

**HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership Newsletter:  
DMin Graduate Dissertation Summaries**

Thomas G. Walsh  
June 23, 2025



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Get ready to be inspired! In this issue, we're thrilled to share summaries of the impactful Doctor of Ministry dissertations from our recent graduates of the 49th Class of HJ International. Dive in to discover a glimpse into the diverse and significant contributions these new graduates are making, and feel free to connect directly with the graduates using the contact information provided in each article.



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**DMIN DISSERTATION**  
**DR. KENNETH ALEXANDER**

*The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders in Society: The Collaboration of Community and Faith-Based Organizations Focusing on Transitioning from Prison to Work to Society*



**The Reintegration of Ex-offenders in Society: The Collaboration of Community and Faith-Based Organizations Focusing on Transitioning from Prison to Work to Society**

It is the lack of agencies working together to provide citizens returning to society after incarceration with the support they need to become productive working-class citizens and avoid recidivism that has plagued our families and communities in America for decades. Data from the Department of Labor and other organizations show that reentry initiatives require our attention to reduce recidivism and support those ex-offenders seeking to receive training and jobs to reintegrate into our society with a chance for redemption.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. KATARINA CONNERY**

*In Her Image: Effect of a Personal Relationship with  
Heavenly Mother on Self-Worth in Motherhood*



### **In Her Image: Effect of a Personal Relationship with Heavenly Mother on Self-Worth in Motherhood**

This dissertation project explores whether deepening a connection to God’s motherly love—expressed through the nurturing presence of “Heavenly Mother”—can help mothers of young children enhance their sense of self-worth. At the heart of the project, 30 mothers of children ages 9 and younger worked through a 40-day spiritual practice journal rooted in the metaphor of growing within God’s “womb” as a beloved child—the journal was created to guide participants in creating a sacred space to reflect on what they are receiving, developing, and embodying through that connection with Heavenly Mother.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. MIKA DESHOTEL**

*Unified Voices: Exploring Intergenerational Collaboration  
in a Unificationist Worship Model*



### **Unified Voices: Exploring Intergenerational Collaboration in a Unificationist Worship Model**

This study looked at the effects of monthly intergenerational worship services within a medium-sized Northeast Unificationist community in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The services sought to empower intergenerational collaboration and leadership within the community, while exploring congregants’ sense of belonging, appreciation of one another, and an overall sense of shared commitment to the community’s future. Surveys were conducted at various times over a 5-month period, uncovering the importance and challenge of relational ties within the community, which can be strengthened through intergenerational faith practices.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. ALICE FLEISHER**

*Spiritual Life Formation and Growth Education for Young Adults within FFWPU-USA Opportunities and Limitations*



### **Spiritual Life Formation and Growth Education for Young Adults within FFWPU-USA: Opportunities and Limitations**

A nationwide study was conducted, assessing the spiritual life and development providence, including both cognitive education and practices available for young adults, ages 18 through 26, who were affiliated with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) in the USA. Educational programs and ministries sponsored by FFWPU-USA, tasked with the responsibility of helping young adults invest in and develop their spiritual lives, were investigated.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. SHOTA IWASAKI**

*Building a Community-Oriented Church through Beautification Projects: A Case Study of the Application and Practice of Service Learning as a Catalyst for Community Development*



### **Building a Community-Oriented Church through Beautification Projects: A Case Study of the Application and Practice of Service-Learning as a Catalyst for Community Development**

This dissertation project aimed to show how an active, genuine, community-oriented ministry could establish a practical ethos to attract more youth through consistent community cleanup projects and the need to facilitate numerous in-person and online meetings with was to promote community engagement, encourage residents, and convince public officials to stop illegal dumping and maintain the beauty of the Germantown section of Philadelphia. It also sought to understand how to realize the possibility of Dr. Martin Luther King's Beloved Community in the present day by applying key ingredients to generate synergy.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. ALHASSAN KAMAGTEY**

*Muslim Marital Counseling: Views, Perceptions and Experience  
of Yankasa Muslim Community in The Bronx, NY, USA*



### **Muslim Marital Counseling: Views, Perceptions, and Experiences of Yankasa Muslim Community in the Bronx, NY, USA**

My dissertation focused on the role of marital counseling in enhancing the quality of marital relationships among married couples within the Yankasa Muslim Community, located in the Bronx, New York, USA. The central objective of the research was to investigate how members of this immigrant Muslim community view, understand, and experience Islamic marital counseling, especially in the context of its relevance and impact on marital stability and overall relationship satisfaction.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. MAGNUS LARSSON**

*The 90-Degree Leader: Bridging Faith and Reason for  
Meaningful Relations and Personal Growth*



### **The 90-Degree Leader: Bridging Faith and Reason for Meaningful Relations and Personal Growth**

How can religious ideas be presented to people who do not already have a background in faith? Is there a way to talk about God that does not alienate those who are skeptical of religious authority? In today's world, where many seek both intellectual credibility and personal meaning, education must bridge spiritual insight with real-world application. This requires a model that is both theologically grounded and practically relevant.

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## **DMIN DISSERTATION DR. RONALD PAPPALARDO**

*The God Effect: Exploring the Long-Term Influences of Elicited Mystical Experiences*



### **The God Effect: Exploring the Long-Term Influences of Elicited Mystical Experiences**

This dissertation project provides a window into the lives of people who underwent a Mystical experience while attending one of the author's workshops. The experiences are particularly notable in that they were not random events. They were induced, taking place while participants were practicing techniques learned at the workshops. These techniques have been found to facilitate and elicit encounters with the Divine.

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# The Reintegration of Ex-offenders in Society: The Collaboration of Community and Faith-Based Organizations Focusing on Transitioning from Prison to Work to Society



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. KENNETH ALEXANDER

*The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders in Society: The Collaboration  
of Community and Faith-Based Organizations Focusing on  
Transitioning from Prison to Work to Society*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Summary by Kenneth Alexander | K.Alexander@hji.edu

### Abstract

It is the lack of agencies working together to provide citizens returning to society after incarceration with the support they need to become productive working-class citizens and avoid recidivism that has plagued our families and communities in America for decades. Data from the Department of Labor and other organizations show that reentry initiatives require our attention to reduce recidivism and support those ex-offenders seeking to receive training and jobs to reintegrate into our society with a chance for redemption.

### Statement of Purpose

This project focused on the over 600,000 ex-offenders being released from State and Federal prisons per year throughout America. According to the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) and the Federal Bureau of Justice (FBI) have noted that the USA recidivism rate since 2005 have an average of 50% recidivism rate within 3-5 years after being released, many of the recidivism rates can be higher or lower based on a few factors. Nonetheless, these numbers indicate a severe crisis in our cities, neighborhoods, and families. Studies show that the cost of helping ex-offenders to become reintegrated into society outweighs the cost of incarceration. Particularly when crime and serious crime continue to increase, and overcrowding and the financial burden to taxpayers continue to grow.

### Duplicatable Service

Workforce Inc., dba RecycleForce, is a job training and job placement social enterprise established in 2006 that focuses on the hardest-to-serve ex-offenders released from federal and state prisons, returning to Indianapolis neighborhoods and families without the income, housing, and job skills needed to prevent them from returning to prison. I have made this service a ministry opportunity for myself, aligning it with biblical principles for non-profits, faith-based organizations, and community groups. My focus is on promoting collaboration on social responsibility through restorative justice, reducing recidivism, and addressing the intersection of environmental and social equity for all of God's people.



## Methodology

My work and my dissertation became an addition to my ministry by committing to addressing environmental issues through RecycleForce that has contributed to keeping over 1.5 million pounds of potentially hazardous materials out of our communities, landfills and our neighborhoods by the end of 2024, with a goal of 12 million pounds per year while hiring over thousands of ex-offenders as a social enterprise and business have worked with non-profits and faith-based organizations for over twenty-five years, with a recidivism rate of 6-11% per year after serving over one thousand men and women per year.

This was a key ministry for me, serving as both the Chief Operations Officer and Director of Training in a social enterprise, leveraging my experience as a pastor in a non-denominational church. This service has directly impacted the lives of hundreds of ex-offenders who return to citizenship each year in the state of Indiana and the city of Indianapolis. RecycleForce's social mission has become a model that should be duplicated in many Cities throughout America. This Employment Social Enterprise (ESE) is designed to provide skills training and Industry-Recognized Credentials, along with faith-based services, to a diverse population while reducing recidivism, lowering the carbon footprint, restoring families, and offering long-term employment opportunities that contribute to the local economy, a win on many fronts.

## Theological and Scriptural Framework

Through reviewing how RecycleForce collaborates with other organizations, data collected shows that such collaborative efforts have tremendously decreased recidivism rates in its program area. It is recommended that this be developed as a model for other ministries, as well as state, city, and community-based organizations, to successfully reintegrate ex-offenders back into society after they have served their time, and for those men and women desiring to be productive citizens within our communities and be restored to their family and most of all being restored to the family of God.

During the first three years of ex-offenders being released from prison, the majority of them would return by committing a new crime, violating probation or parole, or committing a Technical Rule Violation (TRV). Not to mention, being labeled as a felon after serving time for their conviction made it very difficult for them to be gainfully employed when 80% of mainstream employers had policies preventing them from hiring those who had committed a felony. The United States of America makes up 2% of the world population, and America incarcerates 25% of its American citizens. Something is seriously not working in America when comparing the criminal justice systems to those of many other countries.

This theological framework is taken from the study of scriptures, such as Matthew in the Bible: "I was a stranger, and you did not take me in; naked, and you did not clothe me, sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me" (Matthew 25:43 NASB).

Matthew 28:18-20: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. Moreover, surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free."

## Recommendations

It is highly commendable for America to have federal, state, and local community correction agencies, as well as religious and numerous not-for-profit organizations, recognize that something must be done to make reintegration and returning to citizenship feasible and reduce recidivism. Workforce Inc., dba Recycleforce has taken on this challenge in an attempt to provide a holistic approach to meet every possible hurdle that the ex-offenders may face to make reintegration back into society a reality by creating a collaboration of services through a model called a Employment Social Enterprise as an awareness for modern day technologies coupled with the mental health therapy that may be needed when creating a model for those returning to citizenship. We must all be mindful of the lack of social, spiritual, and employable skills needed, as well as the financial needs of ex-offenders, while addressing the environmental challenges of our society to make reintegration more than an experiment but a reality for all of God's people who are being disenfranchised.



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# In Her Image: Effect of a Personal Relationship with Heavenly Mother on Self-Worth in Motherhood



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. KATARINA CONNERY

*In Her Image: Effect of a Personal Relationship with Heavenly Mother on Self-Worth in Motherhood*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Summary by Katarina Connery | [KConnery@wfwf.us](mailto:KConnery@wfwf.us)

### Abstract

This dissertation project explores whether deepening a connection to God's motherly love—expressed through the nurturing presence of "Heavenly Mother"—can help mothers of young children enhance their sense of self-worth. At the heart of the project, 30 mothers of children ages 9 and younger worked through a 40-day spiritual practice journal rooted in the metaphor of growing within God's "womb" as a beloved child—the journal was created to guide participants in creating a sacred space to reflect on what they are receiving, developing, and embodying through that connection with Heavenly Mother. Participants' experiences were evaluated through pre- and post-project surveys and qualitative reflections. Key measures included self-compassion, daily spiritual experiences, confidence in motherhood, and perceptions and connections to God's maternal nature. Findings revealed a significant increase in participants' sense of self-worth and spiritual intimacy, with many describing a renewed sense of identity and purpose rooted in their experience of being spiritually "carried" and shaped by God. This project highlights the transformative potential of engaging maternal imagery in spiritual practices, particularly for women seeking healing, affirmation, and a deeper sense of divine connection.



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# Unified Voices: Exploring Intergenerational Collaboration in a Unificationist Worship Model



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. MIKA DESHOTEL

*Unified Voices: Exploring Intergenerational Collaboration  
in a Unificationist Worship Model*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Summary by Mika Deshotel | M.Deshotel@hji.edu

### Abstract

This study looked at the effects of monthly intergenerational worship services within a medium-sized Northeast Unificationist community in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The services sought to empower intergenerational collaboration and leadership within the community, while exploring congregants' sense of belonging, appreciation of one another, and an overall sense of shared commitment to the community's future. Surveys were conducted at various times over a 5-month period, uncovering the importance and challenge of relational ties within the community, which can be strengthened through intergenerational faith practices.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to facilitate intergenerational collaboration and leadership through the creation of an intergenerational worship model. As a young Movement founded in the early 1950s in Korea, like early religious movements of the past, the Unification Church is at a critical juncture in its history, and a large determinant of success lies in how well the tradition and values of the faith are transmitted to succeeding generations. Like many Christian churches in America, Unificationist churches tend to be led by older members, with lower attendance and interest shown by young families. As an "events-driven" Movement, focusing on large rallies and working with key political and civic leaders towards peace, this has also created a challenge for many young families to find their place. At the same time, while elders are hoping desperately to imbue their skills and faith experiences onto the next generation, they are also feeling challenged to relinquish long held positions in top leadership. Thus, a mechanism needs to be put in place to support stronger relationships and natural collaboration between the generations. Reflecting on this writer's experience as a Unificationist pastor, it became clear that intergenerational worship would be a key practice in opening the doors for such possibilities.

### Research Questions

The main research question addressed through the study was about how an intergenerational worship model could help sustain the development of the community. With subsequent questions as follows:

- What was/were the greatest barrier(s) to working together intergenerationally?
- What efforts were needed to engender feelings of community responsibility and consciousness?
- What were the key factors of success in an intergenerational worship model that could be



universal enough for application in diverse unificationist communities:

- What aspects of our tradition and values were most celebrated between generations and resulted in greater feelings of unity and trust between generations?

### Key Findings

A total of 118 respondents participated in the surveys, conducted both before and after intergenerational services. Overall, family closeness and strong community made up the majority of what participants described as the “best part” about their faith community. In a similar way, communication breakdown and generational divisions were most noted as the most “challenging aspect” of the community, with overwhelming value given to intergenerational practices in having the potential to create opportunities for improved communication and strengthening community.

Rating statements revealed that close to 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed to appreciating intergenerational services. Over 80% of positive responses also revealed that participants felt a greater sense of belonging as a result of such services, as well as being able to “see God in others” through such services. The highest negative responses came from a handful of older First Generation members, and had to do with statements that reflected reciprocity, or the idea of relating well and learning from others, and mutuality, or feeling a shared sense of purpose towards a successful future.

Looking more closely at differences between age and faith generations and their respective preferences within an intergenerational service, results revealed that music was an overall unifier, appreciated by every generation. Music is also an easy to practice and share tradition, as the Movement has its own genre of Holy Songs. The youngest and oldest members appreciated hands-on activities, skits and games. The older GenZ/ Millennials, representing mainly Second Generation, highlighted the value of making services fun, with a short universal message. This group, along with their parents’ generation, the Boomers, appreciated conversations at the table also. The GenXers, who are currently in their mid-40s and late 50’s, were the most traditional, appreciating ritual aspects of our services like reciting the pledge, listening to a meaningful message, and singing Holy Songs.

### Recommendations

1. Communities seeking to implement intergenerational faith practices should first seek to create an intergenerational team to lead such an effort. This is what was done in CT. Intergenerational teams should be representative of the community and should strive to showcase diverse members of the congregation within their services/ activities
2. Communities should seek to create goals that ensure that typically underserved and underrepresented groups are being considered in regular planning, like young families, women, and children
3. Communities should seek to implement religious educators, or those who are most concerned about the success and well-being of Blessed Families, like BFM reps or even ‘wise women’ of the community, and allot resources for the support of the diverse and growing needs of our communities, paying special attention to our elderly
4. Intergenerational practices are both intentional and innovative. Such practices are meant to be done in a methodical way over many years, which can help build trust and buy-in from congregants, along with providing a greater sense of stability for posterity



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# Spiritual Life Formation and Growth Education for Young Adults within FFWPU-USA: Opportunities and Limitations



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. ALICE FLEISHER

*Spiritual Life Formation and Growth Education for Young  
Adults within FFWPU-USA Opportunities and Limitations*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Summary by Alice Fleisher | A.Fleisher@hji.edu

### Abstract

A nationwide study was conducted, assessing the spiritual life and development providence, including both cognitive education and practices available for young adults, ages 18 through 26, who were affiliated with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) in the USA. Educational programs and ministries sponsored by FFWPU-USA, tasked with the responsibility of helping young adults invest in and develop their spiritual lives, were investigated. Areas of focus included an examination of the types of educational methodologies being utilized and if and to what extent an integration of Unification Theology with the material related to spirituality and religiosity found within the discipline of spiritual formation had been achieved. The author carried out a random sample of 37 young adults enrolled in a gap program known as the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) and a population survey of 37 educators of young adults who are working within a variety of young adult ministries. Keywords: Fulfillment of First Blessing; Spiritual Life and Growth Education; Field Study; Mentoring and Experiential Educational Methodologies, Locally Based Network of Educators; Continuing Education Program for Young Adult Ministers.

### Statement of Problem

This Dissertation Project sought to address the problem of spiritual formation and faith development for young adults (ages 18-26) within the Unification Church/Family Federation For World Peace and Unification – USA (UC/FFWPU-USA). While there was a strong tradition within the Unification movement related to an intellectual education of the Word (Divine Principle), a tradition and practical protocol for providing internal guidance, coaching, and care for adult and young adult spirituality was not very strong or prevalent. Despite uncovering internal guidance materials for committed individuals of the Movement from the past, the material was not geared towards the youth of this era, especially those who might be questioning their faith and who, at the same time, were most likely novices in the development of their spiritual lives. A substantial amount of material on this topic, given by Father and Mother Moon, was found. However, it was quickly realized that the material had not been centralized or systematized. One exception to this pattern was the training and material available to Unificationists young adults who participated in one of FFWPU's faith-building programs like Generation Peace Academy (GPA).

Related to the last two elements mentioned in the preceding paragraph, learning theories that reflected current research on learning and the brain were investigated. It was discovered that within



FFWPU-USA the greatest emphasis seemed to have been placed on lecture-style presentations rather than more student-centered methodologies such as mentoring and experiential based approaches known for their excellent track record in enhancing learning. Related to such methodologies, research being carried out by educators and researchers in the field of neuroscience, specifically, the science of learning, were reviewed.

In addition, the author found limited opportunities and venues available within UC/FFWPU-USA where educators/ministers could bolster and invest in an educational track that emphasized spiritual life education and development, as a counterbalance to the track that emphasized the study of the Word (Divine Principle).

### Research Questions

1. How can this Dissertation Project provide and strengthen the intellectual, spiritual, and practical ethos that students bring to their university studies that can contribute to the enhancement of their spiritual life and growth development?
2. What do young adults need to learn and experience from their campus ministry to strengthen their spirituality against the emotional, psychological, and practical ethos of the university campus?
3. What are the hallmarks of a truly effective and impactful campus ministry program when it comes to young adult spiritual life and growth development?
4. What theological issues and beliefs are college age students grappling with and how can a spiritual life and growth curriculum bring relevant support and foster faith assuring resolution of those challenges?
5. What are the obstacles and challenges faced by today's college students who endeavor to remain faithful to their beliefs?
6. Who are historical and contemporary sociological theorists who take an atheistic and utilitarian view of the nature of human ontology (the nature of being) and the existence of a supernatural source (God)?
7. What are the neutral and pro-religious perspectives that would be helpful to the spiritual life and growth of young adults in today's world?

Just a note, the focus of the project expanded beyond the university setting to encompass young adults in whatever setting they found themselves in, including taking a gap year or years, internships, and/or entering the job market. On the older age spectrum of the young adult age group (18-26), other areas of time and energy focus naturally became more dominant and present, such as marriage and family concerns, career and professional development, travel, and avocation/hobby/passion pursuits. These questions, then, were seen for what they were – the genesis of a journey of discovery related to the theme of spiritual life and growth education.

### Key Findings

#### **From the GPA Survey**

One critical finding from the GPA study had to do with the importance of a mentoring approach to encourage spiritual life and growth. While the responses to the Likert question gave preliminary indications that the mentoring approach was important in fostering spiritual life and growth, the data in the short answer question that asked the respondents to share about the most inspiring and helpful components in the spiritual development program they had participated in also strongly referenced the importance and value of the mentoring methodology.

In looking for repeated elements and patterns in the responses, two major categories emerged – internal guidance/support and internal activities. In the internal guidance category, the element that received the most mention, 11 out of 22 or 59%, was the internal guidance and testimonies that the young adults received from their team leaders, the program's central figures, and elder GPA staff members. This preference was also noted when the young adults were asked to rank the impact of various elements on their spiritual lives (n=7). The options included – Unificationists organizations, Other Religious Organizations, Family, Peers, Community Youth Groups, School, Advisers /Supporters/Guides, and Other. Thirty-three percent (33%) ranked advisers.

The experiential educational methodology referred to an educational approach where educators designed for and included opportunities and settings where learners could try out and practice the theories they had learned. In other words, the process of spiritual growth needs to combine purposeful action with internal guidance and direction.

The data in the short answer question, which asked the respondents to share about the most inspiring and helpful components in the spiritual development program they had participated in, also noted that the experiential educational methodologies utilized, most especially fundraising, were quite helpful in the development of their spiritual lives. As one participant said, "GPA provided



me with an environment to practice God's words/scripture every day, and as a result helped me go through experiences and realize skills that I can implement in my daily life."

The data suggested that the practice of fundraising provided participants with a valuable opportunity to practice their cognitive understanding of the process of a spiritual life. In the category of internal oriented activities, fundraising came out on top with 10 out of 22 or 46% of the respondents listing this activity as an inspiring and helpful component, though one respondent did qualify it with the following statement – "Not the fundraising training itself, but the reflection that followed it."

### **From the Educators Survey**

Related to the educators who gave neutral responses to Likert Questions five (counseling is part of my ministry) and six (motivate through coaching, advising, guiding, and supporting), we did find the following pattern. For the counseling question, 100% were younger (20s and 30s), 71% had completed 4 years of college, 43% had worked for 1-5 years in the ministry, 43% had worked for 5-10 years in the ministry. None of the responses for the group size stood out as they were spread over 1-10 up to 31+ possible responses. In the motivation question, 100% were young (20s and 30s), 50% had completed 4 years of college, 50% had been working in the ministry for 1-5 years, and 50% had worked with a group size of 1-10 people. Thus, amongst the respondents who gave a neutral response, we found that they were young and had completed at least 4 years of college. For respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the Likert questions, especially the counseling and motivation methods questions, the spread of ages covered all the age categories, as did the educational level, years in ministry and group size.

For the question on the motivating methodology favored, 40% had been in the ministry for more than ten years and had worked with groups of 31+ people, and 33% had completed 4 years of college. The pattern is similar to the counsel question which shows that over 1/3 of the educators who responded to those questions were older, had been doing young adult spiritual life education ministry for an extended period of time, and had received some form of higher education. These responses could reasonably be interpreted to suggest that the educators who had accrued an extended amount of time and experience within the young adult ministry favor the use of the mentoring methodology. Why they would do so could not be determined from this study but could be an aspect that could be investigated through future research.

One set of responses provided a pervasive pattern that drew the author's attention. This was related to the educators who strongly disagreed and disagreed with Likert questions five (counseling question) and six (motivation methodology question). For the counseling question, of the three who disagreed, 66% were in their 20s, had completed a high school education, had been in the ministry for 1-5 years and worked with group sizes of 1-10 people. For the motivating methodology question, the respondent who strongly disagreed was in their 20s, had completed 4 years of college, had been in the ministry 1-5 years and worked with groups of 1-10 people. Of the three who disagreed, 100% were in their 20s, 66% had completed high school, 66% had spent 1-5 years in the ministry, though 66% had worked with groups of 31+ people. Thus, the respondents who strongly disagreed or disagreed were generally young, had completed high school, and had been in the ministry for a relatively short time; thus, were lacking in experience.

Since a large percentage of respondents who strongly disagreed or disagreed with the educational methodologies of counseling, coaching, advising, guiding and supporting young adults were young, the highest level of schooling completed was high school, and had been in the ministry for a relatively short time; thus, their negative responses could reasonably be attributed to a lack of experience and confidence with utilizing those approaches rather than a disagreement with the actual methodologies. Typically, when there is a deficit of experience and confidence with the use of a skillset, it is wise for administrators to have in place a solid continuing education program. The data, however, could reasonably be understood to indicate that such a program was lacking.

*Question asked to educators – what additional resources do you need to make your ministry work more effective?* It was in examining the responses to this question that the essence of what the educators saw as the main problems and limitations within the existing spiritual life and growth ministry became apparent to the author. Valuable prescriptions and recommendations were also offered by the educators that, if applied, could be transformative for FFWPU-USA's young adult ministry. One message that was repeated was the need for the development of a spiritual life and growth initiative located at the local level to complement existing immersion programs. The education being recommended was concerned with the providing of care after a young adult has exited the immersion program and the development of initiatives and a network of educators that would be available to address the young adults' spiritual life issues and concerns as they arose, in the midst of their daily lives.

Thus, the overwhelming prescription given to increase the effectiveness of the spiritual life and



growth ministry for young adults called for the development of a mentoring program based at the local community/church level where internal guidance/spiritual life and growth education could be offered by educators who would assume a parental role. Other solutions were offered as well. *Overall, the educators clearly perceived that FFWPU-USA lacked a culture of care and a system of spiritual life development that addressed the daily issues, problems, and concerns of young adults and that encouraged and helped them to nurture spiritual life practices within their daily lives.* In addition, the educators suggested that the goal of such a system and culture of care should be to enable all members, including young adults, to take ownership of their spiritual lives.

### Recommendations

1. It is recommended that a systematic approach to spiritual life and growth education within FFWPU-USA be developed that incorporates methodologies backed by the science of learning to include the mentoring model, experientially based educational methodologies, and guidance related to best practices, including character education.
2. In response to the concerns which can best be described as a limitation of access, it is recommended that a locally based care and support system and providence be created within FFWPU-USA that is staffed by trained and capable ministers who are tasked to be center points who would coach, mentor, advise, guide, and support young adults post high school age throughout their 20s and early 30s related to their spiritual lives and also any faith issues they may have. The focus of the ministers working within such a network will be to 1) facilitate educational opportunities, 2) support the efforts of the young adults in their community as they organize activities, projects, and programs, and 3) be on-call and available to respond to and minister to the spiritual life issues, needs, and journey being undertaken by those young adults. This locally based network should, however, be coordinated through and by a centralized organization that has the responsibility for the oversight of the care and support of young adults. This last point is needed to allow for consistency and coordination of care.
3. There is a compelling need within FFWPU for the development of a continuing education and training providence to avoid educators burn-out and to facilitate the development of the expertise of its educators who are serving young adults. All educators of young adults should be enabled, supported and encouraged in their efforts to invest in and build up their knowledge of educational theory, productive skill sets, valuable methodologies, and best practices. Methodologies to be encouraged are those that incorporate a mentoring and experiential-based approach to learning as advocated by professionals within the field of education concerned with the science of learning. The author is suggesting that a continuing education program should include opportunities for educators to be exposed to information on optimum learning methodologies, including mentoring and the experiential approach. It should also examine and present information on topics and issues that educators would deem to be relevant to young adults in our global environment, based on subsequent surveys given to those educators. Further, the author recommends that such a program include the study of educational materials that are concerned with the topic of spiritual formation, derived from and informed by the Christian educational sphere that comes under that heading. Also, material on spiritual life and growth from a Unificationist perspective of the fulfillment of the First Blessing. As is the case for all professional sectors, the value of an on-going and either self-guided or formal class educational opportunity to enhance one's professional skill set and develop expertise in young adult education, is clear and totally justifiable. That is why a continuing educational program is recommended. Such a program will benefit relative novices in the field as well as those who have been active within it for an extended period.
4. Develop a program which teaches a basic level of training in counseling and pastoral care for the educators of young adults who are working on the frontline of the young adult ministry. In addition, a cadre of professionally trained counselors should be developed to whom young adults with more serious psychological or emotional issues can be referred to should the need arise. As noted by one educator in speaking to this need: "Besides that, we need to raise more Counselors in our movement who can take care of youth on a deeper level who are dealing with trauma, addiction, depression, suicidal tendencies, etc....with a professional but principled approach."



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# Building a Community-Oriented Church through Beautification Projects: A Case Study of the Application and Practice of Service-Learning as a Catalyst for Community Development



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. SHOTA IWASAKI

*Building a Community-Oriented Church through Beautification Projects: A Case Study of the Application and Practice of Service Learning as a Catalyst for Community Development*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Overview by Shota Iwasaki | Shotaiwasaki1031@gmail.com, +1 267 333 2347

This dissertation project aimed to show how an active, genuine, community-oriented ministry could establish a practical ethos to attract more youth through consistent community cleanup projects and the need to facilitate numerous in-person and online meetings with was to promote community engagement, encourage residents, and convince public officials to stop illegal dumping and maintain the beauty of the Germantown section of Philadelphia. It also sought to understand how to realize the possibility of Dr. Martin Luther King's Beloved Community in the present day by applying key ingredients to generate synergy. Another focus was on determining how a service-learning format offers a strong pedagogy for project participants in developing a Beloved Community.

The first finding was that maintaining the beauty of a community requires residents to know which political officials are responsible and have the proper tools. The second finding was that maintaining transparency, trust, and integral relationships with attendees and their organizations in every meeting could generate new synergy among constituents, potentially boosting the overall outcome of the beautification projects. It would be necessary to examine further whether the same condition may apply to coordinating with a larger number of stakeholders to undertake larger-scale projects. The last finding was that Consistent beautification projects paired with a quality service-learning curriculum may generate an effective ethos within the ministry and attract Millennials and Generation Z.

Five key recommendations are suggested based on several findings that include developing a comprehensive strategy for community improvement, emphasizing research, congregational projects, stakeholder meetings, youth engagement, and innovative methodologies for community development.





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# Muslim Marital Counseling: Views, Perceptions, and Experiences of Yankasa Muslim Community in the Bronx, NY, USA



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. ALHASSAN KAMAGTEY

*Muslim Marital Counseling: Views, Perceptions and Experience of Yankasa Muslim Community in The Bronx, NY, USA*



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My dissertation focused on the role of marital counseling in enhancing the quality of marital relationships among married couples within the Yankasa Muslim Community, located in the Bronx, New York, USA. The central objective of the research was to investigate how members of this immigrant Muslim community view, understand, and experience Islamic marital counseling, especially in the context of its relevance and impact on marital stability and overall relationship satisfaction.

To achieve this objective, the study utilized a mixed-method research design, which integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodological combination allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the topic by capturing statistical trends as well as deeper, personal insights. For the qualitative component, I conducted semi-structured interviews featuring open-ended questions. This flexible interview format enabled participants to share their thoughts freely while allowing for follow-up questions that further clarified their responses. The qualitative data collected from these interviews were systematically analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method. This rigorous method of thematic analysis helped identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes across participant responses.

Five major themes emerged from the qualitative data:

- 1. Prior Experience with Islamic Marital Counseling:** This theme addressed whether and how participants had previously engaged in any form of marital counseling rooted in Islamic principles.
- 2. Perceptions of What Constitutes Marital Counseling:** Here, participants discussed their understanding of marital counseling, distinguishing between informal religious advice and structured counseling.
- 3. Timing of Marital Counseling Interventions:** This theme explored whether counseling was sought before or after marital issues became serious, highlighting a tendency to seek help only at crisis points.
- 4. Accessibility of Marital Counseling:** This reflected participants' concerns about the availability and affordability of counseling services that are culturally and religiously appropriate.
- 5. Perceived Benefits of Marital Counseling:** Participants emphasized how such services could



improve communication, mutual respect, and conflict resolution in their marriages.

In the quantitative phase of the study, data were gathered through structured questionnaires distributed among community members. These instruments helped capture measurable opinions and demographic trends related to marital counseling practices and attitudes.

The overall findings of the study suggest that Islamic marital counseling can play a significant role in strengthening relationships within the Yankasa Muslim community. Counseling was perceived not only as a tool for resolving marital conflict but also as a preventive measure that could foster mutual understanding and respect between spouses. Importantly, the research also revealed that negative cultural perceptions often act as barriers to seeking marital counseling. However, by increasing awareness and education about the benefits of Islamic marital counseling, these cultural barriers can be addressed and potentially overcome.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights that can inform the development of culturally and religiously sensitive marital counseling programs tailored to the needs of African Muslim immigrant communities. It also highlights the need for further community education and advocacy to normalize counseling as a positive and faith-aligned resource for marital wellbeing.



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# The 90-Degree Leader: Bridging Faith and Reason for Meaningful Relations and Personal Growth



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. MAGNUS LARSSON

*The 90-Degree Leader: Bridging Faith and Reason for  
Meaningful Relations and Personal Growth*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Summary by Magnus Larsson | Larssonusa@gmail.com

### Abstract

How can religious ideas be presented to people who do not already have a background in faith? Is there a way to talk about God that does not alienate those who are skeptical of religious authority?

In today's world, where many seek both intellectual credibility and personal meaning, education must bridge spiritual insight with real-world application. This requires a model that is both theologically grounded and practically relevant.

This study addresses that challenge by developing and testing *The 90-Degree Leader*, a theory that contextualizes the core tenets of the Bible and the Exposition of the Divine Principle within leadership best practices. By bridging the perceived divide between religion and science, this project shows how integrating faith and reason can foster a deeper understanding of human purpose and potential.

### Statement of the Problem

Traditional religious institutions are struggling to stay relevant. Many people are searching for truth but often find it hard to connect theology to their daily lives. Even those who have been long-time believers often feel like they are left to figure things out on their own. Church services frequently fail to engage newcomers or inspire current members to invite others, which leads to declining interest and attendance.

Dallas Willard notes that without integrating scientific inquiry, religious education remains disconnected from the broader intellectual context. This disconnect limits its transformative potential, especially for those who identify as spiritual but not religious.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Kenda Creasy Dean observes that faith communities tend to elevate leaders who project outward confidence rather than those who exhibit authenticity and spiritual depth. When spiritual formation is separated from rational inquiry, it often produces superficial faith and shallow leadership—both of which alienate younger generations.<sup>2</sup>

While much of the research informing this project centers on mainline Christian churches, these issues are not unique to them. The Unification Church faces similar challenges. However, unlike many other traditions, it holds theological resources—such as the Exposition of the Divine Principle—that may offer relevant responses to the needs of this generation.<sup>3</sup>

### Research Questions



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These research questions guide the project's design and objectives, with the goal of developing and testing a theory that acts as an educational tool for promoting personal growth and leadership development:

- What Distinguishes the Leadership of Growing Churches and Successful Organizations in Motivating Their Members to Support Their Mission?
- What Are the Contemporary Leadership Theories of the 21st Century, and How Do They Intersect with the Theory Formulated in This Project?
- What Within the Biblical and Theological Context Bears on Personal Development and Leadership?
- How Can We Measure the Educational Impact of the Theory Formulated in This Project?
- How Can the Educational Effectiveness of the Theory Be Measured Across Demographic Groups Within the Unification Church and Among Non-Affiliated Participants, Spanning College-Aged, Young Adults, and Older?

### Key Findings

The 90-Degree Leader theory translates the harmony between internal and external truth into a practical framework for personal development and leadership. By integrating the core teachings of the Exposition of the Divine Principle with real-world leadership principles, the theory makes these ideas more accessible—even to those who might otherwise avoid religious or theological discussions.

Research conducted for this project shows that the 90-Degree Leader offers a compelling model for both members of the Unification Church and individuals with no prior religious affiliation. Across diverse age groups, participants found that the theory helped them balance their inner search for meaning with tangible goals like career growth and personal achievement—bringing new relevance to religious education by uniting faith and reason.

From June to November 2024, 31 individuals were invited to participate in the study. Each received a printed or digital version of *The 90-Degree Leader* and was asked to complete an online questionnaire. By the close of the survey period, 20 participants—representing three age groups (college-aged, young adults, and older adults)—had read the theory (3–5 hours) and submitted responses. The group included both Unification Church members and unaffiliated individuals.

Among respondents, 75% said the theory prompted self-reflection, 70% said it enhanced their sense of purpose, and 79% reported increased leadership confidence. Interestingly, participants with only a high school education often found the material easier to read than some of those with advanced degrees—suggesting that personal interest may play a greater role in comprehension than formal education.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical directions emerge for improving religious education and leadership development:

- Reform religious education to emphasize both intellectual credibility and real-world relevance, making theology a guide for life, not just belief.
- Cultivate leaders who integrate spiritual maturity with real-world competence.
- Encourage bivocational readiness as a way to protect the purity of purpose associated with the initial calling.
- Foster a culture of peer support and ongoing evaluation as a means to sustain transformation and deepen accountability.
- Explore how the theory's core principle—bridging religion and science—might inform other areas of ministry, such as the Blessing of marriage.

Together, these recommendations support a vision for ministry that brings faith and reason into meaningful integration. The 90-Degree Leader theory serves as one possible model for how this can take shape. More broadly, the integration of faith and reason nurtures a sense of self-transcendent purpose, expressed not just in belief but in relational integrity and leadership impact. As such, this framework offers value not only for churches seeking renewal but also for individuals and organizations committed to growth.

### Notes

1. Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (HarperCollins e-books, 2009), Kindle Edition.

2. Kendra Green-Davis, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teachers Is Telling the American*



2. Kerida Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: what the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford University Press, 2010. Kindle Edition), 134.

3. Exposition of the Divine Principle (New York: The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 2006).



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# The God Effect: Exploring the Long-Term Influences of Elicited Mystical Experiences



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## DMIN DISSERTATION DR. RONALD PAPPALARDO

*The God Effect: Exploring the Long-Term Influences of Elicited Mystical Experiences*



Doctoral Dissertation Project Summary by Ron Pappalardo | [ronpappalardo.com](http://ronpappalardo.com)

### Abstract

This dissertation project provides a window into the lives of people who underwent a Mystical experience while attending one of the author's workshops. The experiences are particularly notable in that they were not random events. They were induced, taking place while participants were practicing techniques learned at the workshops. These techniques have been found to facilitate and elicit encounters with the Divine.

The research data reports the effect these experiencers had in the moment, but also reveals how their lives were impacted over time. The data and case studies demonstrate that while, at a minimum, an encounter with God is usually a strongly positive experience, in some cases it is powerfully life-transformative. In religious ministry, it is hard to imagine there is anything more valuable than facilitating an individual's direct experience with the love of God. The reader will find information that will aid ministerial efforts in this regard, including work in the fields of conversion, spiritual formation, and the cultivation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### Statement of the problem

At present, we are witnessing a historic shift in the way many people view religion. With each passing year, more and more people identify as "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR). Particularly among the young, we are more likely to see many of them at a yoga or meditation class than at a Sunday morning worship service.

While traditional religion is declining, a surprising number of Americans are longing for Mystical experiences. A 2005 *Newsweek/Beliefnet* poll reported that 75% of respondents believed religion was very important "to forge a personal relationship with God", while only 39% believed religion was very important "to be part of a community" (*Beliefnet.com*, 2005). In order to meet current needs, we in ministry need to familiarize ourselves with the factors involved in facilitating Mystical communion with God.

The author has discovered several techniques that have been found to successfully elicit Mystical experiences.

In sum, this dissertation project has made an earnest case for the need for ministers to provide a gateway for individuals in their congregations to achieve direct apprehension of the Divine, and that relatively simple techniques exist that have been shown to elicit this phenomenon. Readers are enthusiastically invited to adopt these techniques toward the goal of replicating these wonderful



enthusiastically invited to adopt these techniques toward the goal of replicating these wonderful results. When reviewing the data, it is abundantly clear that Mystical experiences result in long-term benefits to the experiencers and society at large, as well as comfort and fulfillment to the heart of God.

As ministers, wouldn't it be wonderful if we possessed tools that we could impart to our congregants that would elicit experiences similar to the one Finney had? These tools exist, and over the last several years have been shared in workshops with startling results. Three of these techniques are: guided meditation, hands-on healing, and what the author calls "Journaling with God."

Here is a sample testimony from the data collected:

I participated in Ron's workshop in Montreal, Quebec, I believe in 2014. What I knew about God was from religions. Growing up in the Catholic Church I did not pay attention to God at all. My mother became a widower at the age of 28 with four very young children and every time something bad happened she would say: "What did I do to God to deserve this?". She would blame God for all her misery. It seems to me that God was a punishing God and I wanted to have nothing to do with this entity (if it even existed).

I joined the Unification Church in my late 20's. The Church painted a different picture of what God could be and it intrigued me. But after many years in the UC, I began to stray. To be honest, I searched all my life for this "father" figure and never found it. I found God at Ron's workshop.

... I was reluctant to go but we ended up going anyway; myself, my husband and our oldest son.

The first day was great and many people were having wonderful spiritual experiences, the give and take with members was very uplifting and Ron was just fascinating to listen to. The second day came and everybody around me was having spiritual experiences, but not me. Nothing. At some point on the second day, I remember thinking, "Here we go again, nothing is happening for me, I am not good enough for God to pay attention to me." I regretted coming to the workshop. I felt so deflated.

That's when something happened. Ron was guiding us through a guided meditation. I remember him guiding us to a beach and sitting on a chair at the beach, and that's all I remember. It's really hard to describe what happened and how I felt. I wasn't in the room and I couldn't hear Ron's voice anymore. I was bathed in light, a blinding white light. I heard nothing but felt a presence. I suddenly felt a love that cannot be described in human words. It felt almost too much for me. This presence was love itself.

I knew without a doubt it was God's presence. I felt so immensely loved! I don't know how long the experience lasted but I suddenly felt my body begin lifting off from my chair! I started crying and the tears were just flowing. Then I heard my son talking to me and asking me if I was ok.

Once I heard my son's voice, I came back to earth. I didn't want to! I wanted to stay with this incredible light and love! When I opened my eyes, my cheeks were wet from my tears and I was sobbing. My son and my husband were sitting on each side of me and they looked worried. My son told me he was worried because I was crying but also because I was starting to lift off from my chair. He also felt himself starting to lift off from his own chair! I was completely baffled by what happened and really surprised! Finally, God knows I exist and HE loves ME!



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