where their beliefs naturally shape their worldview and inform their understanding of life events.

8.1.1.1 The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

First, as members of a Pentecostal community and credentialed ministers with Assemblies of God, these young people have already experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This group of YPLM believes in experiencing the Holy Spirit today, as the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Richie, 2002:2). This belief, known as *the doctrine of subsequence*, as proposed by William Menzies (Menzies, 2000:151) advocates for a baptism in the Spirit that occurs after conversion--a core tenet for those who identify as Pentecostal. The experience of the Holy Spirit empowers these young individuals to engage in discussions on spiritual topics commonly explored within Pentecostal communities. Having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit offers them a unique perspective on the world and society, enabling them to engage with and understand these topics on a deeper level, thereby fostering their spiritual growth and strengthening their connection within their faith community.

8.1.1.2 The Call of God

Second, the call of God plays a fundamental role for every minister in a Pentecostal community. This is evident in the interviews with ministry applicants, where the credentialing committee routinely asks about their sense of calling. The members of this group of YPLM each described, in their own ways, how they felt called by God to pursue ministry. This conviction led them to seek ministerial credentials from the Assemblies of God and step into roles as church leaders. Their testimonies and personal stories clearly reflect a shared belief in a divine calling, which serves as a guiding force, inspiring them to pursue ministry and leadership within their faith community.

8.1.1.3 The Reading of Scripture

Thirdly, within this community of Pentecostal, engaging with the Bible goes beyond acquiring knowledge; it is perceived as an encounter with a living God. Another

formative experience for the YPLM in their Pentecostal faith is what Richie describes as a “This is that” hermeneutics, referring to Peter’s words in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16). This represents a traditional Pentecostal approach to interpreting Scripture, characterised by a literal reading of the Bible (Richie 2020:2). For these young people, reading the Bible is seen as a sacred interaction that bridges the divine and the human realms, involving an encounter with a God who has been actively involved in shaping history and continues to reveal Himself through contemporary events as He did in biblical times.

8.1.1.4 The Presence of God

The testimonies shared by these young people are rich with expressions that emphasise the presence of God as an active and guiding force in their lives. In their narratives, there is a recurring theme of a lived experience of the divine, reflecting a belief that God is continually at work in the world and within the individual. The ethos of the Pentecostal Church is infused with this awareness of God's presence, which serves as the foundation of the Church's spiritual consciousness and communal identity. This awareness is not viewed as an abstract concept but as a tangible and dynamic reality that shapes the daily lives and decisions of its members.

For the YPLM cohort this God consciousness goes beyond theological understanding; it involves an experiential and an emotional dimension. They perceive the presence of God as an encounter that touches the heart, mind, and spirit, reinforcing their faith and commitment to their spiritual journey. This holistic experience resonates with Yong's assertion that the Pentecostal encounter, as described in Acts 2, engages all human senses—an experience where the divine becomes palpable and personal (Yong, 2017:982).

8.1.2 Factors Of Theological Formation - The Theological Experience

Belonging to a Pentecostal community, these young people derive their biblical and theological understanding from this context. Their decision to pursue leadership roles within the church, particularly through an ordination process with the Assemblies of God, stemmed from a deep belief in a divine calling. This conviction reflects several key Pentecostal principles:

1. God's ongoing involvement in human affairs remains a fundamental belief.
2. Individuals can experience God through various channels: the proclamation of scripture, sacraments, and the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. The possibility of experiencing the Holy Spirit's power, similar to the disciples' encounter on the day of Pentecost as documented in the book of Acts, is affirmed.
4. Validating God's call requires integrity, tangible evidence of the calling, and adherence to sound doctrine, with scripture serving as the ultimate authority.
5. The experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost transcended mere intellectual comprehension, encompassing perceptual and emotional dimensions.
6. Genuine encounters with God necessitate a transformation not only of the intellect but also of the emotions and affections.

8.1.3 Factors of Pentecostal Church Traditions – Church Traditions

The study revealed that, beyond supernatural experiences and the theological, biblical, and doctrinal foundations essentials to the Pentecostal community, another inherent factor influences decisions to pursue church leadership. The researcher identifies these as indigenous factors specific to this group of young people. By “indigenous”, this refers to the expressions, experiences, and frustrations that emerge

from within the Pentecostal community traditions, which shape this group's perception and understanding of church leadership.

8.1.3.1 Denominational Tradition

The first of these indigenous factors is the denominational tradition. This factor encompasses the history of the credentialing process and its development within the Assemblies of God, which forms part of the religious context for this group of young people. They are experiencing and developing an awareness of their denomination, including the language of processes, titles, and administrative aspects thereof.

8.1.3.2 Family Tradition

The second indigenous factor is family tradition. This factor involves young people learning about faith within their homes. They are familiar with the language of God, supernatural experiences, and prophetic experiences. Those raised in a Christian home are accustomed to hearing prophetic language, conversion stories, learning to speak with God, and other common aspects of a Pentecostal community.

8.1.3.3 Church Traditions

The third indigenous factor is church traditions. This factor influences young people as they begin to get involved in church ministries. They express a desire to collaborate and participate in church activities. It is in this context that they confront their conflicts of faith and learn to face the challenges within the church. Many of them feel disconnected. In the case of this group of young people, some did not understand the credentialing processes and felt frustrated by this. Nevertheless, they managed these experiences.

8.1.4 Factors of Social Impact Experience - Young Pentecostal Latino/A Millennials

Social Challenges

The aim of examining the Hispanic social dynamics in the United States is to contextualise the spiritual journey of this cohort of young individuals. This exploration highlights the resilience and conviction with which they navigate societal adversities, such as poverty and oppression, while affirming their belief in divine intervention in human history.

Within this context, the social fabric is marked by numerous challenges, including intergenerational shifts, identity crises, and concerns for future generations. Despite these obstacles, the determination of these young people to pursue leadership roles within the church remains unwavering. Their commitment is demonstrated by their attainment of ministerial credentials from the Assemblies of God, reflecting their dedication to their Pentecostal community.

8.1.4.1 Age

The Latino population is the largest demographic among all ethnic groups in the United States, with Latino millennials standing out as the youngest demographic segment. Latino Millennials represent the largest living generation, accounting for 25% of all Latinos in the country. This highlights the considerable size and influence of the Latino population, underscoring their importance within the social fabric of the United States. The fact that Latino millennials are the youngest demographic further emphasises the vitality and potential impact of this age group within the Latino community and the broader American society. Their status as the largest living generation among Latinos suggests a significant potential to shape cultural, political, religious and economic trends within their community and across the nation.

8.1.4.2 Beliefs

Millennials exhibit a lower level of religiosity compared to older generations. They are less likely to affiliate with faith-based religious organisations and attend religious services infrequently. Furthermore, more than half regard religion as unimportant in their lives. This reflects a significant shift in cultural attitudes and values, indicating a move away from traditional religious practices and beliefs among younger generations. It underscores the changing dynamics of religious participation and affiliation across different age groups.

8.1.4.3 Challenges

This group faces several daily challenges that they must confront and strive to overcome. Firstly, there is the challenge of identity in a context marked by racism and cultural conflicts. Secondly, 48% of this group encounters difficulties with language. Thirdly, there is the challenge of relocation, given the constant mobility within the Hispanic population. Fourthly, there is the challenge of mental health, arising from these issues, including the impact of immigration. Lastly, there is the challenge faced by Dreamers within this group--- an initiative that provides unauthorised immigrants with the opportunity to remain in the country for educational or employment purposes, provided they meet specific eligibility requirements.

8.2 The Answered Research Question

This research focused on a specific cohort: Young Pentecostal Latino Millennials of the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God who chose to undergo a credentialing process to pursue leadership roles within their churches. Despite the significant number of youths in this demographic, comprising thousands of individuals, only 100 embraced this path of leadership formation. From this small group, the researcher conducted interviews with 30 individuals, including both men and women.

The central question guiding this research is: What factors contribute to the leadership conversion of these young individuals within the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God?

In the preceding section, our research findings were narrowed down to four primary factors that significantly contributed to leadership conversion among the studied cohort:

1. **Spiritual Supernatural Experience:** This factor encompasses the encounters participants reported with the Holy Spirit through their pastors, leaders, sermons, Bible reading, and life crisis. These experiences provide insights into the participants' spiritual journey, the depth of their faith, and how such encounters shape their understanding of leadership within their religious context.
2. **Theological Formation Experience:** This factor considers the impact of Pentecostal theological discourse and doctrinal teachings on the development of leadership skills and principles. Examining their theological formation experience provides a deeper understanding of how they integrated theological knowledge into their process of becoming leaders.
3. **Church Tradition Experience:** This factor examines the influence that Pentecostal churches and their ethos had on the leadership development process of our cohort. These YPLM engaged with church traditions, including established religious customs and language, as well as their understanding of authority, church structure and community within the Pentecostal community.
4. **Social Impact Experience:** This factor explores how this group of young individuals navigated a social and culturally diverse context while still

listening to and obeying God to fulfil their divine purpose. By analysing their social impact experience, we can evaluate both the challenges they face and their effectiveness in addressing societal issues, advancing God's work, promoting social justice, and fostering positive community development.

8.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This research project does not seek to answer all questions related to Pentecostal church leadership. Instead, it specifically focuses on investigating the factors that contribute to the conversion of church leaders among young people in the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God. The study examines various aspects of Pentecostal church leadership among young Latinos, offering valuable insights into practical theology, the dynamics of leadership conversion, and Pentecostal doctrines and beliefs.

This thesis makes contributions across several key areas.

1. **Practical Theology Literature** – By focusing on individuals under the age of 40, this research sheds light on Pentecostal church leadership by proposing it as a form of conversion within the practical theology literature. By centring on this demographic, the study offers a valuable perspective that enriches the existing discourse in this field.
2. **Latino Church Leadership** – There is a noticeable gap in literature regarding Pentecostal Latino church leadership formation, particularly concerning factors influencing young individuals. This research identifies the components that validate leadership conversion among Young Pentecostal Latino Millennials.
3. **Pentecostal Doctrines and Beliefs**: The study unveils the beliefs and doctrines within the Pentecostal community that impact the spiritual

experiences of our YPLM. By validating their journey towards becoming church leaders, it offers an understanding of the transformative power of Pentecostal faith.

4. **Latino Social Reality:** This research provides insight into the social reality of YPLM in the United States. By contextualizing their experiences within social cultural frameworks, it enriches discussions on young Pentecostal Latinos/as and social dynamics.

8.3.1 Explaining Research Contributions and Existing Theories

This research makes a significant contribution to the field of practical theology. Its first contribution is to identify, describe, and analyse the factors that influenced Young Pentecostal Latino Millennials (YPLM) to become church leaders. These factors include spiritual supernatural experiences, theological formation, engagement with Pentecostal church traditions, and experiences of social impact. There is a notable gap in the Latino Pentecostal literature on the conversion and training process of church leaders among new generations, particularly within the context of church leadership. This research addresses this gap by examining church leadership from the perspective of young Pentecostal Latino/a millennials.

Building on Lewis R. Rambo's theory of conversion, as presented in his work *Understanding Religious Conversion*, this research shifts the analysis from a general religious lens to a specifically Pentecostal leadership lens. Rambo identifies four types of conversion: apostasy, intensification; affiliation; and institutional. This study proposes an additional type: spiritual leadership conversion. This form of conversion is a hybrid, combining elements of affiliation and intensification, distinguished by its inspiration through an act of the Holy Spirit in supernatural experiences.

This research provides a meaningful contribution to Pentecostal theology by exploring the doctrines, practices, and beliefs that have shaped the lives of a group of young Latinos/as. Central to their spiritual journey is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a defining aspect of Pentecostal churches, which serves as the driving force behind the various supernatural experiences they reported. For these young individuals, responding to the call of God involves not only recognising His presence and ongoing communication but also obeying His guidance and understanding His active role in directing their lives. These elements played a role in shaping their decision to pursue leadership roles within the church, demonstrating how embedded spiritual encounters and theological beliefs are in their paths to ministry. This study thus provides insights into the unique spiritual and theological landscape of young Latino/a Pentecostals, highlighting the factors that motivate their commitment to church leadership.

Lastly, the study enhances the understanding of how the social realities faced by Latinos in the United States influence the faith and conviction of their youth in God's intervention in human affairs. Although the Hispanic population in the U. S. frequently encounters socioeconomic disparities and injustices, this group of young people remains steadfast in their aspirations, driven by the belief that divine guidance can transcend societal limitations. Their faith in God's active role in shaping human reality becomes a source of strength and resilience, motivating them to overcome adversity. This conviction plays an important role in their determination to pursue church leadership, highlighting the interplay between faith, social context, and the desire to serve their community through ministry.

8.3.1.1 Key Insights Learned from the Millennial Cohort

8.3.1.1.1 Early Faith Awareness

The millennial cohort demonstrates a pattern of early exposure to faith, often rooted in a Christian upbringing that provided a foundational understanding of religious knowledge and principles. Growing up in a Christian household frequently offered access to a spiritual framework that shaped their worldview from an early age. Additionally, a defining characteristic of their faith development was the presence of a dedicated Christian role model, who acted as a faith supporter. This individual often provided encouragement, guidance, and a positive example of living a faith-centred life.

However, many members of this cohort also reported encountering personal crises during their formative years, which triggered periods of faith doubt or crisis. These experiences were compounded in some cases by a lack of consistent religious guidance, leading to behaviours and lifestyles contrary from faith-based teachings. Despite these challenges, the data indicates that religious change and the shaping of spiritual identity often began during these early life stages. This underscores the importance of early spiritual mentorship and the presence of supportive faith relationships in fostering long-term religious engagement.

8.3.1.1.2 *Early Church Ministry Involvement*

The second insight derived from the millennial cohort data highlights the impact of early involvement in church ministry. Exposure to leadership roles at a young age provides individuals with opportunities to engage in decision-making processes and manage responsibilities, fostering practical skills that extend beyond the religious context. Such participation plays a crucial role in accelerating spiritual maturation, as it challenges individuals to apply their faith in real-world scenarios, deepening their understanding of spiritual principles and practices.

Additionally, early ministry involvement contributes to the holistic development of young individuals, enhancing their confidence, interpersonal skills, and sense of purpose. Notably, participants within the cohort expressed a willingness and desire to collaborate and contribute meaningfully to the Latino church. This inclination reflects both a deep-rooted connection to their cultural and religious community and a commitment to advancing its spiritual and social mission. These findings underscore the importance of nurturing young leaders through ministry opportunities, which can yield long-term benefits for their personal growth and the vitality of the church community.

8.3.1.1.3 Learning the God Language and Supernatural Experiences

The third insight derived from the millennial cohort data emphasises the impact of learning the "God language" and encountering supernatural experiences in shaping individuals' spiritual trajectories. Perceiving the call of God often reflects a pre-existing sense of divine appointment, which instils an awareness of purpose and direction attributed to divine guidance. Participants frequently described this calling as a transformative moment, underscoring the significance of such events in their spiritual narratives. However, rather than being an isolated occurrence, the call of God is portrayed as part of a continuous and evolving interaction with the divine, highlighting an ongoing process of spiritual engagement and development.

The data also suggests that religious communities serve as a precursor to these spiritual experiences. Through collective worship, mentorship, and shared practices, these communities create an environment that fosters heightened receptivity to divine encounters. Furthermore, some individuals identified prophetically inspired moments as pivotal in their spiritual journeys, offering clarity, affirmation, and a deepened sense of connection to their faith. This insight underscores the importance of communal and

personal dimensions in facilitating meaningful supernatural experiences that reinforce spiritual identity and purpose.

8.3.1.1.4 *Facing Church and Faith Struggles*

The fourth insight from the data reveals the challenges millennials face in their faith journeys and their engagement with church leadership. Central to these struggles is the validation of questioning as an integral part of spiritual growth, highlighting the tension between a strict religious upbringing and the desire for independence and self-discovery. Many young people have trouble in understanding how faith should inform their daily decisions and actions, often resulting in a disconnect from church teachings and questioning the relevance of traditional models of ministry. This sense of disillusionment is particularly pronounced among aspiring young leaders, who report frustration with rigid institutional structures, a lack of practical application of faith, and limited opportunities for meaningful dialogue on theological and spiritual questions.

A significant obstacle to leadership development among young individuals is the generational disconnect between millennial priorities and values and the traditional frameworks of many religious organisations. The communication gap and differing perspectives on collaboration between younger and older generations create further barriers to effective engagement. Millennials often feel excluded from established structures, with some mistrusting church leadership due to observed parental conflicts or perceived institutional failures. Additionally, the absence of forums for open discussions about faith, theology, and the Bible contributes to religious apathy, diminishing their interest in pursuing ministerial roles.

The data underscores the need for church institutions to address these issues by fostering inclusive environments that bridge generational divides, encourage dialogue, and adapt traditional practices to align with the preferences and values of younger leaders. Effective collaboration requires mutual understanding and recognition of these generational differences, providing a foundation for developing leaders who can engage meaningfully with the evolving needs of their communities.

8.4 Research Limitations

Claiming that this research offers a definitive or exhaustive study of Pentecostal church leadership would be unrealistic. The researcher acknowledges that, like any scholarly endeavour, this study has its limitations, with certain areas remaining unexplored and various methods that could still be implemented. This admission underscores the ongoing nature of academic inquiry and the continuous opportunities for further advancements in understanding the dynamics of Pentecostal church leadership.

The sample method employed in this research was a probabilistic random model. Despite efforts to engage 100 potential participants only 30 were able to take part in the study, then we categorise them. The researcher acknowledges that using alternative methods, such as surveys or group dynamics, could have led the investigation in a different direction.

He also acknowledges the inherent biases and limitations that may have shaped his approach. As a Pentecostal leader, his personal beliefs and experiences could have influenced how the topic was addressed, potentially affecting the study's objectivity.

8.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of the growing Latino demographic within the American evangelical landscape, with a particular focus on the factors that can motivate younger generations to assume church leadership roles. As the

Hispanic church continues to expand rapidly expansion in the United States, the reluctance of young Pentecostal Latinos to step into leadership positions raises concerns about the future of pastoral leadership in these churches, potentially impacting their vitality and continuity. By examining the factors that encourage young Latino Pentecostals pursuing leadership, this research is essential for understanding how to sustain and support the future growth of the Latino church in the U.S.

The study specifically sought to explore the factors that led a group of young people to become church leaders and obtain credentials from the Assemblies of God. However, there are unresolved questions that warrant further investigation which was not part of the scope of this study. There is a need to understand why more young Latinos are not advancing to leadership positions or acquiring ministerial credentials within the Assemblies of God community. This raises the question of whether contemporary youth share the same motivations for pursuing leadership roles within this denomination as previous generations. Addressing this could deepen the understanding of Latino church leadership dynamics.

Furthermore, the research sets the stage for future studies on how young people from different ethnic backgrounds in the United States view leadership roles in churches. Exploring this further could help us understand how ethnicity, youth culture, and religion intersect, providing a better grasp of what influences leadership trends in churches among different groups of people.

8.6 Conclusions

This study achieved the objectives set forth at the beginning of the research, which were threefold: Firstly, to elucidate the concept of leadership conversion for the cohort of YPLM and identify and describe the factors that contributed to the decision of this group of young people to become church leaders and obtain credentials from the

Assemblies of God. Secondly, to identify the Pentecostal beliefs and teachings that influenced their convictions. Thirdly, to establish the Latino social context in the United States that served as the environment where their convictions about the presence of God became real. By meeting these objectives, the research successfully addressed the research question. Four key factors emerged as influential in the conversion of church leaders among young Pentecostal Latinos: supernatural spiritual experiences, theological influences, church tradition impacts, and experiences within U.S. social contexts.

The research contributed to our understanding in four main areas. Firstly, in the realms of practical theology, this study added understanding on “spiritual leadership conversion” and how the awareness and acceptance of the activity of the Holy Spirit influence Young Latinos/as into embracing ministerial vocation by becoming credentialed ministers with the Florida Multicultural District of the Assemblies of God. Secondly, within the sphere of Pentecostal doctrines and beliefs, the research highlighted the significant impact of spiritual teachings and practices on the formation of church leaders among this demographic group. Lastly, in exploring the realm of U.S. Latino youth social realities, the study illuminated the complex interplay between cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional factors shaping the lived experiences and aspirations of young Pentecostal Latinos.

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ADDENDUM 1

THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS OF THE CALL OF GOD EXPERIENCE ON YOUNG PENTECOSTAL LATINO MILLENNIALS

Introduction

The leadership conversion experience of young Latinos in the United States has been shown to be shaped by their spiritual encounters, theological formation, and the ethos of their Pentecostal community, all within the broader U.S. social context. Building on this foundation, this chapter focuses on understanding how religious attitudes are formed, measured, and influence behaviour, using Maio & Haddock's approach and Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein's Theory of Planned Behaviour to analyse the role of God's calling as an attitudinal factor shaping these behaviours.

According to Maio & Haddock people's behaviour is influenced by their attitude towards an object be that abstract or concrete, with some degree of favour or disfavour (Maio & Haddock, 2012:4,5). There are certain issues, topics, and themes that people feel more about than others (2012: 48). This is the case guiding this research journey. Primary data describes the impact spiritual themes and experiences had on YPLM and how it affected their decisions towards church leadership. If behaviours are determined by attitudes towards objects, then these experiences as expressed by the cohort deserve to be analysed through social psychology lenses. Spiritual experiences are attitudinal factors because they influence people's behaviour.

Definition of Attitude

Maio and Haddock define attitude as an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective and behavioural information, (Maio & Haddock, 2012: 4).

Evaluation is the consistent key component of an attitude (Albarracin & Johnson 2019:5). The target or subject matter of an attitude can be any entity, such as an object, person, group, or an abstract idea (2019:5). In other words, attitude involves deciding on liking versus disliking, or favouring versus disfavouring a particular issue, object, or person (Maio 2012:3).

Supernatural Experiences as Attitude Objects

Anything that is evaluated along a dimension of favourability, is an attitude object (Maio & Haddock 2012:4). Attitude objects can be concrete, but they can also be abstract (2012:4). Supernatural experiences such as perceiving God's call or receiving a prophetic word from someone are abstract attitude objects affecting YPLM's behaviour. This was the case with YPLM-2 as she explains her experience the day God called her to the ministry: *"And I remember looking around and thinking, all this is about me. So, I looked around and I was like, God, if you're real, God, if you want something with me, just show me. And I began to feel the presence of God"*. As we have seen, this experience inspired her to embrace church leadership, and she evaluated the experience positively.

The experience that YPLM-22 had involved receiving a prophetic word, a common practice in Pentecostal communities as described in 1 Corinthians 12:10. She said, *"I received a prophecy that I was not to go to law school outside of Florida and that I was called to be a pastor. So, when I received that prophecy, I was very much against it. But God had a plan. I feel if I don't accept my calling as a minister, I am being disobedient to God. So, I'm going to embrace it."* She evaluated her experience with the prophetic word and concluded that it was God's calling, which she felt compelled to obey. These are just two examples among many where this group of young people decided to embrace church leadership based on their evaluation of these attitude objects.

How Attitudes Affect Decisions?

Maio & Haddock define attitude as an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective, and behavioural information. He uses the metaphor of the three witches to explain three major components of an attitude: content, structure, and function; Content means cognitive, affective, and behavioural information about an object.; in other words, the types of information we incorporate within attitudes. Structure refers to how this information is organised and integrated along dimensions within attitudes. Attitude function encompasses diverse psychological needs served by attitudes; in other words, the psychological needs that this integrative process helps to satisfy (2012: xiii). What can be said then regarding the testimonies of the YPLM in this research? How do these testimonies fit in this attitude scheme?

Cognitive Content

Content constitutes the cognitive component of an attitude, including the beliefs, thoughts, and attributes associated with an object (2012:30). It is essential to analyse the specific beliefs, thoughts, and attributes that motivate YPLM to pursue credentialed ministry with the AOG.

In the context of the Assemblies of God as a Pentecostal movement, the message compellingly calls people to continue Christ's work on earth. The message usually comes with biblical information, personal stories where its delivery is emotional, persuasive with Pentecostal manifestations in many cases. One of the interviewees (YPLM-2) recalls listening to the message preached the night God called her to the ministry. *“The preacher spoke about how God was going to call us by name. He kept preaching this message of God only needs one person. And I remember looking around and thinking, all this is about me”*. The message this young woman heard contained beliefs, thoughts, and attributes about how God still speaks and invites us to embrace His call. The effect

of that preached message was a spiritual experience for this young woman, prompting her to commit to God's calling.

This was also the case of YPLM-8. She recalls that in 2012, through a message preached, she felt the call to surrender her life to God and to follow Christ for ministry. *“In 2012 the minister was preaching. I remember for the first time I understood what was happening. God was calling me to follow him. I remember I went to the altar, and I gave my life to Jesus and accepted Jesus that day. But God spoke to me very clearly. I remember. And he said, when you graduate from college, you're going to move to China. Very direct”*. These two examples describe the cognitive content of the object, which, in this case, is the supernatural experience because of Pentecostal preaching. The message, rooted in the beliefs, ideas, and attributes of God, had a persuasive effect on the decisions of these two individuals.

Affective Content

The affective component of attitude refers to feelings or emotions linked to an attitude object (Maio & Haddock 2012:30). The attitude objects in this research inquiry are the supernatural experiences and Pentecostal church beliefs, doctrines, and practices. Feelings play a major role when it comes to shaping the attitudes of people. Affective responses will always influence attitudes (2012:30). The primary data can witness to the affective component of an attitude. Their stories are full of affective experiences, describing how God intervened in their lives in such a way that they knew they were being called to the ministry.

Examples of the affective component are these three testimonies of different experiences, all united by a common feeling and emotion linked to their experience with God. The first one describes the desire to spend a lifetime in ministry *“I always said I wish that I could just dedicate my whole life to ministry, to doing the work of God”*

(YPLM-6). This testimony conveys a deep sense of longing and commitment. There is a desire and a heartfelt aspiration towards church ministry in this testimony. Overall, these words effectively communicate a sincere and passionate dedication to a life of ministry and service to God.

The following testimony reflects a feeling and a desire for the preaching of the Word of God because in doing so he finds peace: *“I have noted that I have a desire to preach and bring the word. It brings me so much peace when I bring the word”* (YPLM-28). This individual manifests a personal realisation and fulfilment in the preaching of the Word of God. The phrase “I have noted” suggests a thoughtful and reflective awareness of his desire. The fact that this activity brings peace to this individual conveys a sense of contentment and inner tranquillity. Overall, these words effectively communicate the passion and the positive impact preaching has on this individual.

The last testimony in this section reflects the importance of a relationship with Jesus at an early age. The encounter was of such magnitude that she experienced the power and the love of God: *“I didn't start a relationship with Jesus until I was like 13 and I was at a youth camp -- that's when I first encountered the power and the love of God”* (YPLM-2). These words convey a mix of nostalgia, gratitude, and awe. They suggest a significant turning point in the speaker's life, marked by the beginning of a spiritual journey. The mention of “a youth camp” evokes a sense of nostalgia, recalling a specific formative experience. Overall, these words express a deep and meaningful connection with a pivotal moment in the speakers spiritual development.

Behavioural Content

The third element on the attitude content is the behavioural aspect. The behavioural component of attitudes refers to past behaviours or experiences regarding an attitude object (2012:30). In relation to this research, what experiences or past behaviours

has the YPLM cohort had with supernatural experiences? Additionally, are they aware of other's experiences related to God's call, healings, and demon possession deliverance? As members of Pentecostal churches, they are familiar with the liturgy or church service program, where testimonies often involve people being called by God to specific areas of ministry in the most unusual circumstances.

Researchers such as Dennis, Reagan, and Russell Fazio have demonstrated the effects of behaviour on attitudes. They argue that people who have direct experiences with attitude objects, develop favourable attitude towards them (Regan & Fazio, 1977). The more time spent with these objects, the more positive the attitude becomes. Primary data describes the experiences of YPLM within communities emphasising supernatural events, like healings and divine calls to ministry. This group of young Latinos, who regularly attend youth conventions with direct appeals for ministry, often hear testimonies with a supernatural tone. These direct contacts with various attitude objects influence YPLM behaviour.

The following testimonies recount the experiences of individuals at various stages of their ministry involvement. These accounts highlight their continuous engagement and behaviour in different aspects of ministry. Through these testimonies, we gain insight into the personal and spiritual journeys that have shaped their commitment in serving in ministry. The first recounts the experience of how his parents' ministry had effects on his own life. *"I always was involved with my parents' ministry. They would always say that it's not just their ministry, but it's ours as a family that God has given us"* (YPLM-7). The statement suggests that the individual's behaviour was heavily influenced by their parents' involvement in ministry. This likely led to consistent involvement, and a sense of ownership and commitment to the ministry work. The next testimony is of the individual who is raised within the church and is involved in many

aspects of practical ministry. *“We moved to Lakeland and ended up in a church where I served there for years. I grew up there; all of my major life events happened in that church. I got saved there, baptised in the spirit, and I got married there. Being part of that congregation is where I received my calling to ministry”* (YPLM-25). This testimony serves as evidence that the individual’s behaviour was influenced by their church community. Growing up in the church and experiencing major life events there – such as salvation, baptism in the spirit, marriage, and receiving a ministry calling -- implies that the church played a central role in shaping their life choices.

The last testimony of this section reflects an individual whose involvement in various practical ministries has affected his behaviour. *“I’m in charge of every aspect of the service and events that happen in and outside of the church. I oversee and work together with the different ministries and different teams to make sure that the event goes on without any problems. That means I might have to work with the worship team and work with the pastors”* (YPLM-1). This individual’s behaviour is characterised by a level of responsibility, leadership, and collaboration. Being in charge of every aspect of the service and events, both inside and outside of the church, requires organisational skills, attention to detail, and the ability to coordinate with various teams. Working closely with the worship team and pastors also suggests a collaborative and supportive approach demonstrating a commitment to the success of the church activities and overall mission.

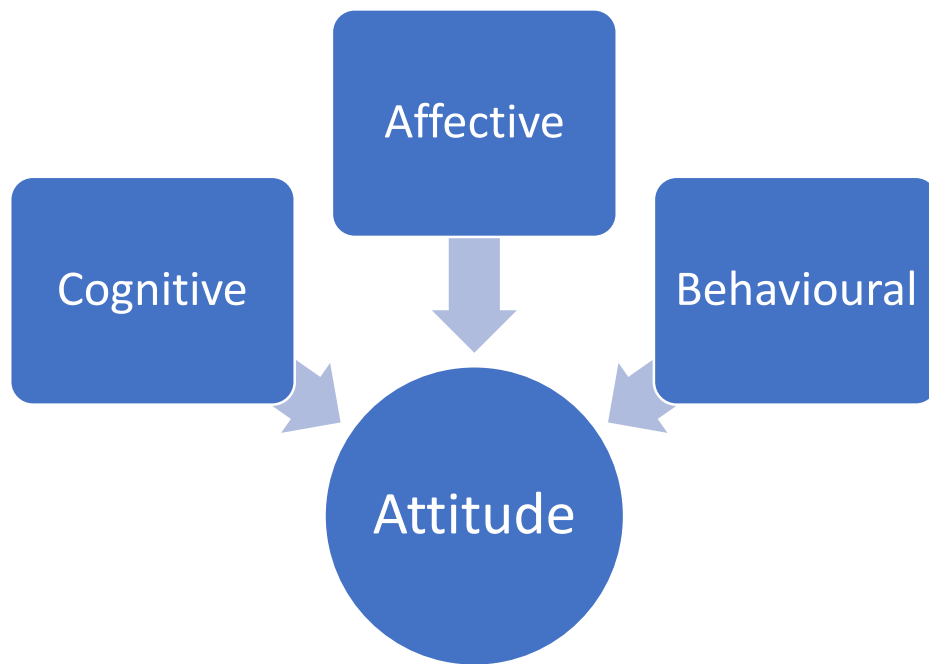


Figure 3. The Three Witches of Attitudes

The Theory of Planned Behaviour

This model was created by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein in 1975 and is considered one of the most prominent models of attitude-behaviour relations. The model tends to explain behaviour rather than predict it. It is one of many contemporary theories of human social behaviour and represents a “reasoned action” approach to the explanation and prediction of social behaviour (2019:219). The “reasoned action” approach refers to the fact that people’s behavioural intentions are assumed to follow reasonably from their beliefs about performing their behaviour (2019:220). From a social-psychological perspective, this chapter analyses the correlation between the attitudes of YPLM towards church leadership and their behaviour in becoming credentialed ministers with the A/G.

Intentions

According to this model (TOPB), the immediate predictor of an individual’s behaviour is their intention, (Maio & Haddock, 2015:82). There are three major considerations in

the formation of intention that influence the decision to engage in each behaviour: attitude towards their behaviour, subjective norm behaviour and perceived behavioural control (2019:226). They are also known as behavioural beliefs (2019:219).

Attitudes Towards the Behaviour

The attitude components refer to the individuals' attitudes towards the behaviour. In other words, whether the person thinks that performing the behaviour is good or bad. It is recognised that attitude toward a behaviour contains instrumental aspects such as: desirable – undesirable, valuable – worthless, pleasant – unpleasant, interesting – boring (Azjen & Driver, 1992:24:207). Attitude towards the behaviour considers if there are positive or negative consequences to the behaviour. Usually, in every decision, there are positive and negative evaluative beliefs, but when the positive outweighs the negative, people are likely to form a favourable attitude toward the behaviour.

For example, if the intentions of the YPLM cohort members are to serve others, inspired by their faith, and what they believe God is directing them to do, namely, to become pastors and credentialed ministers, they are most likely to engage in that behaviour. Such was the case of YPLM-31: *“I have just really gained a heart to serve others and really give them what the Lord has given me. I would honestly really want to be a pastor one day”*. This person had a clear goal of becoming a pastor one day.

Another case was YPLM-12. This person at an early age was already desiring to be a leader and to be called by God to ministry. *“I remember at the age of 11 and 12 years old I was already reading the Bible every morning, already desiring to be a leader and to be called”*. The intentions of this person are evident in an early engagement with faith, and in the desire for leadership. This suggests a sense of responsibility and an ambition to guide and influence others within the faith community. Overall, this

testimony conveys a developed commitment to faith, a desire to lead, and a sense of being destined for a religious vocation.

This other testimony regarding to intentions to become a church leader arises now when this person gives her heart to the Lord.

YPLM-29 *“I got into ministry when I gave my heart to the Lord my second year of college. I went to UCF from West Palm Beach and I got introduced to God through one of my friends. I started serving in the campus ministry”*. This reflects a proactive step towards practicing faith through service and involvement in a religious community. The journey of spiritual awakening and commitment began in college, influenced by a friend, and manifested in active participation in campus ministry.

YPLM-2 explains the reasons for embracing church leadership: *“Because my heart is for people, I think, and I just want to be different. I want to be a different kind of leader. I want to show people that there can be good leadership”*. One of the positive evaluative beliefs in these remarks is the value of compassion for people. This reflects an underlying belief that compassion and concern for others are positive qualities. Also, the desire for distinction in leadership reveals her belief that current leadership styles are lacking in some way.

Another example of attitude towards the behaviour is the testimony of YPLM-5. He explains why choosing to become church leaders and credentialed ministers has positive consequences, yet he also highlights why some Latinos leave for the Anglo church: *“They don't want credit, they don't want position, they don't want stage. They want to make genuine contributions. They want their voices to be heard, they want to experience change. They are about justice, about movement. That's what millennials want, and they see those opportunities being afforded to them within the American church, but they leave to the American church, and they feel a sense of cultural loss”*.

This person believes that choosing to embrace church leadership aligns with the values of millennials. For them, genuine contribution is more important than personal recognition. It also demonstrates the importance of meaningful and authentic participation in causes. Additionally, it expresses the belief that having a voice and being an agent of change are highly valued.

Subjective Norm Behaviour

The second consideration in the formation of intentions is the subjective norm behaviour. The subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour. Subjective norms are determined by two factors: how people who are important to the individual expect him or her to act and the individual's motivation to comply with these expectations (2012:84) This consideration has to do with the approval or disapproval of the behaviour by respected individuals or groups. In other words, what were the reactions of those close to our research cohort members when they shared their intentions to become credentialed ministers? This consideration is usually termed normative beliefs. It is the perceived social pressure or subjective norm to engage or not engage in the behaviour (2019:219).

In simple words, subjective norms will be favourable to the cohort members if families, friends, and church colleagues have positive expectations towards getting credentials, becoming a minister, and church leadership in general. It can be said that the overall subjective norm of this cohort was favourable. Although some of the testimonies from the cohort primary data were mixed when it came to the opinions of their peers and close relatives, some of them felt that there were some close friends and relatives that did not see the value of them becoming a credentialed minister and were even personally asked the purpose of having a credential. Yet the members of the cohort felt that the positives outweigh the negatives.

The other aspect of the subjective norm has to do with the YPLM being motivated to comply with their expectations. The primary data will show that the cohort was motivated, and they all felt that getting a credential from the AG was a reachable goal. Their motivation was evidenced by first enrolling in Bible Institute and complying with all the Bible and theology credits needed for the credential. Additionally, they needed to demonstrate that they were involved in some kind of ministerial practice at the local church level. They needed motivation to work closely with their church pastor and receive the signed recommendation forms and have them sent to the district office. Part of the requirements, which needed much motivation, was to take an examination of over one hundred questions in the areas of Bible knowledge, theology, doctrines and church polity.

YPLM-9 says that it was his mother who introduced him to Bible institute as preparation for ministry: *“My mother was a part of Bible institute, and so I didn’t know too much about it as a teenager, but she would talk to me about it, learning the word and things of that nature”*. This testimony reflects the subjective norms coming from this individual’s mother. There is the parental influence which had a significant voice in his perception of religious education. The fact that religious learning was a topic regularly discussed within the family suggests that the speaker’s attitudes and beliefs about religious education and involvement were shaped by his mothers’ practices, and the conversations they had about learning and studying the Bible.

There is also the influence of larger groups, such as the testimony of YPLM-20: *“In the Spanish eastern district, we were having tri-monthly youth services, and a lot of the young people were interested in becoming ministers. They would attend the pastors’ meetings, so they were exposed to that. Space was created. That’s how I was exposed. Just hearing those conversations and being motivated to do so”*. The experience of this

individual was that regular youth services were a common activity where many young people showed interest in becoming ministers, creating a collective expectation and aspiration. The fact that it was encouraged for young people to attend meetings with pastors provided them with exposure to leadership and ministry activities. This testimony reflects a community culture that values religious gatherings, fostering aspirations towards ministry and motivating young participants in leadership meetings.

Perceived Behavioural Control

Besides people's expectancy that the behaviour will produce a desired consequence and the subjective norms where people are influenced by the expectation of friends and relatives who are important to them, people's actions are also influenced by whether they believe they can perform the relevant behaviour (2012:84). This idea is called perceived behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control influences behaviour in two ways. First, it has a direct effect on behavioural intentions: individuals' intention to engage in a particular behaviour is affected by their confidence in their ability to perform the action. Second, perceived behavioural control has a direct effect on behaviour in that it depends on actual control of the relevant action; that is, whether that behaviour can be performed (2012:85). It has to do with individual perceptions about whether they possess the resources and opportunities required to perform the behaviour (Maio, 2012: 89).

Did the members of the cohort feel that it was easy to act on their intentions? In other words, was the process easy to follow? Was the information available? Some members of the cohort testified that, although at the initial stage of the process it was not easy, especially in communicating with the denomination office, it became easier once the process began.

An example of this is what YPLM-3 shares about his experience. When he received his minister's credentials, he encountered significant communication problems during the process. The information provided by one office did not align with what was given by another office regarding the credentialing process. YPLM-3 credits one secretary with consistently providing accurate information. However, in her absence, the situation became chaotic and confusing again: YPLM-3: *"I would say the application process itself is pretty straightforward. What I find challenging is communication. There's information that one person says that doesn't correspond. The secretary, whom I went to, had all the information pertinent, and then when she was gone, it seemed like they weren't speaking the same language. So, the secretary was right all along. The secretary was helpful in terms of knowing the information."* Overall, while the application is simple, the credentialing process is complicated by inconsistent communication and a heavy reliance on specific personnel for accurate information.

Conclusions

The primary data indicates that the behaviour towards becoming credentialed ministers was influenced by a value-driven attitude towards a supernatural experience, such as God's call to the ministry. The YPLM cohort formed value – expressive attitudes towards the supernatural, meaning that their attitudes towards supernatural manifestations in church experiences play a significant role in their lives. These experiences are usually followed by responses that vary among individuals. People respond to supernatural experiences in different ways. This cohort of YPLM has responded to God's calling by becoming credentialed ministers with the AG. It has already been stated that people's evaluative judgments may favour an attitudinal object but behave differently. They could be part of the same event, hear the same sermon and witness the same supernatural experience, yet respond differently. They might choose to

become more active in church, volunteer for special activities, or accept ministerial duties close to the pastoral staff but not necessarily become a credentialed minister with the AG. This action indicates that these value attitudes serve an important psychological function in them (1995:268).

The Pentecostal faith community they belong to holds values and attitudes towards the supernatural. Since values are abstract, they have the potential to influence many different attitudes (1995:268). In any Pentecostal gathering it is not strange to experience lively worship singing, people being prayed over for healing, others speaking in tongues, spontaneous expressions of prophetic words during the service liturgy, and altar calls for people to commit their lives to God and accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Supernatural manifestations are common and not strange but even expected when people gather in many Pentecostal churches such as the AG churches. They seek, encourage, experience, and teach these manifestations. That is why for them it is normal to say that the reason why they chose to become credentialed ministers with the AG was because of the experience with God's calling in their lives. When people form attitudes specifically aimed at expressing values, it is when the values have significant relations to attitudes. The YPLM's value regarding the supernatural was expressed by becoming credentialed ministers with the AG as a response to God's calling in their lives.

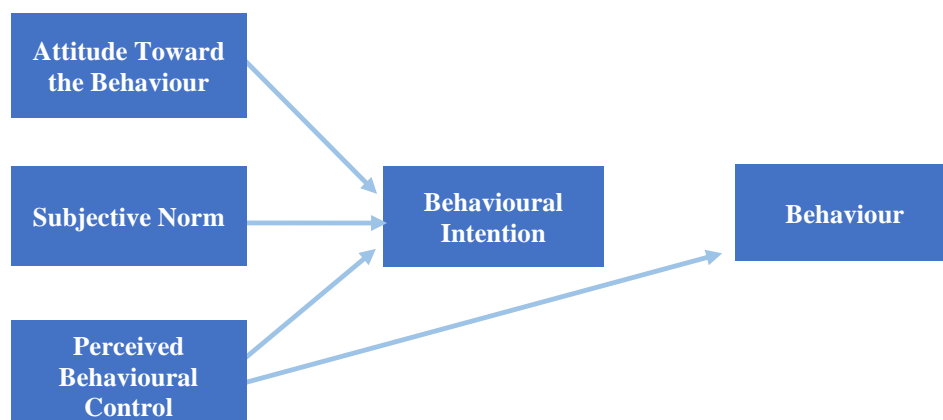


Figure 4. The Theory of Planned Behaviour