

DISSERTATION

FAITH AND LEADERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH ON THE  
LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

### FAITH AND LEADERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH ON THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The purpose of this study was to understand how faith influenced women leaders in higher education. The specific research question was: “How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?” This was a qualitative research study utilizing a phenomenological approach for data analysis and interpretation.

The data were collected from nine women leaders in senior leadership roles in higher education. Each of the women leaders in this study are deeply connected to their faith. Though they defined faith in their own terms, they all agreed to the definition of faith for this study: a belief and trust in a transcendent being. In the current study, the term *transcendent being* can be called God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, or another name and does not require a religious affiliation.

This study produced four important findings. First, the influence of faith on the participants’ leadership experiences begins with each one of them exercising faith-driven leadership. They exercised faith-driven leadership through their co-creating relationship with a transcendent being, which they all referred to as God. The influence of faith also served as a foundation for their overall leadership ethos, comprising values and lessons, both a part of faith-driven leadership. The values or guiding principles they associated with their leadership were derived from their faith. Sometimes they also utilized lessons learned from their faith in how they led or what they did in their leadership roles. Second, the influence of faith on their

leadership encouraged them to promote inclusion and equity. They practiced open-mindedness and fairness. Third, how and why the women leaders persevered was attributed to the influence of their faith. They demonstrated resilience in a variety of situations, including moments when the influence of faith was visible to others—an experience that sometimes left them feeling exposed, misunderstood or vulnerable. Finally, the influence of faith brought these nine women blessings and opportunities for connection.

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ॐ

*Om Bhur Bhuvah Svaha  
Tat-savitur Vareṇyam  
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi  
Dhiyo Yonah Prachodayāt*

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## DEDICATION

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This work is dedicated to Savita Lilavati Patel. It started with you picking me.  
Remember, who loves you the most?

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organizations are reflective of their leaders. Faith, spirituality, and religion have all been found to contribute to leaders' inner strength, resilience, ability to lead with integrity and purpose, and expression of compassion. These leadership attributes and others have been studied in and out of higher education for years (Carter, 2024; Thomas, 2024; Woolard et al., 2022). In the literature, faith, spirituality, and religion are used with limited distinction. Among populations in higher education there has been more scholarship on spirituality and religion while the inclusion of faith is more recent (Betts et al., 2023). Betts et al. (2023) points out the limitation of using all three together in research and encourages separating them to understand the differences. The influence of faith on leadership experiences was the purpose of this study and is defined as a relationship with a transcendent being (Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020).

The origins of higher education in the United States are deeply rooted in religious communities. Over time, according to Waggoner (2016), most of these institutions have gradually shifted towards a more secular orientation due to the separation of church and state, especially in public higher education (Burchell et al., 2010; Waggoner, 2016). Although higher education institutions still move more toward secularization, individuals within higher education institutions continue to seek meaningful connections with others and themselves (Betts et al. 2023; Waggoner, 2016). This deeper connection is more fulfilling to personal growth and often arises from making sense of life experiences through spirituality and faith, which tend to be more fluid and personal compared to structured religious practices (Betts et al., 2023; Waggoner, 2016). However, there is still little that is known about how spirituality and/or faith influences the experiences of individuals, specifically leaders, in higher education. This gap may stem from

the secular orientation of higher education institutions (Waggoner, 2016), the dominance of one religion over others—leading to a less inclusive environment—or the lack of safe spaces where discussions of faith can occur freely. This study sought to understand the experiences of women leaders in higher education, specifically through the influence of their faith on their leadership.

### **Significance of Study**

This study was significant for several reasons. First, the importance of religion and/or spirituality, less so faith (Betts et al., 2023), has been well documented in higher education (Astin et al., 2011; Lindholm et al., 2011; Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2000; Parks, 2008). These studies have been mostly about students (Lindholm, 2006) and how staff and faculty can help facilitate students' spiritual development (Lindholm et al., 2011). In a 2023 study on student motivations, 85% of respondents expressed a desire to engage in their spiritual, religious, or faith lives while in college (Betts et al., 2023). Betts et al. (2023), Burchell et al. (2010), Love and Talbot (1999), encouraged higher education professionals to lean into conversations and programmatic activity about spirituality, religion, and faith with students and others to deepen connections with one another. Leaning into conversations and programmatic activity could involve personal reflection on one's own spirituality, religion, and faith while also challenging the acceptance of a belief that higher education is not a space for leaders and faculty to express, be influenced by, or discuss topics related to religion, spirituality, and faith (Betts et al., 2023; Bugenhagen, 2009; Burchell et al., 2010; Lindholm, 2006; Lindholm et al., 2011; Lindholm, 2014).

Second, continuing to study women leaders who are in senior leadership positions and what influences their leadership experiences is important. Women in higher education occupy senior leadership roles among the faculty, in academic and student affairs administration, and

within the cabinet—including and not limited to presidents and chancellors. Although women’s representation in the most senior leadership roles has improved over time, they continue to remain underrepresented, especially among the highest levels of higher education leadership, and continue to earn less pay (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023). For example, according to a report on American College Presidents published by the American Council on Education in 2023, 32.8% of college presidents who responded are women (Melidona et al., 2023). Most higher education degrees that are earned at all levels—bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees—are earned by women, and 60% of women make up the professional higher education workforce (Silbert & Mach Dube, 2021). In addition, faith has been cited numerous times as a factor contributing to success in women leaders (Carter, 2024; Chance, 2022; Menchaca et al., 2016; Thomas, 2024). However, there has been an absence of a deeper examination of the influence of faith on women’s leadership experiences in higher education.

Third, faith, religiosity, and/or spirituality are important to people’s lives. In a 2017 study from the Pew Research Center, 81% of Americans identified themselves as religious and/or spiritual (Lipka & Gecewicz 2017). In 2018, another study from the Pew Research Center cited “nine in ten Americans believe in a higher power” (“When Americans Say They Believe,” p. 4). Dik et al. (2024) suggest for most people, faith—including religious practices and spiritual experiences—is an integral part of human existence, and it plays a critical role in how people experience life.

Finally, the average working adult spends one third of their life or 90,000 hours engaged in their workplace or profession (“One third of your life,” 2023). In higher education, approximately 67% of full-time employees regularly work more hours than the standard full-time schedule. Additionally, 63% have assumed the responsibilities of other staff who recently left,

while 73% have taken on extra duties as a direct consequence of the pandemic (Bichsel et al., 2022). Given the significant time higher education professionals dedicate to their work, it is important to understand factors that impact their experience. Exploring the influence of faith, particularly for women leaders in higher education, provides valuable insight into their leadership practices.

In summary, this study is significant because there is minimal research on leaders in higher education and their faith (Betts et al., 2023) and more specifically an absence of research on how faith influences women leaders in higher education. Given faith, religion, and/or spirituality have been documented to be a part of most people's lives and the amount of time spent working in a lifetime, how can the influence of faith on leadership not be investigated more closely?

### **Purpose of Study and Research Question**

This research project built upon existing literature on women leaders in higher education by specifically examining how they describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. The study spoke to established literature on leadership models and women leaders in higher education and was informed by faith development theory as well. The primary research question was: How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Faith.* Faith is associated with a personal relationship with a transcendent being, a connection to others, and the promotion and maintenance of hope. Faith is deeper than a religious ritual or a singular spiritual experience (Fowler, 1981; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020).

*Religion.* Religion is a structured and organized belief system that can include specific rituals, teachings, and practices to which followers must adhere (Gschwandtner, 2021; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020; Phipps, 2003). A person's religiosity refers to their relationship with a specific doctrine (Ebstyne King et al., 2014).

*Spirituality.* Spirituality refers to a wide range of beliefs and practices that can reflect the followers' inner longing for purpose, integration of multiple identities, life meaning, and community (Fry, 2003; Gschwandtner 2021; Phipps, 2011). Spirituality can be dependent on religion, but this connection is not a requirement for the expression or practice of it (Ebstyne King et al., 2014).

*Transcendent being.* Trusted by some to be what is considered worthy enough to give their lives unity and meaning and with which there is a deeply personal relationship (Fowler, 1981). God implies a transcendent being (Milem, 2019; Newman, 2004). God can be called God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, or another name (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000, Love & Talbot, 1999, as cited in Van Cappellen et al., 2023) and therefore can be called a transcendent being.

*Women in senior leadership.* Hannum et al. (2015) and Phipps (2012) indicate a senior leadership position in higher education requires an advanced degree, and the scope of responsibility within that role is broad.

### **Researcher Positionality**

The seeds for this project were planted at least 48 years ago as a result of my mother's hopes for another child. Those seeds were watered by many deeply faithful and religious people, some I have known and some I never knew. My own relationship with faith and its influence on me personally and professionally originates from a 48-year relationship with a rich cultural identity that has been informed by an Indian American and Hindu upbringing. My relationship

with faith, for most of my life, was in the background of the experiences I was living. I did not ignore my faith or God, but I also did not often and intentionally try to connect with either.

This study is a result of a change in my awareness of faith and God that began eight years ago. I came to a point in my life where I opened myself up to consider among many other things, that a faith in something I cannot necessarily see or touch could also be operating my life. What I heard at that time and continue to hear today is, “Take a pause, listen for guidance and reflect before making a decision.” I began to be more consciously aware of developing a relationship with my faith. I have faith and believe in the humanity of people. I believe in faith’s influence over my life, and I am always eager to hear other people’s point of view on faith.

Regarding my professional career, I have had 25 years of leadership experience in higher education in several functional areas. My experiences have occurred at different levels of leadership and at both small and large universities. The challenging experiences I have encountered as a senior leader in higher education, especially in the last decade, were demanding and at times had a profound impact on my life. Despite these challenging experiences, pursuing and building a career in higher education aligns with my personal values, which stemmed from my cultural, religious, and faith traditions.

Today I consider my faith to be something that covers all aspects of who I am and how I want to live and lead. Values such as honesty, integrity, humility, and service are central to how I live my life and lead in my work. All of these life and leadership values stem from my faith, cultural traditions and the formal and informal education I have received. In recent years, when these values have been compromised, especially in my leadership role, I have called on my faith as a source of support and guidance. Conversely, when my accomplishments as a leader have been aligned with my values, I felt it necessary to give gratitude to my faith first. I have finally

arrived at a point in my professional life where it is necessary to begin a conversation on the influence of faith. This is a direct result of what I have given and received in service of higher education, through leadership.

### **Summary**

The impact and influence of women leaders is noteworthy, and much has been published on factors that influence their journey to and experience in higher education leadership. There is a strong possibility—given the aforementioned statistics of the number of people who are committed to faith, religion, and/or spirituality and how much time is actually spent working in a lifetime—that people are integrating aspects of personal faith into the workplace experience consciously and unconsciously. This study investigated how women leaders described the influence of faith on their leadership experiences in higher education. As a result, it provided deeper insight into how faith shapes their leadership experiences and is essential to understanding who they are and how they lead.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature related to how women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experience. There are two important subject matters in the research question: faith and leadership. This chapter begins with addressing the central subject of the research question, faith. To do this, information on religion, spirituality, and faith is discussed. This is followed by a discussion on leadership theories. The chapter culminates with a presentation of the current and relevant research on women leaders in higher education and the influence of religion, spirituality, and/or faith on their leadership experiences.

### **Religion, Spirituality, and Faith Defined**

Religion, spirituality, and faith have overlapping meanings and are intertwined. They are practiced and experienced in different ways depending on individual people, location, time, and surrounding events. An expression of faith can be a religious ritual that can lead to a spiritual experience. This spiritual experience can then confirm someone's faith in a religion or their spirituality (Gschwandtner, 2021). Newman (2004) explains religion and spirituality as indicators of faith. The extent of someone's faith is indicated by their practice of and/or belief in religiosity and/or spirituality. Religion is a "state of doing" (Newman, 2004, p. 106), spirituality is a "state of being" (p. 106), and faith is a "state of knowing" (p. 106). A person can move closer to or further from their religion and spirituality in a lifetime, while one's faith remains foundational to both (Newman, 2004). Dyess (2011) documents faith as serving as the foundation to understanding life and specific situations that human beings experience in their lifetime. Dyess (2011) believed that faith, like religion and spirituality, deserved a more specific

definition and exploration. Her concept of faith is discussed in more detail in the section below titled Faith Further Explored.

Before moving to additional and a more detailed discussion of faith, it is important to clearly and concisely define religion and spirituality. According to several authors, religion is a structured and organized belief system that can include specific rituals and practices to which followers must adhere (Gschwandtner, 2021; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020; Phipps, 2003). In religion, there is a belief in and worship of God (Newman, 2004; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020). One's religiosity is cultivated through an affiliation with a group of others who abide by the same or similar set of teachings, beliefs, and rituals (Ebstyn King et al., 2014; Gschwandtner, 2021).

Spirituality has a broad definition and a wide range of beliefs and practices. Spiritual beliefs can reflect the followers' inner longing for purpose, integration of multiple identities, life meaning, and community (Fry, 2003; Gschwandtner 2021; Lindholm, 2006; Phipps, 2011) and can include embodying humility, unity, and well-being (Allen et al., 2023; Cregard, 2017; Dancy, 2010; Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Parks (2008) further amplified the vastness of spirituality; spirituality can evoke feelings of being "moved" to "outrage" (p. 4). Spiritual practices can encompass acts like prayer, church affiliation and attendance, and scripture reading (Allen et al., 2023). Spirituality is more inclusive and broader than religion (Dancy, 2010; Lindholm, 2006; Salinas et al., 2018) and can encompass aspects of more than one religion at one time (Reave, 2005). A connection to a transcendent being, for example God, is not required; rather it is optional (Allen et al., 2023; Gschwandtner 2021; Phipps, 2011) and is informed by personal identity, values, and behavior (Dancy, 2010; Salinas et al., 2018).

In this study, the specific term *faith* is used instead of religion and spirituality. The following discussion will define faith, as used in this study, and include details on how the definition of a transcendent being, which is a critical part of the definition, was determined.

The literature on faith is expansive and offers several related definitions that ultimately inform how faith is defined for the study. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines faith as a “belief and trust in and loyalty to God; belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion; firm belief in something for which there is no proof; complete trust; something that is believed especially with strong conviction.” Gschwandtner (2021) and Newman (2004) offer several more descriptions of faith. These authors see faith as a commitment to a person, a religious group, and a set of religious beliefs and rituals.

In his first book, *Stages of Faith, The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Fowler (1981) developed a definition of faith and outlined the stages of faith development. The stages of faith are briefly discussed in the section titled Faith and Related Literature Further Explored. According to Fowler, faith is the attempt to make meaning out of life, which he describes as something humans are doing from birth. Faith is a verb, it is relational; it is a commitment to a transcendent center of value and power.

“Faith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence” (Fowler, 1981, p. 14) and “should be understood as trust in another and as loyalty to a transcendent center of value and power” (p.14).

Fowler’s use of the phrase “transcendent center of value and power” (p. 14) comes from his readings of Paul Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr, and his teacher and colleague, Wilfred Cantwell Smith. According to Fowler (1981), Tillich, Niebuhr and Smith define the transcendent center of value and power as the thing we trust to be “worthy [of giving] our lives unity and meaning” (p.

5). Faith is how we respond to transcendent value and power individually or as a group. It is about responding to one another with kindness and a willingness to be helpful. Faith is about experiencing life's highs and lows with a consistent and stable response. Fowler's definition here is akin to how Newman (2004) describes faith as the foundation for religion and spirituality, meaning a consistent and stable response that requires a solid foundation.

Fowler outlines three faith-identity relations to the transcendent value and power. First, there is the polytheist. The polytheist has interests in many small centers of value and power. A polytheist can be many things and have many commitments. Second, there is the henotheistic. The henotheistic invests in one transcendent center of value and power. This could mean a commitment to one's professional identity—for example, doctor, minister, or teacher. The professional identity is what the person knows themselves to be and is at the forefront of their identity. The focused commitment of a henotheistic could also mean being in service to a particular cause or institution. These can be noble and important commitments but ultimately are limited and have boundaries like time or rules. Finally, there is the monotheistic, which is the most relevant to this study. Traditionally monotheism is understood as a belief in one God; however, Fowler defines it differently. Fowler calls it radical monotheism and describes it as a principled way of being in the world. Radical monotheism is a personal or group relationship with a transcendent center of values and power which is not fleeting (polytheist) and does not stem from ego or a particular cause that someone believes in or is committed to for the moment (henotheistic).

### *Transcendent Being Defined*

In this study, a belief in a transcendent being is a part of the definition of faith. In an article aimed at distinguishing faith, religion, and spirituality, authors Paul Victor and Treschuk

(2020) suggest faith as deeper than a religious ritual or a singular spiritual experience. They propose that faith is associated with a personal relationship with a transcendent being, a connection to others, and the promotion of hope. In a study about faith in the lives of African Americans, transcendent being was referred to as a force and defined as God, spirits and/or one's ancestors (Mattis & Grayman-Simpson, 2013). Love & Talbot (1999) suggest that the transcendent could be a power or energy and related to an organized religion or not. Milem (2019) and Newman (2004) suggest the term *God* implies a transcendent being. Emmons and Crumpler (2000), as cited in Van Cappellen et al. (2023), explain that God can be called, for example, God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, or another name. In seeking transcendence, all aspects of someone's life is influenced by this being often, but not always referred to as God (Ebstyn King et al., 2014; Mattis & Grayman-Simpson, 2013).

As previously mentioned, Tillich, Niebuhr, and Smith, according to Fowler (1981), define the transcendent center of value and power as the thing we trust to be worthy of giving our lives unity and meaning. Therefore it is this transcendent being (Milem, 2019; Newman, 2004), God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, and/or a being by another name (Van Cappellen et al., 2023), that is trusted by some to be what is considered worthy enough to give their lives unity and meaning and with which there is a deeply personal relationship (Fowler, 1981).

In summary, faith is deeper than a religious ritual or a singular spiritual experience (Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020). The knowing of faith comes from a relationship with others; it comes through a search to find meaning in the world and connection to transcendence (Fowler, 1981; Newman, 2004). Alignment with a transcendent being is a representation of someone's faith (Fowler, 1981). Ultimately the proposed study defines faith as being associated with a personal

relationship with a transcendent being, a connection to others, and the promotion of hope (Milem, 2019; Newman, 2004; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020).

### **Faith and Related Literature, Further Explored**

As previously noted, the literature on faith as it would relate to this study, is limited while literature on the adjacent subjects of spirituality and religion, especially among students, is more accessible. The inclusion of additional relevant literature on spirituality among students and faculty and on faith is relevant to laying the foundation for this study and discussed below.

In response to an absence of student development theory that included the exploration of spirituality, Love and Talbot (1999), wrote “Defining Spiritual Development: A Missing Consideration in Student Affairs.” The purpose of this article was to elevate the conversation on spirituality in the field of student affairs and in regards to student development. Through their research they outlined a definition for spiritual development that included five “propositions” (p. 364), in no specific order. They include, 1) searching for personal authenticity and wholeness, 2) transcending the self, 3) connecting to self and others, 4) finding meaning and purpose, and 5) relating to the transcendent (Love & Talbot, 1999; Waggoner, 2016).

1. “Searching for personal authenticity” refers to finding consistency and congruence in one’s existence.
2. “Transcending the self” means identifying your limits and then challenging yourself to move even further beyond them. Transcending encourages being introspective and identifying ways to improve oneself.
3. “Connecting to self and others” refers to living and working in a community. Spirituality is personal but to fully experience and benefit from it one must be active in meaningful relationships with others.

4. “Finding meaning and purpose” is accomplished through gaining knowledge, applying what is learned and then reassessing. A commitment to this process encourages continuous growth for betterment.
5. “Spiritual development” requires being open to developing a relationship with something that is perhaps unknown or even unseen by human beings. It could be a power or an energy; in some religious traditions it is referred to as God.

Love and Talbot (1999) concluded, to support students’ spiritual development, professionals in higher education must also explore their own connection to spirituality. This conclusion was echoed by Chickering et al. (2006):

“As we seek to strengthen authenticity, spirituality, meaning and purpose in higher education, we need to encourage our administrators, faculty, student affairs professionals, and students to become true leaders through living their own visions for amplifying our institutional environments” (p. 253).

This includes being introspective about the meaning of one’s life and work. Being a knowledgeable source of support might also require formal training related to spiritual development (Love & Talbot, 1999).

Important studies out of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Higher Education Research Institute by Alexander and Helen Astin and Jennifer Lindholm from 2003-2009 examined the importance of spirituality in the lives of young adults (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Waggoner, 2016). Specifically, the study sought to better understand how and to what extent spirituality showed up in the lives of students. In this study, spirituality was defined as “experiences that help provide meaning for life and frameworks for moral interactions with fellow humans” (Waggoner, 2016, p.148). From the UCLA study five domains of spirituality among college students were discovered: equanimity, spiritual quest, ethic of caring, charitable involvement, and ecumenical worldview (Waggoner, 2016). The benefits of spiritual

development during college included increased satisfaction with the collegiate experience, better academic performance, and overall better mental health (Astin et al., 2011).

The UCLA Higher Education Research Institute also studied faculty and recognized the importance of learning about their spirituality given the role they play in students' overall development (Lindholm, 2014). Faculty members serve as leaders in their classroom, academic departments, and within university administration. They encourage exploration and self-reflection while modeling respectful dialogue that comes with alternative viewpoints (Waggoner, 2016). The study found more than 80% of faculty respondents saying their professional and spiritual lives were "somewhat" (Lindholm, 2014, p. 202) integrated, and their work in higher education was a calling (Waggoner, 2016).

Specifically understanding various aspects of faith and faith development was considered an important exercise of laying the groundwork with the nine participants in the current study. Discussing participants' origins of faith and their faith development helped build rapport, creating a seamless transition to addressing the interview questions and establishing a foundation for understanding how they describe faith's influence on their leadership experiences.

#### *James Fowler's Stages of Faith Development*

In *Stages of Faith, The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Fowler (1981) outlined the stages of faith development and detailed six stages of faith development happening across one's lifetime. His work was influenced by Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erickson, and Jean Piaget, all significant scholars and theorists who have researched and written extensively about the stages of life development (Fowler, 1981). Over the course of eight years, Fowler and his colleagues conducted interviews with 359 individuals, mostly White, "evenly divided by sex" (p. 317), and who ranged in age from 3.5 to 84. The interviewees were

of mostly diverse Christian backgrounds; however, there were some individuals who identified as Jewish, Agnostic, and Atheist (Fowler, 1981).

The six stages of faith development, in order, are intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith. Before stages one through six, Fowler (1981) outlined one additional stage which he called the “pre-stage,” titled infancy and undifferentiated faith. At this pre-stage, faith is found in how the infant puts their trust in the person(s) giving them love and care. The pre-stage is followed by stage one, called intuitive-projective faith, usually presenting itself from ages three to seven. In this stage of life, children are self-aware and more specifically egocentric. Images and understanding of God come from pictures and stories. Stage two, the mythic-literal faith—age six/seven to 10—is where individuals have a literal understanding of what they see and hear. At this stage, individuals are also focused on fairness (all things equal) and/or right or wrong. Individuals reach stage three, the synthetic-conventional faith, around the time of puberty. In this stage, individuals have collected values from faith but likely have not spent time reflecting on what those values really mean. According to Fowler (1981), people can stay in this stage through adulthood without further developing. Remaining in a stage with no further development applies to the next three stages as well. In stage four, the individuative-reflective faith, the person is experiencing and owning individual thought, maybe even to the point of a reemerging self-centeredness. There is less focus on being a part of a group for the purpose of needing affirmation. At this stage, people begin to question what they know and believe about faith. In stage five, conjunctive faith, one is maybe middle-aged. There is a confidence in what is valued and believed to be true. This gives rise to curiosity about other faith beliefs and traditions without feeling like their own beliefs are compromised or under attack. In stage five, there is a

strong awareness of other-people, beliefs, ritual, pain, destruction, but there is also a sense of self-preservation. According to Fowler (1981), stage six—universalizing faith—is reached by only a select few. Fowler suggested Dr. Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa as examples. People in stage six have a “...radical commitment to justice and love and of selfless passion for a transformed world, a world made over not in their images, but in accordance with an intentionality both divine and transcendent” (Fowler, 1981, p. 201). Fowler makes it a point to emphasize that reaching this stage does not mean someone is perfect; rather they have risen from struggle and are working for and committed to a plan God has laid out to follow.

### *Dyess' Attributes of Faith*

Dyess' research (2011) in the field of nursing education, clinical practice, and leadership argued that faith deserves a clear definition and elevated its importance and distinctiveness to the level of religion and spirituality. She identified four attributes of faith: “focusing on beliefs; foundational meaning for life; living authentically in accordance with beliefs; and interrelating with self, others and/or Divine” (pg. 2723). These attributes were identified through the review of related literature and revisiting and performing secondary analysis of patient interview data from previous studies.

Attribute one, focusing on beliefs, referred to what participants believed about what they were doing and/or thinking and their belief in feelings of hope, trust, and/or perseverance. The second attribute, foundational meaning for life, represents the core beliefs that serve as the basis for one's existence. The third attribute, living authentically, means actively living out the foundational beliefs. Finally, the fourth attribute is interrelating with self, others, and/or Divine. For some, the interrelatedness was with God, while for others it was with their community of family and friends. Dyess concluded that faith is related to and different from spirituality and

religion and can be experienced individually, with community, and with or without a relationship with God.

## **Leadership Theories**

Initially, leadership studies focused only on the leader; most often that leader was a man in a corporate setting in the United States. Today, leadership theories focus not only on leaders but also on their peers, superiors, and followers. These theories also look at context and at leaders across various organizations and systems, both private and public, and across the world (Avolio et al., 2009). There are many leadership theories, and those that currently exist are evolving simultaneously as new ones are being created. The literature review for this study would be incomplete without discussion of leadership theories and models relevant to the research question.

### *Great Man Theory*

Thomas Carlyle's public presentations in 1840 focused on heroes (masculine) and how they (men) shaped and influenced all of history, and they were brought together in a single publication entitled *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. The Great Man theory emerged (Spector, 2016) from Carlyle's work. The Great Man theory is squarely focused on men and masculinity and is heavily influenced by Carlyle's Calvinist upbringing. According to this theory, the role of those not anointed to lead is to uplift and obey the leaders (Spector, 2016). Given the obvious omission of women and of most other men from this theoretical perspective, one might think this theory (or at least most aspects of it) has been eliminated from more contemporary portrayals of leaders and that it is no longer included in the discussion of leadership among theorists and practitioners. This, however, is not the case since men occupy

most significant leadership roles and create the content of many leadership theories. Both practitioners and theorists echo aspects of Carlyle's thinking (Mouton, 2019).

### *Spiritual Leadership*

One of the most widely known models of spiritual leadership was developed by Louis W. Fry. Fry defines "spiritual leadership as comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership" (Fry, 2003, p. 694). Fry describes spiritual leadership as the leader's vision and values coming together to foster individuality among constituents. When leaders express their vision and values together, their team is more empowered, engaged, and dedicated to ensuring productivity across the organization (Fry, 2003). Fry insists that the fundamental needs of leaders and followers are important.

According to Fry, spiritual leadership has two requirements. First, there must be a vision in place where leaders and members feel a sense of calling to make a difference, thereby causing their life to have meaning. Second, the organizational culture must embrace love; leaders and followers must care for themselves and each other. When the aforementioned two conditions exist, this creates a sense of belonging and a desire for active membership; people feel valued and understood (Fry, 2003).

Spirituality in Fry's spiritual leadership theory is broadly defined in that people could associate with a specific religion or god, but it is not required. Spiritual leadership encompasses a wide variety of practices including but not limited to prayer, yoga, meditation, journaling, and mindfulness. Spirituality is dynamic and broadly inclusive; when defined this way it seems to be more acceptable to talk about and include in the workplace and in discussions about leadership

theory (Fry, 2003). Spirituality in the workplace is being given more space to grow and expand, and the workforce is in a mode of spiritual survival (Fry, 2003).

Fry's theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing spiritual leadership. Fry's broad interpretation of spirituality suggests that a belief in God may or may not be present. In the current study, a belief in a transcendent being is a cornerstone.

### *Spiritual Leadership in Practice*

Spiritual leadership is inclusive of religious beliefs and practices and “ethics and values based approaches to leadership” (Fry, 2003, p. 693). Below is a synthesis of studies referencing spiritual leadership. Despite spirituality being broadly defined, in the studies below there is a strong reference to faith and faith derived from religion.

Allen et al. (2023) examined how “spirituality” empowered 15 Black male student leaders at colleges and universities in the state of Florida. Using Fry's spiritual leadership theory as a theoretical framework, they explained how collegiate Black male student leaders made meaning of their spirituality while serving in leadership roles. Spirituality is a common cultural value in the African American community (Allen et al., 2023; Wood & Hilton, 2012; McGuire, 2019). As a psychological response to hundreds of years of mental and physical abuse and longstanding systemic oppression and racism, African and African American people have centered spiritual and religious engagement within the culture as one way of feeling secure and safe and in hopes of reaching salvation (Wheeler et al., 2002).

This study examined how the student leaders communicated their vision, expressed altruistic love, and used their belief in faith/hope (Fry, 2003), all components of how they led their student organizations (Allen et al., 2023). There were three specific findings from this study. First, for these student leaders spirituality was both motivation and strength; they used

their spirituality to work through challenges, including those brought on by their leadership roles, and felt empowered in their leadership roles. The participants explained how faith kept them going and was the one thing they could rely on as a source of comfort and motivation.

Participants felt that without centering spirituality and faith, they would not be able to overcome the challenges of life and would perhaps live out the stereotypes associated with being a Black man (Allen et al., 2023).

Second, spirituality referred to a “personal relationship with God” (Allen et al., 2023, p. 398). Although not necessarily associated with a specific religious practice, 13 of the 15 participants indicated that their spirituality was informed by Christianity. Religion was often described as structured, associated with specific Christian denominations like Catholic or Baptist, and linked to places like a church. Most participants agreed that their spirituality stemmed from an organized religion (Allen et al., 2023).

Finally, the study revealed that it is a burden for Black male leaders to be Black. This identified burden is not a part of spiritual faith, but it speaks more to who the participants were; it can provide more context for how they use their spiritual faith in leadership (Allen et al., 2023). Being part of a racialized group added more challenge to additional life pursuits like a leadership role. Some participants described how the challenges they faced as a leader could not be separated—either by others or sometimes by themselves—from their Black male identity, but they had their spirituality, faith, and God to guide and support them in dealing with those challenges (Allen et al., 2023).

As seen in the previous study, there is evidence that supports the positive influence of spiritual leadership; however, there are some evidence-based risks that have also been identified. Cregard (2017) collected qualitative data through focus groups, interviews, participant

observations and document analysis. The study was conducted at a Catholic abbey for nuns in Sweden and the main research question was “What are the risks of spiritual leadership in the leader–follower context of organizational operations?” (pg. 534). The researcher found two risks of spiritual leadership. First, spiritual leadership requires a great deal of emotional labor which can lead to the sacrifice of time and resources. Emotional labor is one of two required components of spiritual leadership and refers to the expression of love, compassion and grace for others (Cregard, 2017; Fry, 2003). The expression of boundless emotion for others coupled with the sacrifice of time and resources as a result of considerable responsibility can make a leader feel strained. In this study, the leader of the abbey, the abbess, offered endless emotional support and took on more responsibility than the nuns so they could focus their attention on God.

Second, spiritual leadership requires a leader to set a vision that inspires a calling among followers (Fry, 2003). The second risk of spiritual leadership identified in this study was the structured approach of the leader. A leader who inspires a visionary calling to work can sometimes find it challenging to compromise or function outside of the established structure of an organization. This could also lead to setting a standard of expectations that are too high for followers within the organization to achieve. In Cregard’s (2017) study, the abbess followed the doctrine of the Catholic faith closely and expressed a level of rigidity in her duties to meet the expectations of her long-standing role in the abbey.

### *Servant Leadership*

Servant leadership was first introduced by Robert Greenleaf in his 1970 essay “The Servant as Leader.” Servant leadership centers the leader as being in service to the followers. The leader is a servant first. Greenleaf’s idea of the servant leader came from reading Hermann Hesse’s “Journey to the East” (Spears, 1996). In this story, a group of men are traveling together;

no specific destination is mentioned. Among them is a man named Leo who becomes an integral part of the group. He does chores for the men and also supports the men through his positive outlook, songs, and enthusiasm. Leo's presence among the men is comforting. When Leo disappears from the group, his absence has a profound impact. The group of men cannot seem to function without Leo. They disagree about how to navigate the journey, and tension mounts between them. As a result, the men cannot sustain their journey and it comes to an end. Years later, one of the men in the group finds Leo and learns he is actually the leader of the "Order" that sponsored the original journey the group of men took (Greenleaf, 2014).

To Greenleaf, the main takeaway from the story was that Leo was a servant first. Leo took care of each person's needs on the journey; he was in complete service to his fellow travelers. When Leo disappears, the group cannot fend for themselves and the journey ends as a failure. Leo led the men with a heart of service rather than the leader role that had been bestowed upon him.

Servant leaders prioritize the well-being and development of their followers. They create a culture of empathy, humility, and community service. They take a holistic approach to leading (Eva et al., 2019), the inverse of the traditional top-down pyramid image which depicts followers at the bottom and leaders at the top (Dhiman & Roberts, 2023).

Spears (2021) listed ten characteristics of a servant leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and building community. Below is a brief description of each characteristic as stated in the foreword by Spears (2023) in *The Palgrave Handbook of Servant Leadership*:

1. Listening: Servant leaders listen with intention and seek to learn the will of the group they are a part of leading. Deep personal reflection, listening to one's inner voice, is a unique attribute of a servant leader.
2. Empathy: Servant leaders attempt to recognize the uniqueness of each follower. They acknowledge people's desire to be seen and recognized. Servant leaders are empathic listeners.
3. Healing: Servant leaders are cognizant of the healing that is required within themselves and others. They create space for everyone to heal from past and present challenges and recognize that personal struggles can impact one's performance.
4. Awareness: Servant leaders are strengthened through their deep self-awareness. In being aware, servant leaders are not turning inward; rather, they welcome the disruption that can be associated with recognizing challenges. This disruption can give rise to growth.
5. Persuasion: Servant leaders seek to influence others instead of relying on their authoritative position to order people into complying. Servant leaders collaborate and build consensus.
6. Conceptualization: Servant leaders embrace dreaming and use those dreams to think broadly about the needs and future of their organizations. They bring together abstract ideas and current practices to advance the organization and their team.
7. Foresight: Foresight and conceptualization are closely related. Servant leaders take the time to learn the lessons of the past, assess the present realities, and

anticipate the future consequences of decisions. These practices allow a leader and team to see future possibilities while addressing the current needs of the organization.

8. Stewardship: Servant leaders inspire others to embrace their organizations in a way that holds it safely for others in the future. Being a good steward now can ensure an organization's sustainability for the future.
9. Commitment: Servant leaders see the contributions of the people around them to the organization and value their contributions and strengths that fall outside of the needs of the organization. Servant leaders are committed to nurturing personal and professional growth in each person.
10. Building Community: A sense of community can be lost when an organization or team grows. Servant leaders believe community can be created and sustained among small and large groups. Building a community requires that each individual exhibits various characteristics of servant leadership (Dhiman & Roberts, 2023, foreword by Spears, p. ix).

McDaniel (2023) outlines several criticisms of servant leadership. Criticisms of servant leadership range from simple to more complex. For example, a simple critique involves the use of the word "servant" and how it can be akin to the word "slave," which is offensive. The difference is that the word servant in servant leadership refers to a way of being, while the word slave implies that a being has been assigned a specific role. A second criticism is that servant leaders might be more easily manipulated or taken advantage of by followers who are corrupt, unethical, or without good intentions. A third criticism is that leaders must have a specific religious foundation in order to be a servant leader. Though the five major world religions cite

being in service to others as a core leadership attribute, an explicit religious connection is not required. In fact, other leadership models (discussed below) also present attributes that are common across most religions and do not require a leader to be religiously connected. Finally, a more complex criticism examines the role of the servant leader. By definition, a leader directs while followers actually perform the service of advancing an organization or community through their specific tasks and work. The question then is what service is a leader offering? Servant leaders center people first. They aim to learn about what motivates followers, they provide steady and strong support systems for followers to succeed, and they express care and concern for the well-being of followers. Servant leaders serve their followers, while followers serve their organization; it is a cyclical relationship.

#### *Servant Leadership in Practice*

A number of studies utilizing servant leadership have examined different populations of leaders in higher education including students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Servant leadership in higher education has been analyzed in the context of presidential leadership, crisis management, student development, teaching, community outreach, and research within specific departments or units. Four studies utilizing the servant leadership model are presented below, one each centering students and faculty and two focused on administrative leaders in higher education.

In 2014, a qualitative study described how the ten characteristics of servant leadership (Dhiman & Roberts, 2023; Spears, 2021) could be implemented into collegiate recovery programs (CRP) to address the needs of students recovering from addiction (Thompson, 2014). Recovery programs are built on providing support through service, humility, and community, and the central value of servant leadership is to be in service to others. This study outlined how each

of the ten characteristics of servant leadership could be implemented into CRP and how doing so would be beneficial to students' recovery. For example, regarding one of the characteristics of servant leadership, the researcher suggested asking students who are in a recovery program how and where they would like to establish leadership opportunities. Engaging them in a conversation and the implementation of these leadership opportunities would be following the servant leadership characteristic of conceptualization (Thompson, 2014). In the foreword of *The Palgrave Handbook of Servant Leadership* (Dhiman & Roberts, 2023), Spears (2023) describes conceptualization as bringing ideas and dreams together and putting them into practice. Thompson (2014) suggested engaging students in idea sharing also creates space for listening, expressing empathy, and overall contributes to the building of community, all characteristics of servant leadership (Spears, 2023). This is especially important and can be beneficial to a group of individuals who are going through the process of recovery and who require support from one another for success.

AlShammari et al. (2019) suggested that a teacher who first cares to serve before being a leader can develop a more healthy, wise, and independent student. Students who feel cared for and intellectually challenged are given a strong foundation to safely fail and succeed. According to AlShammari et al., a servant leader teacher is a content expert and a leader in the educational setting and broader community. In their 2019 quantitative study, the authors investigated how undergraduate students perceived the leadership traits of their faculty (AlShammari et al., 2019). The researchers administered the Servant-Leadership Assessment Instrument (SALI) developed by Robertst Dennis and Mihai Bocarnea to 789 undergraduate students at a private American university in Kuwait. Seven servant leadership constructs are measured in the SLAI: agape love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, serving, and empowerment. The students rated agape love,

empowerment, serving, and trust as the highest and most visible characteristics of servant leaders among the faculty.

A 2022 quantitative study (Al-Asfour et al.) explored leaders' servant leadership behaviors and their readiness to address the COVID-19 pandemic at institutions of higher education in the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged leaders like no other event in recent history. Leaders moved learning to online platforms in a matter of days, shut down residence halls, canceled major events—all while attempting to address significant financial implications. The attributes of servant leadership were identified as necessary to manage organizations and teams during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Al-Asfour (2022) explored three research questions in this study:

- “What is the HEI officials’ level of readiness for the COVID-19 pandemic?”
- Does the officials’ level of readiness for the COVID-19 pandemic vary based on the type of institutions?
- Do the servant leadership behaviors predict HEI officials’ level of readiness to COVID-19 pandemic?” (p. 6).

Data for this study were collected from senior leaders including presidents from community colleges, minority-serving institutions, and mainstream higher education institutions. The number of participants was 348. A majority of the participants, 58.9%, identified as male (the assumption is that 41% of participants identified as women, though this was not reported in the article). Regarding experience, 52.6% had 1-10 years of experience, 36.5% and 10.9% had 11-20 and greater than 21 years of experience respectively. Of the participants, 92.5% held a Ph.D. degree. Participants took a two-part questionnaire. The first part asked about demographic

data, and the second part included items for measuring servant and crisis leadership readiness (Al-Asfour et al., 2022).

To measure servant leadership, the researchers used Barbuto and Wheeler's servant leadership questionnaire (SLQ), designed in 2006. The SLQ is designed to measure the frequency with which an individual believes they exhibit servant-leader qualities (altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship) (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

Readiness to respond to a crisis was evaluated using the Crisis Leadership Survey (CLS). The CLS was developed by the Center for Creative Leadership. CLS scores fall into four groups. Those leaders that score in the top quartile are described as "leading the way," meaning they have the necessary qualities to successfully lead during a crisis. In the second quartile, leaders are described as being "on the right path." These leaders may require some additional support to be fully effective at leading during a crisis. The third quartile is titled "ready for a map." These leaders have some strong leadership qualities but require development in most areas of their leadership. Finally, the fourth quartile is titled "unprepared for the journey." This group of leaders requires a plan to improve and develop their leadership skills and traits.

Just over half of the research participants (50.9%) were in the "ready for a map" quartile which requires additional support in order to be fully effective in leading during a crisis. Only 3.2% of the research participants were in the "leading the way" quartile; these are considered top performers. There were no significant differences between the leaders based on the three institutional groups they represented. Finally, there was a strong positive correlation between the servant leadership behaviors (altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping,

and organizational stewardship) as measured by the CLS and leaders' level of readiness to address the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Al-Asfour et al., 2022).

In a 2023 study, researchers examined why leaders want to serve and lead Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the context of the servant leadership framework (Gasman et al., 2023). The specific research question was "What motivates Black leaders to pursue presidencies of HBCUs?" (p. 641). Twenty-six interviews were conducted with aspiring leaders who want to lead HBCUs. No other specific data was given about the participants to fully protect their identities.

The servant leadership framework was used for two reasons. The first reason was that each of these 26 leaders participated in a presidential leadership development program that was constructed around the servant leadership framework where participants were selected using a servant leadership inventory. The second reason is that previous research on HBCU presidents shows their commitment to service first, especially serving students who attend HBCUs. Furthermore, the attributes outlined by Spears (2021) align with the findings in this study as to what kinds of leaders want to serve and lead HBCUs.

The researchers used a qualitative approach by conducting and analyzing 26 individual interviews. The interview questions asked about personal motivation and aspirations that would lead them to the role of president of an HBCU. Three major themes emerged from the interviews; these themes speak to one or more of the servant leader attributes outlined previously. First, participants had strong feelings in support of the unique mission of an HBCU, and being a product of an HBCU only increased those feelings of wanting to serve these institutions and their constituents in the role of president. This theme speaks to the commitment and community-building attributes of servant leadership. Second, participants wanted to give

themselves to be in service to those most in need, for example, students of color and under-resourced students, both of which HBCUs attract in high numbers. This is another illustration of the servant leader attribute of commitment. The last theme centered on the participants' dedication to keeping HBCUs as a meaningful and real option for future learners. This speaks to the servant leadership attribute of stewardship. Ensuring the future of this kind of institution of higher education is particularly important, especially given the increased development of diverse educational opportunities in higher education that seek to attract the same kinds of learners as do HBCUs.

Spiritual and Servant Leadership present characteristics that are more obviously recognizable and related to the discussion of faith and therefore speak more directly to the purpose of this study. There are other leadership models that are also important to discuss and present potential faith-related components. Below is a brief discussion of authentic, transformational, and shared leadership.

### *Authentic Leadership*

Authentic leadership theory was presented first by Bill George in 2003 in his book *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (Leavy, 2023). Authentic leadership encourages leaders to be open and transparent (Avolio et al., 2009). This leadership theory is grounded in ethical behavior and seeks the input of followers. Four components of authentic leadership are: balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and self-awareness (Gardner et al., 2021). Balanced processing refers to how information is shared between leaders and followers without being defensive. Information is shared openly and without bias when possible. Internalized moral perspective refers to leaders having a centered and strong moral compass within themselves. Authentic leaders who have a

strong moral compass are less likely to impose their will on followers and more likely to work from a place of having respect for all. Relational transparency refers to the leader intentionally engaging in relationship-building with followers. This includes building mutual trust, whereby a foundation for an open exchange of information is established. Finally, self-awareness refers to leaders knowing themselves and their own values and then behaving in a way that matches those values on a consistent basis. “Authentic” leaders lead through the discovery of their own values that have been developed through their life experiences. Authentic leaders know themselves deeply and remain true to their values and beliefs (Leavy, 2023).

### *Transformational Leadership*

Transformational leadership was introduced by James V. Downton in 1973 and further developed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003).

Transformational leadership theory (Avolio et al., 2009; Owusu-Agyeman, 2021) focuses on inspiring followers to achieve goals that extend beyond their own self-interests. There are four main themes associated with transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Mbindyo et al., 2021).

Transformational leaders possess charisma, which helps to inspire and motivate followers. They challenge their followers yet encourage them towards reaching a shared goal(s). Idealized influence refers to the leader’s ability to communicate a vision and to inspire people to embrace that vision. Often transformational leaders are seen as role models because of their ability to positively influence followers. Individualized consideration refers to how transformational leaders appreciate and elevate the unique attributes of their followers. They mentor their followers and support their professional development. Transformational leaders listen intently and are considered empathetic to the needs of their followers. Finally, intellectual stimulation is

when transformational leaders encourage followers to challenge existing ideas, think critically, be creative, and question assumptions. Transformational leaders empower followers to solve problems creatively and to become agents of change.

A criticism of transformational leadership is that it does not allow for individuals to work outside of group goals or to consider individual circumstances. One study reported a relationship between a histrionic personality and transformational leadership (Khoo & Burch, 2008). This kind of a personality could lead to the emotional manipulation of followers (McDaniel, 2023).

#### *Shared, Collective, or Distributed Leadership*

No one source can be credited for the development of shared, collective, or distributed leadership theory. Shared, collective, or distributed leadership (Avolio et al., 2009) has emerged with hierarchical structures being challenged. This theory seeks to center the team and their process of working together to achieve stated goals. Pearce and Conger (2003) defined shared leadership as leaders and followers influencing one another to achieve stated goals; their relationship with one another is dynamic and interactive. This is further echoed by Pearce et al. (2018) stating that a combination of top-down and shared leadership is required for public institutions of higher education to survive. However, criticism of shared leadership posits that—if managed incorrectly or inappropriately—it can lead to ambiguity, lack of accountability, unintended power dynamics, and, inevitably, poor outcomes (Evans et al., 2021).

#### **Women Leaders in Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education are complex organizations that function based on their history, mission, and the impact they experience from current events. Complex organizations require leaders who are nimble and possess a wide variety of attributes. Some scholars suggest that women are most equipped to lead these kinds of complex institutions (Ritt, 2017).

Since the 1970's, the general landscape of women in higher education, in terms of student representation, has had a positive outlook. The increase in female college students has also led to gains in the representation of women in a variety of professional fields, including senior leadership positions in higher education. However, roughly only one in five senior-level leaders in education are female (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023). When the data are further disaggregated, there is even less representation of women of color in the most senior levels of leadership (Hannum et al., 2015). Six studies are discussed below; they pertain to the barriers facing women who are pursuing and/or in senior level leadership positions and their sources of support, the intersection of race and gender as a senior level leader, and motivations to pursue higher levels of leadership.

In a 2015 study, researchers (Hannum et al., 2015), sought to better understand the experiences of women in senior leadership positions and the barriers they faced in reaching those positions. They presented four research questions:

- “First, what barriers or sources of discouragement do senior women leaders identify as obstacles faced on their journey to leadership roles?
- Second, what sources of encouragement and support do senior women leaders identify as important to their success?
- Third, what are the negative aspects of being in a senior leadership role?
- Fourth, what are the positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role?” (p. 67).

The study used semi-structured interviews with 37 senior-level women leaders at institutions of higher education in the United States. All participants had earned a doctorate degree and held such offices as President, Chancellor, Vice President, Vice Chancellor, Provost, Chief Diversity Officer, or Dean.

Responses to question one about barriers to leadership included different expectations for men and women, discouragement and sabotage, lack of opportunity and support, and not having a leadership identity. Forty-six percent of women in the sample shared stories that were coded within the sub-theme of not having a leadership identity. These women were intentionally limiting themselves because they could not see themselves in a leadership role or serving authentically in that role. In another study by Commodore (2019), barriers to serving authentically were also highlighted among Black women leaders who aspire to become college presidents of historically black colleges and universities.

In response to the second question about support structures for leadership, sub-themes such as formal leadership development, early leadership experiences, encouragement and support, and having a role model were included. The sub-themes that emerged from the third question about negative aspects of being in a senior leadership included scrutiny and criticism, time demands of the job, pressure of ultimate accountability, broad scope of the job, isolation, and not fitting in/not being heard. Finally, the sub-themes that emerged from the fourth question about the positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role included having an influence, making an impact, broad scope of the job, power, authority, and autonomy, and being a role model.

There were several important outcomes of the Hannum et al. (2015) study. First, the women in this study provided more detailed descriptions of the positive experiences of being in a senior leadership role. Bringing attention to the positive experiences can serve as encouragement for future senior women leaders, given there is much more on the negative aspects of leadership being reported. Second, leadership development programs and initiatives should have a focus on promoting confidence and comfort with exercising authority. Third, as previously mentioned, the

sub-theme of not having a leadership identity, within the first main theme of barriers to leadership, was used to code stories of women intentionally limiting themselves because they could not see themselves in a leadership role or serving authentically in that role.

A more recent study (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023) specifically focused on the intersection of race and gender for Black women in senior level leadership roles. The purpose of the study was to understand the leadership journeys of the participants. The authors answered the following question: “How have the racial and gender identities of Black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?” (p. 297). The four Black women participants shared how their professional relationships, early experiences, and their decisions, related to their growth into educational professionals. A second part of this study examined the participants’ successes, barriers, and other related experiences on their path to and in their current leadership positions. In addition, the researchers gathered information on lessons learned from the four leaders and the advice they would share with others to navigate the pathway to senior leadership. Five themes emerged from conversations with the participants. The first theme related to how the participants shared similar experiences and characteristics that set them apart. For example, they had early life experiences where they were doubted and/or treated differently by people in positions of power (teachers) because of the participants’ racial and gender identities. This led to them feeling “different” (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023, p. 304) from others around them. The second related theme was community, broadly defined, and how it is critical to their success as a senior level leader. Community included family, friends, mentors, and colleagues. One participant described a group of women friends as a “real blessing” (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023, p. 305) in her life. The third theme was resilience, and it emerged from the diverse life experiences the leaders went through on their journey to leadership. Despite

their challenges, including how they were treated and perceived, they responded to a “call to lead” (p. 306). The fourth theme, perseverance, came through from the participants’ stories about their current leadership experiences. They spoke of being steadfast in the face of inequities, role modeling for others, and following through on the commitment they made to be in their leadership roles. Finally, the fifth theme—the price they paid or continue to pay—refers to the additional cost to achieve success. Despite the expected challenges that exist with the pursuit of an opportunity and the subsequent achievement, there exists additional costs. For example, senior level leadership, for Black women in this study, came with added stress and more competition for resources. They also felt the need to continue to have to prove themselves capable and worthy despite past evidence of success.

Spirituality and faith can be a source of support in times of adversity. This was more specifically cited in another study about Black women and intersecting identities. The experiences of nine Black women in higher education leadership roles were the subject of a study that specifically explored how intersectionality, stereotype threat, and tokenism are navigated and addressed (Chance, 2022). The results suggested Black women leaders in higher education often have to manage the intersection of multiple marginalized identities including but not limited to race, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Over time, the stereotypes associated with these identities can become what someone actually believes about themselves, and this can lead to poor performance, negative self-talk, and diminished confidence despite proven evidence of success and achievement (Chance, 2022). Identity marginalization and stereotype threat together can lead to isolation and feelings of tokenism where Black women leaders feel completely unseen and/or forced, through internal and external pressures, to be hypervisible (Chance, 2022). Despite the adversity that comes with having to combat the threats associated

with these identities, each of the nine participants attributed a commitment to spirituality and faith as personal motivation to remain steady and engaged in the leadership roles they occupied. When they spoke of their networks of support, they included spiritual advisors and leaders in addition to mentors, teachers, and community (Chance, 2022).

Menchaca et al.(2016) published a qualitative research study on the journey of two Latina senior leaders in higher education. The research focused specifically on their journey to the senior leadership positions they occupied. The study was guided by three research questions. First, “What support do Latinas need to attain successful careers outside of the home?” Second, “What barriers do Latinas face in creating a highly successful career?” Third, “What is the profile of highly successful Latinas?” (Menchaca et al., 2016, p. 98). Six themes emerged from the semistructured interviews conducted with the two identified “Latina Titans.” The themes included: a strong, supportive mother; fervent faith; humble beginnings; mentorship; determination and intelligence; and viewing certain experiences as challenges instead of obstacles. Of the six themes, fervent faith was identified as a source of support for reaching the highest level of success for each of these women. Each participant shared how they were raised in a faithful household. Because from an early age they were surrounded by family and community who practiced a religious faith, they too embodied those teachings and carried them into adulthood both personally and professionally. Similarly, as previously discussed, Black women and men leaders aspiring to become presidents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) noted among other factors that the unique culture at HBCUs that is rooted in faith, community, and service is a significant draw and aligns with personal values (Gasman et al., 2023).

Dahlvig and Longman (2014) studied the motivation to pursue higher levels of leadership among a group of 16 women faculty and administrators. These women were participants in a leadership development program sponsored by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU); they shared a Christian faith commitment and centered Christian education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Three motivations emerged from this qualitative study. First, the participants felt a responsibility to the relationships they had with peers, team members, and leaders who all shared a commitment to their institutional mission. The participants believed in the mission of the institution and they also believed in their colleagues. Because of this, participants felt it was their responsibility to strive for higher levels of leadership to continue the work of the institution. Second, the women expressed being aware of an internal calling and giftedness for leadership. One participant discussed a call to step into a higher leadership role, but did not specifically define where that calling originated. Longman et al. (2011) discuss a calling as an expression of a “sense of purpose and meaning” (pg. 257). The word “calling” is familiar among individuals identifying as Christian and refers to an external call from God and an internal practice of reflection leading to greater self awareness (Longman et al., 2011). Lastly, the participants in this study felt the encouragement of mentors and role models to pursue their leadership goals (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Lastly, a recent dissertation study explored the experiences of presidents who are women. Among other questions, 12 participants who served as presidents of institutions of higher education in the Southeast were asked about strategies and support structures they use to overcome gender-based barriers. Several women indicated their faith providing support throughout their professional career (Hagen, 2021). It is something they leaned on, especially during challenging times throughout their presidential leadership experience.

The aforementioned studies focused on the journey women take to reach senior leadership positions, the path two Latina women took to achieve the highest level of leadership, aspiring Black women leaders, motivations to pursue higher levels of leadership, and the experiences of women presidents. Leading authentically, using faith as a source of support, experiencing a calling to serve, feeling blessings, and being inspired early in life by faith were all discussed. This current study picked up where the previous ones left off by exploring how faith specifically influences women leaders while they are serving in senior levels of leadership in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to review literature related to how women who are senior leaders in higher education, experience leadership and describe the influence of faith on their leadership experience. Early in the chapter, descriptions of religion, spirituality, and faith were discussed in an attempt to present differences and overlapping meanings. Additional information about how spirituality has been studied in higher education, faith development and attributes of faith was also explored. The chapter presented different leadership theories including research on leadership in higher education in the context of students and their personal and professional development, faculty as servant teachers, administrative leaders facing crisis, and leaders seeking senior level leadership positions. The literature review concluded with a presentation of various studies about women leaders in higher education in an effort to uncover evidence of faith or faith adjacent information and its influence on their leadership experiences. Detailed information on the latter was absent and presented an opportunity for this research. In contrast, there is abundant information on leadership theory, attributes of various types of leaders, motivation to pursue leadership, support systems for successful leaders and the barriers individuals face in advancing

to higher leadership positions. Based on the review of current literature, there is a dearth of research on how leaders describe faith as influential to their leadership experiences.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how faith influenced women leaders in higher education as they navigated through their leadership experiences. The specific research question was: “How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?” In this chapter, I provide detailed information regarding the research rationale and design and methodology.

### **Research Rationale and Design**

The nature of this study is emergent, stemming first from personal experience and refined with newly acquired knowledge (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research question, “How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?” is answered through the examination of the participants' lived experiences and the subjective interpretations of these experiences by the researcher and participants through a phenomenological approach (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Edmund Husserl is known to be the founder of phenomenology. Husserl suggested that the meaning of an experience can be interpreted differently based on the positioning of the viewer. There is an absence of reflection among those who see science as objective only. Instead, questioning objective scientific data through reflection can unveil a different and perhaps more expansive meaning of an experience (Husserl & Gutting, 2005; Moran, 2012). A core question in phenomenology is, “What is the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2015, p. 115).

Others have described a researcher who is using phenomenology as embarking on an adventure or going on a journey to discover the unknown (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Finlay,

2009). The use of imagination is encouraged to understand the meaning of how people experience a particular phenomenon (Beck, 2020). In short, phenomenology seeks to understand the subjective experiences of human beings which can include, but are not limited to, their thoughts, feelings, interactions with one another, the influence of beliefs, and the impact of life events (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified common features of a phenomenological study, which grounded this research study and are listed below.

- “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). In this research project, the lived experience was the influence of faith on the participants’ leadership experiences.
- The researcher completes interviews with a group of participants who have all experienced the phenomenon. For the current research, I completed interviews with participants who indicated their faith influences their leadership experiences.
- A phenomenological approach explores the individual subjective experiences of people and then identifies the commonalities between people, subsequently understanding a set of commonly shared experiences. During the interview process, I listened for and encouraged participants to share examples of how their faith influenced their decision-making, supervision, crisis management, and other experiences in their leadership roles. Based on participant responses and the subsequent analysis of data, I identified 11 themes and four superordinate themes that describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. One of the 11 themes was further described by two additional sub themes.

## **Methods**

To describe the influence of faith on the leadership experiences of women leaders in senior level positions in higher education, I used phenomenology to analyze and interpret the data. In this section, I outline the details of who the participants are and how they were recruited. Data collection is explained by outlining the interview process and includes a reference to the interview questions that were utilized. This is followed by explaining how the data were analyzed, specifically outlining the step-by-step process to an inductive analysis approach. The methods section concludes with how I ensured trustworthiness, followed by explaining the delimitations and limitations to the research study.

### *Participants and Recruitment*

Participants met two criteria to participate in this study. First, they identified as women, currently serving in senior leadership roles within a higher education institution. Second, they recognized that their faith influences their leadership experiences.

Hannum et al. (2015) and Phipps (2012) indicate a senior leadership position in higher education requires an advanced degree, and the scope of responsibility within that role is broad. Responsibilities include, but are not limited to, financial oversight and management, strategic planning and implementation, fundraising, human resource management, academic program development, student services management, community relationship building, and/or infrastructure expansion and development.

Three participant sampling strategies were utilized: First criterion sampling, followed by snowball sampling, and then maximum variation sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I started by contacting colleagues through my own professional network. (Appendix A, PRE INTERVIEW EMAIL, outlines the predetermined criteria.) Additional participants were

identified through snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). After reviewing the list of participants that were recruited and confirmed through criterion and snowball sampling, I identified the need for additional participants from backgrounds not represented. I made attempts to recruit additional participants specifically based on their level of leadership and cultural and/or faith background. Recruiting participants from a wide range of backgrounds is maximum variation sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Through these three sampling strategies, personal contact was made with 40 potential participants. An additional 17 potential participants responded to the recruitment call by completing the RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM, Appendix B. This form was accessible through the PRE INTERVIEW EMAIL (See Appendix A) which was circulated by colleagues who were notified by me of this project.

In total, 27 potential participants completed the RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM (See Appendix B). Of this group of 27 potential participants, 19 were contacted to participate in this study. Five of the 27 participants who completed the RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM (See Appendix B) were either not qualified or did not follow through to schedule the preliminary first meeting. An additional three participants completed the form after data saturation was reached. A preliminary first meeting was scheduled with each of the 19 participants. In this meeting, their two required interviews were scheduled, and they reviewed and signed the informed consent document (See Appendix C). This document confirmed their participation in the research project. The informed consent offered a project description and purpose, expectations of participants, how their identity would be kept anonymous, an explanation of how the data would be collected, secured, and utilized, and

outlined the risks and benefits associated with participation. Participant permission was also obtained to record the video interviews.

Of the 19 originally scheduled participants, four could not participate due to various reasons and eventually withdrew from the project. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest five to 25 participants for an IPA study. Data saturation is reached when the researcher no longer receives new information regarding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, data saturation was reached after interviewing nine participants. Information about these participants is found in Table 1. Interviews were cancelled with the remaining six participants who initially confirmed their willingness to be in the study. A note informing them of the cancellation, the reason why and thanking them for their time was sent to each of the six participants who could not be included in the project (See Appendix D).

The following information was gathered during the first interview. The first interview was utilized to build rapport with the participant and begin to understand their faith at a macro level. Each of the nine participants were born into families and belonged to communities that instilled in them the value of having and practicing their faith. They were nurtured and educated about their faith by their elders near and far and through organized and organic experiences. Every participant has remained connected to their faith, never having walked away from it. They have questioned their faith about experiences in their life only to find a deeper connection as they grew and developed. Table 1. includes each participant's description of faith in addition to other relevant data. This information was collected from the RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM (See Appendix B).

**Table 1***Leaders*

<b>Participant ID Number</b>	<b>Institution Type-Carnegie Classification</b>	<b>Professional Title</b>	<b>Please describe your faith in a few sentences.</b>	<b>Which racial and/or ethnic identities do you most identify with?</b>
1	Private not-for-profit	Associate Provost	My faith informs my core beliefs and defines my servant leadership and motivation to lead for the common good.	Bi-raical
2	Public	Vice Chancellor	Faith - The substance of things hoped for the evidence of things unseen. My faith is the belief in God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son which I trust to get me through ALL things both triumphs and challenges in life.	Black American
3	Public	Director	God is at the center of everything I do whether it be how I show up as a woman, leader or educator. It is an honor for His light to shine from me as I walk this path called life.	Black/African American
4	Public	Director	I view my faith as relational, with God and others, and a journey. It provides identity, community,	White

			meaning and purpose, and animates my life and work.	
5	Public	Director	My faith helps me to navigate challenging situations and to let go of things that are outside of my realm of understanding.	White
6	Private not-for-profit	Associate Dean	My faith is rooted in a strong belief in God and I believe that God directs all aspects of my life. I anchor my decisions in daily meditations and attend church to provide direction in my life.	African American
7	Public	Vice Chancellor	I have been a Christ follower my entire life. Knowing Christ is formational to who I am and the life I live in family, at work and in my community.	White
8	Public	Director	I believe in a higher power and the teachings of Judaism. I am guided to act kindly toward others and "do unto others as I would have done unto me."	White, Ashkenazi Jewish (Eastern European)
9	Public	Director	I believe in God (the Holy trinity) and believe that God and the holy	Black

			spirit guides my actions and decision making. I rely on my faith on how to navigate difficult situations coupled with past experiences; policy and procedures and just treating people well.	
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*Data Collection*

I used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the interview process (See Appendix E). The semi-structured interview allowed for follow-up questions as necessary. To ensure the effectiveness of the interview protocol, I conducted a pilot study with a single participant (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Interview questions were modified slightly after the pilot study. The interview from the pilot study was analyzed along with the other participant interviews and included in the research findings.

Participants committed to two interviews and one additional meeting as indicated on the informed consent document. Each interaction lasted up to 90 minutes in length and was recorded via Zoom video conferencing. In the first interview participants willingly shared personal stories of the origins of their faith, which included details of their families and community, and their faith journey. This dialogue prepared us for the second interview which continued with a conversation about their faith and its influence on their leadership experience. After the second interview, participants were asked to review their interview transcript and given the opportunity to make edits (See Appendix F). Finally, in a third meeting (See Appendix G) each participant was presented with the data analysis which included a presentation of the themes and superordinate themes. They were also able to review their specific quotes that were included in

Chapter 4 and confirm that the quotes accurately reflected what they shared in their interview. Records were deleted after the study was completed (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

### *Data Analysis*

Phenomenology is not only a description of the experience but an interpretation of what the experience means (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019). In this study interpretive phenomenology analysis (IPA) (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019) was utilized to understand and interpret how faith influenced the leadership experiences of women in senior leadership roles in higher education.

### *Inductive Approach to Data Analysis*

An inductive approach to research is a data process wherein data is collected, specific observations are made, patterns are identified, and a conclusion is presented. The inductive approach to data analysis works exclusively from the participants' experiences and is a repetitive process of reviewing the data to identify emerging themes (Azungah, 2018).

For this study, Alhazmi and Kaufmann's 2022 study on students' cross-cultural educational experiences served as a guide to creating a step by step process to analyze the data. Like the current study, Alhazmi and Kaufmann's study also sought to understand the essence of participants' experiences through their descriptions; the authors' distinction between describing and then interpreting the data to identify the meaning of phenomenon being studied was easily accessible to a new researcher like myself.

It is important to note that while analyzing the data I made sure to practice bracketing to ensure everything in the data was given attention with open mindedness. Bracketing involved setting aside my assumptions and judgments as the researcher, staying actively open to all the information presented, and avoiding any selectivity or bias in the way I described the

participants' experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The specific steps to analyzing the data are outlined below.

1. Data Transcription: The data was automatically transcribed by the Zoom transcription service. The transcripts were downloaded to a Google drive folder titled "IV Transcripts."
2. Transcript Review: After all participants reviewed and edited their transcripts for both of their interviews, I began the transcript review process. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) suggested listening to and watching the interview recordings multiple times to get a general sense of the participants' experiences related to the overall research question. Over the course of a few days, I read and reviewed each transcript twice. I read through each participant's transcript once and then repeated the same process. This gave me the chance to reflect on the conversation multiple times in a short period of time and begin to feel more comfortable with my comprehension of the data. After reading the transcripts twice, I watched and listened to each participant's video recordings. While viewing the video recordings, I also followed the transcription.
3. Identify codes: After reviewing the video recordings and transcripts several times, the next step is to begin a more structured process of engagement with the data (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Every statement requires attention to determine whether it is relevant to the experience being studied. The ultimate goal of this step was to capture every unique statement or set of statements; this leads to the important step of creating codes (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Codes are one word or short phrases, in this case determined by the researcher, that describe a quote or set of quotes from the interviews.
  - a. As stated previously the review of every statement from the interviews is critically important (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). To accomplish this first step,

each interview was watched and listened to a second time while simultaneously following the transcription. While watching, listening, and following the transcript, each statement or set of statements was cut and pasted from the transcript and placed beneath the interview question/overarching interview topic it was associated with in a google excel document. This required periodic pauses, rewinding the recorded interviews, and rewatching segments to accurately capture all of the data. When there were statements that did not respond to an interview question directly or fit under an overarching interview topic, they were grouped together in a separate column. Directly associating each statement or set of statements to specific interview questions/overarching interview topics and grouping non-associated statements ensured the aforementioned critically important step of making sure that every statement was reviewed (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) and dealt with in some way and in the same manner. This technique also ensured easy organization of the data and some initial understanding about relevance. Statements were color-coded to help identify the participant. While these steps may seem overly detailed, as a first-time researcher, it was important for me to establish a defensible process that was both easy to understand/follow and maintained the integrity of the analysis while offering some flexibility.

- b. Second, in Alhazmi and Kaufmann's study they followed a process suggested by Psychologist Clark Moustakas (1994) where every statement or set of statements should be checked against two criteria; first are the statements essential to understanding the phenomenon and second can the statements be labeled with a

code. If the criteria were met each statement or set of statements were kept in the column that they were originally placed in. If both criteria were not met the statement or statements were placed in a separate column.

- c. Each statement or set of statements were then reviewed again and labeled with a code; a singular descriptive word or phrase.
4. Group the codes into themes and name each theme: At this stage of the process, I grouped the individual codes I determined to be related to one another and relevant to the research question (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Each group was given a name and now referred to as a theme. Eleven themes emerged from the grouping of similar codes. One theme was further broken down into two sub themes. Table 2 shows a subset of the data and how it was coded, grouped into themes and superordinate themes.
5. Group themes into superordinate themes: At this stage, I answered the main research question by communicating the meaning of the phenomenon across all participants. Similar to how codes were grouped together to create a theme, themes that were overlapping and related were grouped together to create superordinate themes. This inductive approach to data analysis (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) produced four superordinate themes. Superordinate themes are higher-level themes; they are overarching themes that describe the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon across all participants (Azungah, 2018). In addition to illustrating the common features across all participants, through the identification of the superordinate themes, I made note of unique experiences that emerged for future research and identified those opportunities in Chapter 5 (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

**Table 2***Subset of coded data.*

<b>Quotes</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Superordinate Theme</b>
(Participant 1) The way I think about it is like we're God's hands on earth. We're co-creators. And our job is to create heaven on earth; we're supposed to help God create a more perfect world. And my work is completely informed by that.	Working with God/God's purpose for me	Co-Creating with Transcendent Being/Faith	
(Participant 2) I see any of the roles that I have as being a servant and working to do what God has purposed me to do...	Being in service/God's purpose for me		
(Participant 4) I believe in a connection to a Creator God, a Supreme Being. God is a Creator and a Supreme Being. I believe that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and is ultimately loving and good. That comes from my background, being raised in a Protestant Christian environment. And through the relationship I've cultivated with God as I understand him over the years. And then my scope of how I understand has also been sort of enriched by contact with other different religious cultural traditions.	Centering faith/Grounding yourself in faith	Relationship to a Transcendent Being	Faith Driven Leadership

<p>(Participant 8) I think God is a great term. While I wrestle with questions of faith, I ultimately recognize the presence of a higher power in moments of connection, tradition, and reflection. My experiences in prayer and community affirm my belief in something greater than myself, guiding my actions and values as a Jewish person. Certainly there is a God. I mean, obviously it's in the Torah. God created heaven and the earth. I try to think more about its relevance to my life, God's relevance to my life. Am I being godlike? Am I living my best life as a Jewish person? By the way, I am treating others, you know.</p>	<p>Centering faith/How God sees my behavior</p>		
<p>(Participant 5) My hope is that in being who I am and living how I am, that if there's something that piques someone's curiosity, and they want to ask me more about it, I'm not afraid to share more information. I think anything that helps to continue to build connections with others is valuable.</p>	<p>Being noticed/Sought out for one's faith identity</p>	<p>Being Your Whole Self</p>	<p>Connecting and Experiencing Blessings</p>
<p>(Participant 9) I show up very much as myself always. I tell my folks that it's difficult for me to compartmentalize. I am a whole person. I hope people lead with faith more openly or bravely in ways that are psychologically safe. If people are able to experience their faith at work in a more open way it</p>	<p>Being authentic</p>		

helps the entire organization.			
(Participant 7) It's been a huge privilege to be able to apply what I think are my God-given talents and the service of humanity.	Likes work	Feeling a Transcendent Being's Blessings	
(Participant 3) I have been favored in this leadership role. I've been promoted two times. I love my job.	Advancement/Promotion/ Feeling valued with the right pay		

*Trustworthiness*

Establishing trustworthiness confirms the importance of the research to the researcher and the public (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria for trustworthiness. These four criteria include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the data and subsequent interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017). Alignment between the data collected through multiple semi-structured interviews, until data saturation was achieved, was one way I ensured the credibility of this research project. This was further achieved by engaging research participants in the review of their transcribed interviews. Research participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcription and the chance to delete quotes. Finally, at the conclusion of the data analysis I met with each participant one more time to present the themes, review their written response to the definition of faith, and to confirm the content of their specific quotes that were included in Chapter 4.

To ensure transferability, I provided detailed descriptions of the research methods, criteria for participant recruitment and how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability was achieved by making sure the research process was clearly outlined so it can be followed by others (Nowell et al., 2017).

In order to avoid limiting my perspective of the data, I practiced bracketing and remained open to new ideas and interpretations shared by the participants. This practice spoke to confirmability. I also utilized a research journal where I disclosed my ideas and thoughts throughout the data collection process. I took periodic pauses to reflect on these ideas and thoughts, which allowed me to identify important biases that could unintentionally and negatively affect the research project. When I interviewed each participant, I disclosed my identity and relationship to the research question.

#### *Delimitations and Limitations*

There are three delimitations in this study. This study only included people who identified as a woman. I identify as a woman, and the initial idea for the project stemmed from my own lived experiences. Second, participants needed to be serving in a senior leadership role. Third, participants explicitly identified with faith defined as having a belief and trust in a transcendent being (Milem, 2019; Newman, 2004) and saw it as influential to their leadership experiences.

There are four limitations to this study. First, given the small sample size, findings were not generalizable to all women in senior leadership positions who are influenced by faith. Second, there exists an inherent bias in the research participants either about experiences they detailed in the interview or their favorability towards faith (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Third, most participants identified with one common religious background, Christianity. Finally, senior leadership was defined broadly in this study and direct efforts were made, through the various

sampling strategies outlined previously, to recruit women from the highest levels of leadership. Despite targeted recruitment efforts the final number of participants who served in the highest levels of leadership were lower compared to those who were considered senior leaders whose scope of work is limited to a specific part of the institution.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the findings associated with the superordinate themes that emerged from the leaders' descriptions and the researcher's interpretations about the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. The specific research question that guided this project was, "How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?" To understand and interpret how faith influences the leadership experiences of women in senior leadership roles in higher education, descriptive and interpretive phenomenology analysis were utilized (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019). The data were collected through two separate semi-structured interviews with each of the nine women higher education leaders.

Eleven themes emerged from the initial coding of the data and those were categorized into four superordinate themes: faith-driven leadership; promoting inclusion and equity; persevering; and connecting and experiencing blessings. The superordinate themes and their related themes and sub themes can be found in Table 3, titled Table of Themes.

**Table 3***Table of Themes*

<b><u>Superordinate Themes</u></b>	<b><u>Themes</u></b>	<b><u>Sub Themes</u></b>
Faith-Driven Leadership	Relationship to a Transcendent Being	
	Co-Creating with Transcendent Being/Faith	
	Leadership Ethos	Leadership Values from Faith
		Leadership Lessons from Faith
Promoting Inclusion and Equity	Inclusion	
	Open-Mindedness and Fairness	
Persevering	Resilience	
	Navigating Multiple Intersecting Identities and the Influence of Faith	
	Balancing Faith's Influence with Institutional Realities	
Connecting and Experiencing Blessings	Connecting Through Faith to Build Community	
	Feeling a Transcendent Being's Blessings	
	Being Your Whole Self	

**Superordinate Theme 1: Faith-Driven Leadership**

Today, women in higher education occupy some of the highest levels of leadership at their institutions. For some, their leadership practice is driven by a deeply reflective partnership, emerging from faith, with a transcendent being and supports and guides them continuously. The participants in this study are leading with the active influence of faith. Their leadership practice

is driven by a partnership with a transcendent being, often called “God,” that supports and guides them continuously. They see their work as leaders in higher education an extension of that transcendent being on this earth, therefore serving in a co-creating role.

Participants in this study described their leadership as shaped by a belief that their unique talents, gifts, skills, and knowledge were divinely given. These qualities form the foundation of their leadership ethos, which is characterized by their leadership values and lessons learned from their faith about leadership. They view it as their responsibility to steward these gifts in service of their communities. In this way, the influence of faith is evident not only in how they lead, but in their understanding of why they lead.

*Theme: Relationship to a Transcendent Being*

All of the participants described their connection to a transcendent being and named that being “God.” Their description of this relationship, in the context of their leadership roles in higher education, although varied and described as changing over time, is personal and influenced by their lived experiences. Each of the participants spoke to their God’s love and acceptance being a consistent experience throughout their life. Participants four and six, being from the Christian faith, shared the following about their relationship to a transcendent being:

(Participant 4) I believe in a connection to a Creator God, a Supreme Being. God is a Creator and a Supreme Being. I believe that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and is ultimately loving and good. That comes from my background, being raised in a Protestant Christian environment. And through the relationship I’ve cultivated with God as I understand him over the years. And then my scope of how I understand has also been sort of enriched by contact with other different religious cultural traditions.

(Participant 6) I realized my connection with God is not based on anybody else’s perspective, it’s my own personal relationship. I figure it out with Him, not with everybody else. When you’re stepping into these new [leadership] roles you start to question, how did I get this position? What am I supposed to be doing here? And it’s that point of reflection that, I think, allows leaders who practice in faith to continue to want to do more and offer more, create more.

Participant eight, who identifies as being from the Jewish faith community, offered the following:

(Participant 8) I think God is a great term. While I wrestle with questions of faith, I ultimately recognize the presence of a higher power in moments of connection, tradition, and reflection. My experiences in prayer and community affirm my belief in something greater than myself, guiding my actions and values as a Jewish person. Certainly there is a God. I mean, obviously it's in the Torah. God created heaven and the earth. I try to think more about its relevance to my life, God's relevance to my life. Am I being godlike? Am I living my best life as a Jewish person by the way I am treating others? All of the participants in this study described a clear belief in a transcendent being they

called God. While the presence of God in their lives stemmed from different cultural and/or religious traditions, all of the participants described the relationship to a transcendent being as foundational to all aspects of their lives and evolved with their various life experiences. The participants actively worked to strengthen their relationship with God and did not reference or imply ever acting passively. Their active participation in building and sustaining a relationship to God happened one on one, in community and through personal self reflection and prayer.

*Theme: Co-Creating with a Transcendent Being/Faith*

As they led, participants spoke to being an extension of the transcendent being in whom they have faith. They also expressed a belief in having been given special talents and skills that were unique to their lives and should be used to serve through their leadership experiences in higher education. They believe it is their responsibility to deploy those talents and skills through their leadership experiences; doing so is working in partnership or co-creating with the transcendent being. Several participants described the influence of faith on their leadership experiences by illuminating their relationship to faith and the transcendent being. Participant nine described being "in communion with the Holy Spirit" by saying "I will ask God to use me as a vessel...." Participants felt responsible for creating a world that is good, just, and caring through service to others.

(Participant 1) The way I think about it is like we're God's hands on earth. We're co-creators. And our job is to create heaven on earth; we're supposed to help God create a more perfect world. And my work is completely informed by that.

(Participant 2) I see any of the roles that I have as being a servant and working to do what God has purposed me to do....

(Participant 7) I do think that God gives every person really unique talents and gifts. And so, as a leader, it's that part of me helping people steward that. And one of the primary reasons that I am a leader is to treat people in that way. And I think in treating people that way I am the hands and feet of Christ, and to some extent furthering my faith practice in the world.

The use of the words "light" and "salt," from what the participants explained, refers to how they should be on this earth. They are expected to be here and do good things. By doing good work they were living out the co-creating partnership they were in with the transcendent being.

(Participant 3) When I talk about leadership, typically I talk about me serving others, you know the Bible speaks on servant leadership. Being the light and salt to help things along. That's again why I'm here and that's it.

(Participant 4) My faith tells me that I am on this planet for this lifespan to be a light, to bring life, and to treat the people around me with care, with justice, with mercy. And my faith gives me a strong...it's also in my nature... a call towards excellence, and what is good and perfect and right and true.

As professional leaders in senior level positions in higher education the participants expressed a deep sense of responsibility to meet the expectations of their institutions. Their call to excellence came from their institutions' values and mission but first and foremost from their transcendent being. Because they believed in a co-creating relationship they often sought guidance from God to execute responsibilities associated with their leadership roles especially in moments of great difficulty. Their co-creating relationship with the divine was expressed through metaphors like being "God's hands," "light," and "salt," reflecting their commitment to lead in ways that reflect their faith in action.

### *Theme: Leadership Ethos*

Based on participant responses, leadership ethos is the expression of who the leader is, what they believe in and how they apply what they know about leading. Across all participants,

there was agreement on common leadership values which they learned from faith resulting in the sub theme: Leadership Values from Faith. The other sub theme that emerged from the data was Leadership Lessons from Faith. Together these two sub themes compose the participants' leadership ethos.

*Sub Theme: Leadership Values from Faith*

Based on participant responses, leadership values are guiding principles that are a part of their faith-driven leadership foundation. These values are associated with what several participants indicated as being important to them in how they lead others. The leadership values the participants described were inherent or learned and represented compassion, forgiveness, integrity, kindness, grace, and/or mercy. The participants discussed that their faith inspired them to see humanity first (a value derived from faith) in the people they serve through their leadership roles. Participant five stated:

I think, as leaders, my faith largely tells me to put people first. We are sometimes going to need to make hard decisions and challenging decisions. But we should never deny someone's humanity and to not forget that there are ways to do things that are showing as much care towards that person as possible, and I think that's something that I practice.

The participants' leadership values are demonstrated through the use of their unique talents, gifts, skills and knowledge they believe have been given to them by God. Participant six spoke about this and added that she has a responsibility to share, sharing being a value derived from faith, her talents, gifts, skills, and knowledge.

It's (faith) allowed me to be a role model, an example. I think being able to be visible to students, especially underrepresented students, so that they can see/think okay, there is something that I can aspire to. I think, too, because the collective of my experiences has allowed me to not sit back on the knowledge that I have. You're not supposed to keep things to yourself.

*Sub Theme: Leadership Lessons from Faith*

A very tangible way of understanding the influence of faith on the participants'

leadership experiences came from their description of lessons they learned from religious texts or teachings associated with their faith. Some participants shared examples of lessons they learned and how they considered and applied them to their leadership role.

(Participant 8) There's this old parable of a traveler coming to a rabbi, and the traveler says, "I will convert to Judaism if you can teach me all of Judaism while I stand on one foot without putting my foot down." And the Rabbi says to the man, "Stand on one foot," and the Rabbi says, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you. The rest is commentary. Now go study." And so I think that is really sort of like the gist and the heart of how Judaism influences not only my leadership, but how I interact with all people. It is to treat people the way you would want to be treated. Think about how your words, my words and my actions impact other people and take it from there.

(Participant 9) So the Bible talks about how God gives us a little bit and when we can take care of the little bit then he'll increase. You have to take care of the little things that you have now, then you can show yourself trustworthy to be able to take on bigger things. I've had to tell people, I know that you want to do this, but I need to see you master this. I will give you these tasks and let's see how those things go and then I will begin to give more responsibility.

The findings presented under the superordinate theme, Faith-Driven Leadership, reveal the participants' leadership experiences are deeply influenced by their faith and a co-creating relationship to a transcendent being, God. They exercise their leadership with personal values rooted in faith and translate lessons learned, through scripture and/or other faith oriented activities, to guide their leadership approach and activities.

Together, the themes within Faith-Driven Leadership, illustrate that for the participants in this study, faith is not merely a private belief system but a central, animating force in their public and professional lives. Each participant agreed that faith's influence was always present, but it was their active and intentional pursuit of faith's teachings, God's guidance, and ultimately fulfilling their responsibilities as leaders that transformed faith from a personal belief into a lived and visible expression of leadership practice. Their leadership roles and experiences were opportunities to do good work that was thought of, developed and agreed upon in a co-creating relationship with God. And they would be held accountable to the outcomes of their work not

only by their institutions and constituents but, ultimately their faith and transcendent being.

### **Superordinate Theme 2: Promoting Inclusion and Equity**

Faith, as understood by the participants, encouraged and required them to promote inclusion and act fairly with an open mind. The participants are deeply motivated to create space for diverse perspectives to come together and do so via different pathways. They also aim to ensure an equitable learning environment by challenging current policies and procedures and creating new ones. Ultimately, they see it as a personal responsibility, which is their calling from God, to foster inclusion and create accessible opportunities.

Participants also offered insight into the tension that comes with creating inclusion. This tension could stem from an internal dialogue they have when what they expect from themselves as faith driven leaders is in conflict with faith doctrine and/or their institutional standards or mission. This tension was managed by what they feel is their deeper purpose. This deeper purpose is also their faith calling them to action which is to lead with an open mind and compassion.

#### *Theme: Inclusion*

Participants spoke about how they, as leaders, created inclusive environments and what they expect from themselves when it comes to serving people who are experiencing marginalization and oppression. The participants were clear in expressing their personal intention or responsibility. They have internalized a call from their faith and it drives them to create environments where students, faculty, staff and others feel seen and included in the community.

(Participant 1) As a gendered institution, we were leaders in implementing a transgender admission policy. I wanted them to be seen.

(Participant 2) I was trying to provide a sense of belonging and inclusion for students, faculty, and staff who felt marginalized, who were experiencing marginalization and oppression, a place for folks to come to build community capacity around belonging, around looking at practices, policies, programs that had inequities in them, for instance,

search policies.

Participants five and nine drew special attention to power differentials that exist among different religious/spiritual world views and between students and staff/faculty. These power differentials worked in direct opposition to their inclusion efforts as leaders.

(Participant 5) There's probably greater resistance to acknowledging that there's a Christian privilege in this country, specifically what that privilege and power holds. I think people would recognize that religious diversity is part of that identity spectrum that we need to be thoughtful about and considerate of, just like who is being persecuted or who is being privileged. There's a part of my faith that I think calls for radical acceptance, and that is not the interpretation that everybody within the Catholic faith has, but that is the interpretation that I feel called to.

(Participant 9) I think about stories of oppression in the Bible. And different people being oppressed. Whether it's women, Hebrew folks, Gentiles, lepers; all marginalized groups. I feel like my expression of faith in higher education is the same kind of parallel. Students are the largest group of folks that we have in higher education...they can be some of the most oppressed groups amongst each other, from staff to students and from faculty to students. I feel like my job is to fight the good fight to make sure that whether I'm talking about elevating staff members, students, the institution, or breaking barriers through policy, that my faith helps to lead me in that in order for me to do my very small part of trying to make the world better, trying to make an experience better for people.

*Theme: Open Mindedness and Fairness*

Participants described the need to be open minded and fair in their leadership role.

Participants two and four illustrated the tension of managing values associated with their faith, whether they personally hold those values or they are ascribed to them by others due to their faith orientation. At the same time, they shared that they had to navigate the needs of the campus communities they serve. That tension was loosened, in part, by their strong commitment to being open-minded and fair in their treatment of others. They spoke of creating space for everyone, and that stemmed from the previously stated responsibility of co-creating with God—the transcendent being—an environment that is good, just, and caring.

(Participant 2) I cannot stand in judgment of other people and if I say that I am here for all and this is a population of individuals [LGBTQIA+ communities] who have been historically marginalized and oppressed, then they deserve the space and place and

support to be seen as well. The conflict is in the teachings of the Bible. However, my faith tells me that I can't stand in judgment of others. So I pushed through that to do what I think is right in terms of treating God as love and you have to treat people from that place. It is not always received. Oftentimes it is met with resistance, but at the end of the day I have to answer to God for my behavior, not anybody else.

(Participant 4) I found myself agreeing with more conservative views of the institution. But the student and often staff body was more on the liberal side, and I am finding myself in the middle trying to navigate. And realizing that, for me to sort of out myself as being in agreement with more conservative views would be really alienating and would damage my credibility and my reputation with the people that I'm leading. So trying to figure out, how do I acknowledge multiple perspectives in these situations? How do I not hurt my own credibility, right? How do I validate where people are coming from that really disagree with each other? I think those are, for me, when my faith has come into play. That ability of how to both hold deep convictions and values for myself, but not put them on others comes fairly easily to me in one-on-one settings, but in those corporate settings that are larger and more public it definitely makes me pause and think and pray, and talk to my spouse, and figure out, how do I want to approach this?

Practicing and promoting Inclusion and Open Mindedness were requirements of participants' faith centered lives and works derived from their co-creating relationship with God. A core practice of their leadership approach was to make others feel seen, valued, and actively included especially those coming from marginalized or oppressed communities. Their overall steady and consistent leadership approach, rooted in faith, allowed them to navigate the tension that can arise with the valued presence of diverse belief systems that exist in institutions of higher education. The participants felt it was their responsibility and that they were equipped with the knowledge and tools to facilitate important and potentially transformative dialogue around difference. This speaks to their awareness of and respect for the complexity of the human experience. To address the complexity of the human experience, participants, in various ways, expressed the value and importance of taking bold actions in the leadership roles they have been entrusted with—actions that reflect their faith-driven commitment to justice, inclusion, and the well-being of those they serve.

### **Superordinate Theme 3: Persevering**

All the participants shared stories of persevering in their leadership roles. They have had to address a wide range of challenges from managing contentious discussions to the impact of significant local and global events for example shootings on campus, COVID and racial unrest. Their ability to rise up through challenges and move forward was attributed to the influence of faith on their lives and their sense of purpose which was derived from their relationship to a transcendent being.

There were three themes related to perseverance that emerged from the data. Participants shared examples that provided evidence of resilience. They talked about navigating the different identities that made them who they are. And finally, participants described how they balanced the influence of faith on their leadership experiences with institutional realities.

#### *Theme: Resilience*

Two types of examples served as evidence of resilience among the participants. First, participants' faith informed their decision making and approach to leadership during challenging times resulting in their resilience. Examples of these events included but are not limited to conflict with colleagues, overcoming barriers to career progression and community tragedies. Second, participants described experiences where the expression of their faith, while leading in their roles, was misunderstood creating a challenging moment they had to overcome. By cultivating resilience in themselves, through the influence of faith, they also inspired it in those around them.

Prayer, stemming from faith, was a part of the participants' holistic approach to leadership. Participants six and nine, reflected on turning to prayer during a difficult situation. Participant 6 was met with resistance in a team meeting after sharing she prayed about how to

approach the challenge in front of her. Another teammate questioned her practice of prayer making her feel dismissed. She allowed herself to be vulnerable by opening herself up, but then questioned herself for allowing the influence of her faith to intersect with her professional leadership role. She demonstrated resilience by how she responded. Instead of turning away from being questioned about her use of prayer, she calmly and clearly explained herself, detailing the connection between supporting students holistically and leading holistically.

I said, “You know, we practice holistic review and holistic student affairs. We’ve got to be holistic leaders.” There’s not just one way to problem-solve. If I’m sharing that (referring to praying) with the team, it’s because I’m deeply affected by it, and I’m trying to think it through as a person, and that helps me to show up as their teammate, the Associate Dean. I think there was an appreciation that I explained it that way.

Participant nine leaned on her faith and faith community to rise up from the aftermath of a campus shooting. In the face of a traumatic event that had a rippling effect across thousands of people, the only place where she could begin to figure out how to get through was to start with her faith, through prayer first. When coming to her team she set aside her title and came with her humanity at the forefront. Her faith helped her to be resilient by offering her the strength and guidance she needed to begin the healing process with her team.

This is where I lean on my faith and my faith community. For me it is the only thing that is keeping me going. I prayed before I got on this call and about having this meeting. And I told them, “I’m not coming to you as the director. I’m coming to you as a human who is having human emotions in this human experience that is impacting us because our jobs are never going to be the same.”

Participant two shared an example of how Moses, a leader in the Bible, influenced her approach to leading her team after the recent presidential election. Using Moses as an example she wanted to inspire resilient attitudes among her team.

I had an epiphany in that moment to say, (Participant 2) now, in this time, where people feel so hopeless and disparaged that you've got to be like Moses on the rock, telling his people that you know what? Let's just trust God... I said, I've got to stand on the rock [like Moses] and let people know that it's gonna be okay... I do have a responsibility to

help people stay encouraged, to help them understand that ultimately in spite of the storm that may be coming, we have to push through, and we have to push through strongly and stay committed to the work that we're doing.

Each of these leaders demonstrated resilience, informed by their faith, by showing up authentically and collaborating with their colleagues and communities to address and come through challenging experiences. Authenticity is discussed below, within the last superordinate theme, Connecting and Experiencing Blessings, as well. Participants six and nine turned to their faith, specifically prayer. They referenced prayer like it was a conversation between them and their transcendent being. Praying, having a conversation with God, about how they were feeling and/or how they should work through the challenging experiences they were facing grounded them and informed their next steps. In both examples, the participants also exhibited leadership attributes and values discussed previously under Superordinate Theme 2, Leadership Ethos. Participant two, utilized an example from her faith to guide her actions. She felt this example was similar to what she was experiencing in her leadership role during an uncertain time. She inspired resilience where there was an absence of hope in order to keep moving towards carrying out the important work of diversity, equity and inclusion. All of the participants displayed grace and compassion and attempted to show a great deal of care for the people around them despite the challenges they were having to address in their leadership role.

*Theme: Navigating Multiple Intersecting Identities and the Influence of Faith*

Participants discussed the complexities of navigating multiple intersecting identities, for example race and gender, in addition to also managing the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. There were times where participants had to negotiate how prominent the influence of faith might be given a particular situation they were managing in their leadership role. This is not something they could easily do with their race or gender. Participants further reflected on

how their handling of a situation would be perceived by God. For example, if they became angry at or confrontational with a colleague in their work space, how would God view their approach and behavior. This spoke to yet another way their faith had an influence on their leadership experience.

Participants reflected on their early awareness of gender and how religious education and cultural influences shaped their understanding of women's roles. Their personal experiences with their gender and gender awareness varied, influencing how they perceived their roles as leaders, spouses, mothers, and members of their faith communities. However, they collectively emphasized that their own interpretations of women's roles held greater significance than external perceptions. For them, their interpretations of women's roles were more affirming, rooted in their unique and personal relationship with a transcendent being.

The examples shared below speak of specific events or beliefs that are related to the participants' multiple intersecting identities. These examples further support their faith-driven leadership and speak to the co-creation relationship they each have with a transcendent being.

(Participant 1) I'm a feminist. I'm a strong Catholic feminist so I think I frankly piss people off sometimes.

Participant two shared the following thoughts after she was questioned about the institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts where faculty said "why are we doing this/why is this important?":

The feedback from the group that was there, I was the only person of color in that room, is that I came across as the angry black woman, and immediately I snapped and said, "but if I was a white man I'd be coming across as a strong white leader." That was the first time I really had felt like my gender was under attack. I did not want to compromise who I was, because I didn't want to represent myself as someone that would displease God. I probably would have said some things that would have been dehumanizing to another individual. That would have been against my faith. My work is with the resisters. But after two incidents I'm thinking I'm not supposed to be here doing this work. God! I

know I'm not supposed to be here doing this work. And my faith says, but if not you, then who. And if not now then when.

(Participant 8) There were two events at school on October 7, 2024, to recognize the one year anniversary of the attacks in Israel in 2023, and I was very conscious in playing the role of staff member and not Jewish staff member. So the Jewish Student Association had sort of like a gallery walk of quotes and experiences, memorializing the day. And then simultaneously, several other student organizations did a vigil outside, separate and apart from [the gallery walk], where they read poetry, and it was sort of implicitly honoring the dead in Palestine, honoring the dead in Lebanon, etc. But not honoring the Israeli dead or captives. And I went to both, because these were events that my students were holding rather than (Participant 8), who is Jewish, is supporting either one of them.

Participant nine had asked a team member to check in with her on a project. The team member had not reached out. During a staff meeting Participant nine asked the team member for an update on the project and the person responded abruptly. Below, Participant nine, comments on this interaction.

If I responded the way that I felt justified in responding, and that way of responding would not be exemplifying the glory of God, I would have also then had to worry about whether or not I was perpetuating stereotypes of what people thought an angry black woman was, and how that could derail all the work that I have been trying to do. I also thought about how, if I didn't say anything, how she might be the example that other people think that they can talk to me crazy.

For some participants, the influence of faith was consistently in full view, in other words they did not make any conscious choice to keep it, the influence of faith, from the people that they worked with and/or interacted with in their position. For other participants, how they displayed their faith was more "fluid"; sometimes it was put more forward, and at other times it was in the background. Each of these participants' experiences highlighted the tension that can arise when professional roles, personal identity and other people's view of how a leader expresses themselves intersect. At the point of intersection, faith's influence can be a source of encouragement while also serving as a boundary not to cross over, both actions ultimately helping them persevere.

*Theme: Balancing Faith's Influence with Institutional Realities*

Each participant spoke about navigating the influence of faith on their leadership experiences within the realities of the institutions they were serving. Realities of the institution is a broad reference and can encompass but is not limited to the mission, culture, private/public designation, or how the institution is functioning in the context of current events. For some, the relationship between their faith-driven leadership approach and the realities of the institution seamlessly aligned or integrated, and for others there was more obvious distance between the two. All of the participants still needed to build bridges between their leadership approach, personal values that stemmed from their faith, and the institutional culture.

One additional example that is adjacent to the examples shared below is Participant nine's discussion of translating faith-based lessons into more secular language, included under Superordinate Theme One, Faith Driven Leadership, Theme: Leadership Ethos. Participant nine's action of translating faith-based lessons is a distant, but relevant, example of the essence of this theme, the balance between faith's influence and its specific influence in a higher education setting. As shown by the participants' examples below-more closely related to this theme-to comply with institutional culture they discussed having to be more selective about where and when to express their faith openly. Participant one works at a Catholic institution and shared examples of two issues that the church her institution is affiliated with has specific opinions on, LGBTQIA+ communities and abortion/birth control. She has informed her staff that any student programming that has to do with these issues should be discussed with her first, given the church's stance on issues related to these topics.

(Participant 1) Some of my personal beliefs don't align with the church and I have to represent the church for example when it comes to Q plus or especially trans issues. There are some teachings of the church I disagree with, and I don't ever let my personal opinions show at the office. But here's the thing: Catholic intellectual tradition calls us to

examine the signs of our times. It's not that we can't talk about these things, but we also have to talk about the depth of the teaching of the church, not the sound bites, but the real depth of it... We have to find a way to be able to serve all of our students and to develop the spiritual journey of all of our students.

(Participant 3) I can support something in terms of what my job is asking me to do, what my administration is asking me to do in terms of leadership, in terms of respect, in terms of serving, and what my job and responsibilities are without having to impose my own spiritual views on others. Again, I'm always about the upliftment of others.

(Participant 8) The experience I had at work was that every student gets treated exactly the same on paper. Regardless of their lived experiences, or expressed or unexpressed identities. I grappled with that against my beliefs, my faith, my religious teachings that do unto others as you would have done unto you, meaning what is good for Student A. may not be good for Student B. They all deserve to have a voice, and to express that voice, and in most cases they weren't given that chance.

Ultimately, the participants' faith encouraged them to create and foster inclusivity where multiple perspectives could be shared. Faith and some aspects of religious doctrine served as a guide for ethical reasoning and subsequent decision making within the realities of the institutions they were serving. The participants' did not describe the influence of faith as a rigid set of directions or steps to follow in accordance to the expectations set by their institutions or every circumstance they are faced with as leaders. Instead their approach to leadership was more nuanced; faith provided a framework to consider different institutional challenges. Utilizing faith in this way shows the leaders as being able to persevere because they are deeply reflective individuals who are highly engaged with their institutions and their own values.

#### **Superordinate Theme 4: Connecting and Experiencing Blessings**

Throughout the interviews, each participant expressed their deep gratitude for their leadership experiences and viewed their work as a representation of the relationship they are in with their faith and a transcendent being—God. The influence of faith on their leadership experiences offered guidance, instilled a sense of purpose, and served as motivation to persevere.

The interviews offered natural end points whether related to time or moving the conversation from one set of questions to another. When asked about additional insights or

concluding remarks, during these transition points in the conversation and when invited to share their hopes for the future of this topic, participants offered information that spoke to belonging, blessings, and being seen for all of who they are in their leadership roles. Faith's influence encouraged them and offered the tools to connect and build community. From faith's influence, they felt blessed and protected by God, and they desired to be seen for faith's cover over their life, even in their leadership roles.

*Theme: Connecting Through Faith to Build Community*

Connecting through faith to build community first speaks to finding common ground through the basic principles of how to treat people, for example with kindness, respect and compassion. None of the participants considered evangelizing others as their intention by connecting through faith. Some participants were open to being seen for their religion and/or the influence of faith on their leadership experiences if that was important to another person. What was most important to the participants was to be able to be seen for who they are and find common ground with the people around them at their institutions to move their work forward.

(Participant 6) Perhaps, if we had the opportunity to talk about what our faith was, what makes us tick, who we are as people it might help us with connecting and working across diverse teams. I think it would really be helpful to just understand why people are the way they are...And I think the more you express it the bigger your circle becomes and that connection, I think, is really important.

(Participant 7) There are just moments where people need understanding and compassion. And they understand prayer as that, even if they're not really into a faith community themselves. A lot of people have some sort of tradition/background, right? If I'm really hurting, and someone offers me a prayer that means something to me, even if I don't necessarily believe it works, or believe that there is a higher power or practice it myself, people experience that as compassion, I think.

(Participant 8) So right after October 7, 2023, a colleague who is very religiously Christian texted me and she said something to the effect of, "I know the Jewish people are hurting right now. I don't know if you are, but I want you to know that I'm thinking about you and if there's anything you want to talk about please reach out." That moved me a lot because she didn't make any assumptions. She recognized and uplifted my identity and I just thought that was really, really nice.

Faith is not only a personal anchor for each participant to utilize in very specific spaces. Based on what the participants shared, while serving in their leadership roles, they viewed faith's influence as relational. The relational actions inspired by faith can bring diverse groups of people together and serve as a foundation for compassionate interactions. In times of distress most people, at the least, want their pain and/or challenges acknowledged. According to what the participants expressed, when someone feels acknowledged by another person, even through faith and even in a setting like higher education, that person can feel uplifted. These small connections and acknowledgements have the potential to create more inclusive communities.

Leaders are often sought out by others to provide support and guidance, but from time to time they are in need of the same. Being seen by their colleagues and community, without judgment, for their connection to faith and its influence on how they move in leadership made them feel encouraged, uplifted, and emotionally and spiritually safe.

*Theme: Feeling the Transcendent Being's Blessings*

Participants spoke of feeling blessed in their leadership roles and journeys. They attribute their success and/or the support they feel in their leadership experiences to their faith and a belief in a transcendent being guiding their life. Their reflections on what they have been able to accomplish or do, for example being in service to others, was something they described as coming from the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. Participants three, seven, and nine shared the following thoughts that are collectively summarized as being blessings from their transcendent being:

(Participant 3) I have been favored in this leadership role. I've been promoted two times. I love my job.

(Participant 7) It's been a huge privilege to be able to apply what I think are my God-given talents in the service of humanity.

(Participant 9) When I feel like I'm stuck in a space where I have been leading with my head and not my heart and spirit, I have to take inventory and take some steps back and

get back into where I can trust the faith that I have and trust God is going to have my back around whatever it is I'm stuck in.

The participants' descriptions of what has been summarized as blessings—rather than simply good work or success—reflected a deep awareness of a greater purpose they were committed to fulfilling. They all saw their work as leaders as a blessing in addition to other more commonly recognizable rewards like pay and level of leadership.

Every other reference to a transcendent being, in this study, depicted all of the leaders in a co-creating relationship with one being. In other words, the co-creating relationship—which represents how the leaders move in their leadership roles—is reflective of nine leaders and their individual relationship with one transcendent being. However, in the context of this theme, I envisioned each leader having their own unique transcendent being whose only responsibility is to continuously bestow blessings. The participants' comments related to Feeling the Transcendent Being's Blessings depicted nine leaders and nine transcendent beings. So much of what the participants described, even challenging situations, could be interpreted as blessings because they learned or experienced something that moved them further into faith and deeper into their relationship with their God. The participants' vivid accounts portrayed these blessings, not as occurring in the background of their lives from time to time, but as active forces all working consistently, to shape and sustain their leadership journeys in profound ways.

*Theme: Being Your Whole Self*

In Superordinate Theme Three: Perseverance, participants discussed navigating their multiple intersecting identities, alluding to leading authentically. In addition to their race, culture and gender, participants promoted the idea that the influence of faith on their leadership experiences deserved visibility and use. This theme, Being Your Whole Self, referred to how the participants wanted to lead more authentically and in doing so be a role model for others, an

extension of connecting. All of the participants agreed different situations and challenges will require an adjustment to their leadership approach. These adjustments and other compromises might be easier when a leader is encouraged and supported to function as their whole self in their role.

Regarding this theme specifically, it is important to state that participants were clear, leading authentically with the influence of faith was not an extension of evangelism. Participants two, five and nine shared a range of opinions related to being one's whole self in leadership. Participant two boldly declares the influence of faith on her life and leadership approach, even stating that being a part of an organization where she would have to hide her faith would not be the right place for her. Participant five has a more quiet confidence and relational approach regarding the influence of faith on her leadership. Participant nine, similar to Participant two, values and declares showing up in her leadership role with all of who she is. She goes on further to suggest there is potential benefit to an organization when it creates space for its people to experience faith in their workplace.

(Participant 2) Never had to hide it (participant's faith). Frankly, if I did, I wouldn't work for the organization because it goes against everything that I am. Most people that I work with and have worked around would most likely say that I put my faith out there. I mean, I put it out there that I am a believer, and that I operate in this position by faith.

Sometimes it's not always received. Well, I'm not apologizing for it.

(Participant 5) My hope is that in being who I am and living how I am, that if there's something that piques someone's curiosity, and they want to ask me more about it, I'm not afraid to share more information. I think anything that helps to continue to build connections with others is valuable.

(Participant 9) I show up very much as myself always. I tell my folks that it's difficult for me to compartmentalize. I am a whole person. I hope people lead with faith more openly or bravely in ways that are psychologically safe. If people are able to experience their faith at work in a more open way it helps the entire organization.

This theme, Being Your Whole Self, and its related participant statements, might be viewed as being in conflict with the themes of Navigating Multiple Intersecting Identities and

Managing Faith's Influence with Institutional Realities, discussed previously. Instead, from my point of view, these three themes reference three separate aspects of the participants' leadership experiences that are influenced by faith. It is true that the participants have to manage faith's influence, which covers all parts of who they are, and navigate multiple identities, and they can also desire to be able to lead authentically. The participants in this study recognize and actively address all three themes as evidenced by the examples they have shared.

For the participants in this study their description of how faith influences their leadership experiences and their belief in a transcendent being has less, if anything, to do with the promotion of a religiously affiliated doctrine and more to do with authentically living out commonly agreed upon positive and affirming principles of leadership that, for these leaders, are grounded in faith. Based on what the participants shared that related to the theme, Being Your Whole Self, faith serves as an internal guide for external action. Whether faith's influence is stated boldly, expressed quietly or encourages a shift to a more inclusive workplace culture, each participant agreed that their leadership role/approach is not and cannot be separated from the influence of their faith which includes their belief in a transcendent being. To honor the complete integration of faith's influence they desire being able to lead as authentically as possible so they can focus on the actual work they have been selected to do and are grateful for.

## **Conclusion**

In revisiting the research question, the following observations were made. First, these leaders are faith-driven leaders working in partnership with a transcendent being referred to as God by all participants. It is the participants' belief that God has given them unique talents, gifts, skills and knowledge that should be utilized in their leadership roles. The participants' leadership ethos consists of values and lessons that have been derived from their faith. They call upon these

as they guide their teams, implement their ideas and steward their communities through challenging times. Through their leadership of others, they attempt to never lose sight of another person's humanity, no matter the situation; this idea is firmly grounded in faith. Second, they are fervent about inclusivity and equity. Their passion for inclusivity and equity should not assume only liberal perspectives or values. The participants had diverse opinions on various topics, but all of them remained steadfastly committed to and responsible for creating spaces for multiple perspectives that are informed by a diversity of lived experiences. Third, the participants presented strong evidence of their belief in faith's influence on their perseverance. Their ability to survive and persist through the challenges of leadership in higher education has been the result of dedication and doing hard work, both being requirements of their faith. Finally the influence of faith on the participants' leadership experiences evoked joy from connecting with others, gratitude for their blessings, and a desire and an expectation to be able to show up as their whole selves.

The primary research question guiding this study was "How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?" Nine women who are senior leaders overseeing varied portfolios of responsibilities and across a diverse group of institutions of higher education were interviewed about their faith and how they described the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. Based on what participants shared, it was clear that faith influenced their leadership experiences in different and important ways.

The women leaders in this study are first and foremost unequivocally guided by their faith. They described the influence of faith on their leadership experiences by how they exercised faith-driven leadership that stemmed from being in a relationship and co-creating with a

transcendent being. The influence of faith on their leadership experiences served as the foundation for their leadership ethos and promoted inclusion and equity. Finally, the leaders in this study described the influence of faith helping them persevere, find connection with others, and experience blessings through their leadership experiences.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Five is to first discuss this study's findings in relation to the literature on or adjacent to faith, leadership, and women in higher education presented in Chapter Two. This is followed by a call for continued examination of faith, recommendations for practice and a chapter conclusion.

This study specifically sought to understand how women leaders in higher education described the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. The study was supported by established literature on different leadership types and women leaders in higher education; it was further informed by literature on faith and spirituality. The data were collected from nine women leaders in senior level roles who recognize faith as being influential to their leadership experiences in higher education. The participants' recognition of faith being influential also included a belief in a transcendent being which was a critical component of the study and meaningful to the findings.

Collectively, the findings of this study answered the primary research question: How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences? In response to the research question, 11 themes emerged leading to four superordinate themes: Faith-Driven Leadership, Promoting Inclusion and Equity, Persevering, and Connecting and Experiencing Blessings. These findings, to some degree, also informed suggestions for further examination and recommendations for practice.

## **Current Findings' Relationship to the Literature**

Current literature on leadership, faith and spirituality, and women leaders in higher education was reviewed to prepare for this study. For the most part, the populations studied in the current literature included students, faculty, and staff leaders; occasionally studies on populations outside of higher education were referenced as well. The results of this study do not suggest a direct relationship to any one type of leadership, piece of literature on faith, and/or a previous study on women leaders in higher education. This study evolved from a place where current leadership models and previous research on women leaders in higher education fell short and/or was silent.

### *First, Faith*

If religion is a structured set of practices and spirituality is a quest, faith, based on the review of the literature and this study's findings, is focused and actively lived out while anchoring the other two. The participants in this study have a focused relationship with and faith in a transcendent being, called God by them, and this drives everything they do and believe.

According to Fowler (1981), as discussed in Chapter Two, there are six stages of faith development spanning from birth to adulthood: intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith. I propose the findings of this study could be related to the last two stages: conjunctive and universalizing faith.

The superordinate themes Promoting Inclusion and Equity and Persevering could speak to stage five, conjunctive faith. Participants were firmly grounded in their faith beliefs; their faith expected them to be inclusive and act fairly without judgement. Participant two, for example, said, "I cannot be in judgment of other people and if I say I am here for all...[LGBTQIA+

communities] deserve the space and place and support to be seen...” In stage five, Fowler describes there being a confidence in one’s belief system and a genuine curiosity about others in this stage of development. This curiosity comes from a place of having a strong awareness of others, including the ability to identify power differentials and demonstrate inclusivity, for example, as cited by participant five, “my faith...calls for radical acceptance....”

The superordinate theme of Persevering, and more specifically within the theme, navigating multiple intersecting identities and the influence of faith, could also speak to Fowler’s stage five of faith development. There is a sense of self-preservation in stage five. Participants spoke definitively about how their faith shows up. For some, their faith is very forward-facing; for others, it is more in the background. None of the participants hide their faith. For example, participant one said, “I’m a feminist. I’m a strong Catholic feminist....” And participant two shared, “My work is with the resisters. But after two incidents I’m thinking I’m not supposed to be here doing this work....and my faith says, but if not you, then who. And if not now then when?”

The participants’ commitment to not hide their faith also speaks to authenticity which is represented in the findings by the superordinate theme Connecting and Experiencing Blessings and the associated theme of Being Your Whole-Self. Connecting with others in leadership through faith was one way to lead authentically. Spirituality, being adjacent to faith, was found to be an integral part of how Love and Talbot (1999) described the components of students’ spiritual development. Within their five part definition, they promoted the importance of connecting to self and others and by doing so a student could further their spiritual development. Seeing authentic leadership, where faith is influential, could support students in their own spiritual development. The findings of the aforementioned superordinate theme Connecting and

Experiencing Blessings and the associated theme of Being Your Whole-Self are further anchored by the authentic leadership model, which encourages leaders to be open and transparent (Avolio et al., 2009), and Dyess' Attributes of Faith, specifically living authentically. The leaders in this study are actively living out the foundational beliefs of their faith by leading authentically and in community.

The superordinate theme, Faith-Driven Leadership, and two of its associated themes, a relationship to and co-creating with a transcendent being/faith, could speak to Fowler's stage six, universalizing faith. In this stage, individuals have a "radical commitment to justice and a love and passion for a transformed world...in accordance with an intentionality both divine and transcendent" (Fowler, 1981, p. 201). In the context of this study and what the leaders are doing in higher education now, I would propose that all of the participants could be in stage six of Fowler's model. They are working to create an environment that is just for the communities they are serving at their institutions, and they are doing so in response to the guidance they receive from their faith and a belief in a transcendent being they call God. Participant six commented on being reflective with God: "That point of reflection...allows leaders who practice in faith to continue to want to do more and offer more, create more." Participant eight stated, "My experiences...affirm my belief in something greater than myself, guiding my actions and values...."

### *Then, Leadership*

Leadership is broadly defined and well-researched. There is overlap between the findings of this study and the leadership types and attributes of leadership discussed in Chapter Two. Based on the findings, the influence of faith on these leaders begins first with recognizing their

faith informs all aspects of their lives. Their leadership role in higher education is a natural extension of their faith and allows them to be in service to others.

### *Faith-Driven Leadership*

The superordinate theme of Faith-Driven Leadership was evidenced by the women leaders in this study participating in two relationships. First, they all expressed being in an active relationship with a transcendent being; for all of the participants, this transcendent being was God (Theme: Relationship to a Transcendent Being). Second, the findings presented evidence of the participants' work in higher education leadership to be a result of co-creating with God through faith (Theme: Co-Creating with Transcendent Being/Faith). Newman (2004) described faith as a "state of knowing" (p. 106). Based on what the participants shared, not only do they have knowledge of their faith but they actively utilize it in most aspects of their lives.

The participants in this study spoke of having a personal relationship with God. When they began to question if they were living/being how God intended, if they should be in their position, or their purpose for being in their leadership role, they reflected on their loving relationship with God. This time spent reflecting reminded them they were meant for this work of leadership. This reflective practice discussed by the participants is represented by the servant leadership characteristic, listening (Spears, 2023). Listening includes "deep personal reflection, listening to one's inner voice" (Dhiman & Roberts, 2023, foreword by Spears, p. ix).

The participants talked about being given gifts, unique talents and skills from God and those being used in their leadership experiences; it was their responsibility to do this work with what they had been given from God. The way in which this was explained by the participants in this study, is similar to a calling described in the spiritual model of leadership (Fry, 2003). The spiritual model of leadership (Fry, 2003) has two requirements. One, there must be a vision. The

vision should inspire leaders and members to be called to their work to make a difference. Two, leaders and members should show care for one another. Christian women leaders in Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) study expressed having an internal calling and giftedness for leadership as did faculty who were the focus of Lindholm's (2014) study on spirituality.

While the participants are doing the work of being a leader in higher education by using what they received from God, they also continue to develop in their faith. Fowler (1981) suggests that when we are born, we are ready to develop in faith. The work of being in service to others was an extension of the participants' faith and reflected their explicit belief in and practice of co-creating with God. Participants in two other studies about serving in high levels of leadership in higher education similarly attributed their draw to the role and subsequent success in achieving it to their faith (Gasman et al., 2023; Menchaca et al., 2016).

Both Fowler's and Dyess' work on faith speak to the superordinate theme of Faith-Driven Leadership. Fowler (1981) calls this being "co-responsible with God for quality and extensiveness of faith on earth" (p. 303). Two of Dyess' (2011) four attributes of faith—focusing on beliefs and interrelating with self, others, and/or the Divine—reflect the participants' relationship with God. These attributes also represent the work they are doing in partnership with God through beliefs about their faith.

The shared and collective leadership model (Avolio et al., 2009) speaks somewhat to the co-creating relationship between the leader and a transcendent being. This relationship can be seen as a team, and this leadership model seeks to center the team instead of working from a hierarchy, though I believe one is implied. Allen et al. (2023) also identified a "personal relationship with God" (p. 398) as a finding in their study of how Black male students made meaning of their spirituality through their leadership experiences. Finally, the themes in

Faith-Driven Leadership speak also to a theme called “In response to god” (Betts et al., 2023, p. 448) that emerged from a study about college students’ engagement with faith. In the Betts et al. study, students indicated that they sought engagement with faith because of what had been given to them or because of the life experiences they were having. They were in a relationship with God and attributed their life experiences to what God had given to them.

The third theme, Leadership Ethos, in the Superordinate Theme Faith-Driven Leadership, encompasses how the leaders lead, their leadership attributes, and how they apply what they know about leadership to accomplish their goals. The women leaders in this study embody attributes of spiritual, servant, authentic, transformational, and shared leadership. The participants would attest to the influence of faith, specifically their relationship with God, as the foundation for their overall leadership ethos.

Each of the aforementioned types of leadership is a recipe for how to lead. The leadership attributes found in the leadership “recipe,” for the participants, were derived from faith. These attributes, though not an exhaustive list, included compassion, forgiveness, integrity, kindness, grace and mercy.

One very specific point of alignment between the theme, Leadership Ethos, and the literature was that leaders need role models and they are role models. They desire both scenarios. Being a role model for others was consistent across three different studies about women leaders (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Hannum et al., 2015; Johnson & Fournillier, 2023) and in one study about a specific leadership type, transformational leadership (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003). When adopting any of the leadership models discussed in the literature, leaders inherently demonstrate the attributes associated with those models. These attributes are expressed intentionally and unintentionally, influencing those around them. Having a role model is

important to attaining higher levels of leadership, and being a role model is a responsibility of being a faith-driven leader. Participant six said, “It’s (faith) allowed me to be a role model... I think being able to be visible to students...so that they can see/think okay, there is something that I can aspire to.” Being a role model was also discussed as a part of the superordinate theme, Connecting and Experiencing Blessings, in the context of leading authentically, discussed further below.

### *Promoting Inclusion and Equity*

As a part of their co-creating relationship with a transcendent being, the participants felt responsible for creating a world that is good, just, and caring. They accomplished this by being in service to others through their leadership roles in higher education. Participant four said, “My faith tells me ...to treat people around me with care, with justice, with mercy.” Participants have an internal calling to make others feel seen, included, and heard. This finding speaks to authentic leadership presented first by Bill George in 2003 (Leavy, 2023) and Robert Greenleaf’s model of servant leadership (Spears, 2021). Both themes, Inclusion, and Open-Mindedness and Fairness from this study are related to the four components of authentic leadership: balanced processing (being open and cognizant of bias), internalized moral perspective, relationship transparency (intentionally building trust through the exchange of information), and self-awareness (Gardner et al., 2021). Leaders in this study shared examples of exercising their moral courage, being respectful even more so in the face of differing viewpoints and beliefs, and intentionally working to ensure fairness in their decision-making. Authentic leaders are self-aware, and faith-driven leaders are deeply reflective as evidenced by the superordinate theme of Faith-Driven Leadership. There is a natural connection between what is expected of an authentic leader and answering faith’s call to promote inclusion and equity.

In this study, Promoting Inclusion and Equity represents four of the ten servant leader characteristics: empathy, healing, commitment, and awareness (Spears, 2021) as well. Empathic leaders see other people's needs and desire to be seen. Participant one spoke to her desire to make sure transgender students at her "gendered institution" were seen and supported with the institution's admission policy. The participants demonstrated the healing characteristic of servant leadership through their awareness of the pain and struggle that exists in others, institutional inequities, and the marginalization and oppression experienced by certain populations of people. They are committed to other people's personal and professional growth. Finally, some participants expressed times where their beliefs were not consistent with the majority, but they exhibited a "deep self-awareness" (Dhiman & Roberts, 2023, foreword by Spears, p. ix) which allowed them to navigate the challenges that are often present when attempting to create inclusion and advance equity. Participant four spoke of the tension inside of her and truly embodied the servant leadership characteristic of awareness when she asked herself, "How do I not hurt my own credibility...How do I validate where people are coming from...That ability of how to both hold deep convictions and values for myself, but not put them on others...."

### *Persevering*

The participants in this study shared various examples of having to overcome professional and personal challenges. Their reliance on faith guided them through, and at times it was the influence of faith that presented the challenges they had to process and work through. Reaching a higher level of leadership in and of itself is evidence of having persevered. Perseverance was given attention in each of the six studies about women leaders in higher education in Chapter Two. Women leaders in those studies and in this study have experienced similar challenges that include, but are not limited to, opportunities for upward professional

mobility, absence of mentors, pay inequity, managing multiple marginalized identities, tokenism, fatigue, stereotype threat, and disrespect.

At times, faith's influence on the participants' leadership posed a challenge as well. Picture navigating difficult team dynamics, campus crises, or the effects of life-altering local and global issues/events, while also having to consider how to rely on the one unwavering source of support and encouragement in your life—faith. When a leader has multiple layers to their identity (race, gender, sexual orientation) like several participants in this study, the consideration of faith can be viewed as a challenge. Perseverance in the participants was ultimately evidenced by their resilience, navigating intersecting identities and faith, and balancing faith with institutional realities.

#### *Connecting and Experiencing Blessings*

The superordinate theme, Connecting and Experiencing Blessings, was an unexpected and valuable outcome of this study. If the superordinate themes were ranked in order based on the findings, Connecting and Experiencing Blessings might be second only to Faith-Driven Leadership. This finding produced the most simple list of three directions on how to be a “good” leader: be authentic (Theme-Being Your Whole Self); find common ground and connect with people (Theme-Connecting Through Faith to Build Community); and express gratitude (Theme-Feeling a Transcendent Being's Blessings). Each of these important and active demonstrations of leadership, lived out by the women leaders in this study, are related to various components of each of the leadership models presented in the literature. In addition, Dyess' fourth attribute of faith is to live authentically; it means to actively live out the foundational beliefs of faith which is exactly what the participants desire and are doing.

Considering Faith-Driven Leadership again, specifically the theme of Co-Creating with a Transcendent Being/Faith, the leaders all expressed feeling purpose-driven in their leadership because of the aforementioned relationship. They have experienced challenges as discussed previously, but also recognize the blessings derived from purpose-driven work. The co-creating relationship is very much like a small two person team: the leader and the transcendent being. The leader carries out their responsibilities, and one way to do this is with community. At times, leaders sought to build connection and community through shared faith. In other instances, they relied on basic principles of respect, kindness and compassion, derived from their faith, to achieve the same goal. Participant five, in reference to faith's influence on her leadership and using it to connect, said it clearly, "Anything that helps to continue to build connections is valuable." To build meaningful connections with others, the leaders believed in showing up authentically; this creates trust between themselves and the people they are attempting to build relationships with and serve. Building small connections or relational transparency, a component of the authentic leadership model (Leavy, 2023), leads to building community, a characteristic of servant leadership (Spears, 2021) and implies showing care for others, a component of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003).

The participants' gratitude was expressed through their recognition of the blessings, including the protection, bestowed upon them by their transcendent being. They expressed this by saying, "I have been favored in this role...promoted two times" and "I...trust God is going to have my back around whatever it is I'm stuck in." The blessing was the opportunity to be a leader in higher education, where the work often aligns with their personal faith-derived values. Lindholm (2014) also found a higher degree of gratitude among those faculty who were more oriented towards their spirituality which is adjacent to faith. A similar outcome was expressed by

Black women who spoke about navigating their intersecting identities as leaders in higher education (Chance, 2022). Their faith was their motivation to serve. Similar to the women in Chance's study, I believe the participants in this study were also grateful for their faith; it too served as motivation for remaining engaged in their leadership roles despite its challenges.

### **Faith's Future**

It is my hope and that of the participants in this study, more space is created for continued dialogue about the influence of faith on leadership experiences. The active expression of faith and the associated dialogue varies widely. Therefore, as we consider taking this dialogue to a more open and accessible space, it is important to acknowledge that faith, and perhaps more specifically religion, has been used to justify discrimination and widen equity gaps, which at times feel insurmountable. Participant six said "If we had the opportunity to talk about what our faith was, what makes us tick...it might help us with connecting and working across diverse teams. I think it would really be helpful to just understand why people are the way they are...." To that end, I offer the following call for continued exploration and recommendations for practice.

#### *A Call for Continued Exploration*

Understanding the experiences of women in leadership roles in higher education who are influenced by their faith is important, as evidenced by the findings of this study. Additional dialogue and research could serve as one of several factors that could contribute to the wellbeing, staying power, and greater representation of women in senior leadership positions.

I offer five ideas stemming from this study that have the potential to provide more information and clarity about faith's influence on experiences of individuals working in higher education. First, diversifying the participant group by race/ethnicity, level of leadership, religious

background, faith in a transcendent being other than God and gender could add more substantive information to the existing data that has been collected. Second, this study could be extended to collect real time data on participants' experiences in leadership and their active use of faith while they guide their teams, work through crises, and move through decision-making processes. Third, faith has been shown to be a bridge for advancing dialogue on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Given the current dismantling of programs designed to support and advance DEI efforts, perhaps utilizing faith as a different way to advance DEI work is worth examining more closely. I make this suggestion cautiously given historical and current evidence of how religion, and by extension faith, has been enacted to systematically harm different groups of people. Fourth, in the last 10 years the work of higher education professionals has been greatly affected by the impact of the political landscape, controversial legal decisions and the COVID-19 pandemic. Administrative leaders have taken on more responsibilities and are navigating even more complex issues. This has caused higher levels of burnout and stress. Knowing that most people believe in something greater than themselves; "nine in ten Americans believe in a higher power" ("When Americans Say They Believe," p. 4), I would suggest examining how a belief in a higher power could be related to employee engagement and well-being. Finally, I recommend expanding current research on students' spirituality, religion, and faith to explore their perspectives on campus leaders' engagement with faith. Furthermore, examining how this engagement could be strengthened to enhance students' faith development could provide additional valuable insights.

#### *Recommendations for Practice*

Sometimes a relationship with faith might benefit from being recognized outside of a traditional setting (e.g. church, temple, or another faith-specific gathering place) and being

welcomed in one's place of work where much time is spent. This study attempted to learn about faith from the perspective of women in higher education leadership. It is a possibility, in higher education where open-mindedness and inclusivity is encouraged, highlighting someone's relationship to faith might foster deeper conversations around differences and promote more meaningful relationships among the community. This recognition of faith could possibly help to bridge divides, allowing for more inclusive dialogue and understanding of one another.

At the end of each conversation, participants were asked what they would like to see come of this study. They all expressed a strong desire to continue the conversation; they encouraged the production of scholarship and believed there was an appetite for this information to be shared widely.

### *Open Dialogue*

Unanimously, participants encouraged more open dialogue about this topic. They agreed that given the level of importance that faith has in people's lives, creating space for recognizing its influence on leadership practice is necessary. Participants one and nine offered insightful thoughts and feelings that speak to the depth of importance of this topic:

(Participant 1) We don't talk about this at our professional conferences. I wish we could talk about it, because, as women, it's one of the tools we use to get us through all the crap that we have to deal with sometimes...I think anybody who experiences the margins we have to have something to hold on to, or we're going to fall off...And as educators, we have to talk about it because our nation is becoming morally lost.

(Participant 9) I would love for there to be more conversation around how people lead by faith and what it looks like for them. I just want there to be a better blending of my faith, my personhood as a black woman, and the positions that I hold in higher education.

Their comments are passionate and remind me of the invaluable contributions they bring in service to higher education. Their institutions are truly fortunate to benefit from their gifts and talents.

### *Contemplative Practices*

Participants spoke about expressing gratitude, showing respect for others, and co-creating environments with God that are good, just, and caring, all while actively exhibiting kindness, compassion, and grace. These attributes and values represent the themes Co-Creating with a Transcendent Being/Faith, Open Mindedness and Fairness, and Leadership Values from Faith. Based on my interpretation of the participants' additional recommendations for practice, I believe there is a connection between the findings of this study and contemplative practice.

Contemplative practices can include behaviours like self-reflection and awareness, mutual respect, open communication, deep listening, and honesty (Beer, 2010). Contemplative administration is a way of performing one's administrative responsibilities with the highest degree of honesty, open-mindedness, and respect for difference. In Beer's 2010 study, she asked five administrators at Naropa University how they incorporated and made meaning of contemplative practices in their work. Beer's interviews were balanced with the analysis of a set of guidelines Naropa utilizes for its administrative staff and at new employee orientation.

Four themes resulted from Beer's study: respect, individual strengths and weakness, stillness, and bringing your whole self to work. The theme of respect spoke primarily to treating yourself and others with compassion, grace, forgiveness, and kindness. All of these can be used to recognize and de-escalate conflict and resolve challenging situations through open and respectful communication. Inner qualities and outer actions represented the participants' connection to spirituality. This connection is valued at Naropa and encouraged.

Contemplative practices seem to consist of behaviours we should all exhibit whether we are faith-driven leaders or not. For leaders who identify as being faith-driven, there exists the

benefit of seeing the connection of these practices to faith, perhaps then deepening the co-creating relationship with the transcendent being.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed some overlap with established leadership types presented in Chapter Two. The participants' descriptions of the influence of faith on their leadership experiences presented characteristics of spiritual and servant leadership. The influence of faith on their lives established their value system which they carried forward into their leadership roles. An established set of values is the basis for authentic leadership. Authentic leaders are also self aware and committed to their values and beliefs (Leavy, 2023).

The findings of this study suggest the following observations. First, the nine women leaders in this study are guided definitively by their faith, which is grounded in a belief in a transcendent being, God. Their faith drives all aspects of who they are and how they operate in their leadership roles. Second, how these nine women are influenced in leadership by their faith is crucial. Their leadership stems from their explicit belief in their co-creating relationship with a transcendent being. Leadership models for example, spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991) do not reference a relationship like this one.

Finally, the integration of faith and leadership in higher education is complex. I believe the findings of this study highlight exactly what it set out to do, understand how women leaders describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences; this is different from the expression of faith. The expression of faith in higher education by leaders might evoke a range of feelings, from excitement to skepticism to hesitation. The women leaders in this study expressed confidence and evoked feelings of joy and excitement related to faith's influence; occasionally there was some reservedness.

## CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCHER'S REFLECTION

This study took shape in the Fall of 2023. At that time, I did not know I would soon face the most challenging professional experience of my career that also turned out to be deeply personal. Despite not knowing what was ahead, I really believed my faith had a plan in place for me; it offered the comfort and security I needed. The formal academic learning environment has always been a place of immense intellectual challenge for me. The intellectual challenge of researching and writing this dissertation was no different. But, addressing the topic of faith was even more challenging. It required vulnerability and courage. This study was a blessing that prevented me from traveling a path that would have been less enlightening and perhaps even harmful. I am grateful to have not known that path.

Instead, I was offered the opportunity to speak to others about faith. Nine women collectively presented evidence that spoke to their confidence, integrity, humbleness, grace, conviction, and most importantly their abiding faith in the context of serving in important leadership positions across higher education. I went into this project thinking I would bring attention to what I identified as the gap in the literature: an absence of more detailed information on the influence of faith on the leadership experiences of women leaders in higher education. I initially saw the influence of faith as one part of someone's whole life. What I have since learned is that the faith in the lives of each of these women leaders covers all aspects of who they are and how they operate their lives in a loving partnership with a transcendent being. I believe I contributed something to the gap I identified. I also gained unexpected new knowledge. I have to admit the new knowledge I gained is significantly greater than the contribution I made to the gap in literature.

This study was set in higher education, but each of these leaders could be placed in a leadership role anywhere and the influence of faith on their experiences would be just as alive and operational as it was in this study. I think one thing that is different, however, is the participants serving in higher education leadership roles would identify this work as being a “calling.” Responding to a call to do something is distinctly different than just doing something and not identifying it as a calling. These women felt called to their work.

My newly realized awareness of this leads to the following consideration. Not recognizing the role of abiding faith in someone’s life, in this case, women leaders in higher education, represents a loss of valuable insight. Therefore, I offer two additional thoughts. Reflecting on my own leadership and what I know now, I am eager to explore whether I was called to do the work I made a decision to pursue 25 years ago. If I determine it was a calling, I might begin to explore how I would approach my next role differently. Second, I asked myself the following questions from a retrospective perspective. How would the experiences of previous difficult conversations and moments that I encountered throughout my leadership have unfolded differently if I had been able to express my thoughts, actions, and emotions through the lens of being influenced by faith? Even more impactful would have been the ability to ask others—particularly those making destabilizing or harmful decisions—what guides your thought process and subsequent actions? If they are people of faith or driven by a purpose greater than themselves, I would have asked: Why are you making these choices? Is there another way? Can we do better together? Maybe I will have the chance to ask these questions of myself and others in my future leadership experiences. Taking intentional pauses to revisit and discuss our shared values on what influences our leadership approach and experience could create something truly meaningful for the communities we have been entrusted to serve.

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## APPENDIX A: PRE INTERVIEW EMAIL

Dear (Insert Name),

My name is Dimple Patel, and I am a doctoral student at Colorado State University in the Higher Education Leadership Program. *(If needed in this space I will include a personal note. For example, I found your contact information on this website.)* For my dissertation, I am conducting a qualitative research project that seeks to understand how faith influences women who are senior leaders in higher education. I will be conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Anderson, my dissertation committee chair, and the principal investigator (PI) of this project. The IRB approval letter is attached.

This project reflects my own professional journey of being a woman leader in a senior leadership role who has, over time, discovered the influence of faith on different experiences related to leading and being in service to others.

I am seeking volunteers to participate in this study. The specific criteria required for participation are outlined below.

Criteria:

- Women-identifying leaders serving in senior-level leadership positions at institutions of higher education.
  - A senior leadership position requires an advanced degree, and the scope of responsibility within that role is broad. Responsibilities can include, but are not limited to, financial oversight and management, strategic planning and implementation, fundraising, human resource management, academic program development, student services management, community relationship building, and/or infrastructure expansion and development.
- Participants recognize that their faith influences their leadership experiences.
  - Faith is associated with a personal relationship with a transcendent being, a connection to others, and the promotion of hope. The term transcendent being can be called, for example, God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, or another name. A commitment to a person, a religious group, and a set of religious beliefs and rituals can also be a part of faith but is not a requirement.

Each participant will spend up to 90 minutes in three separate meetings. The first two will be semi-structured Zoom interviews. An additional third meeting will take place to confirm data analysis. During the interviews, I will ask participants about the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. Participating in this study is voluntary, and if at any point the participant experiences discomfort they may decline to answer a specific question or withdraw from the study entirely.

The interview will be recorded with the permission of the participant. Following the interview(s), participants will be asked to review their interview transcript(s) for accuracy and will have the

opportunity to make changes to the transcription(s) as needed. This could take up to 60 minutes. The complete interview will be kept confidential and will only be available for review by the participant, student researcher (Dimple Patel), and the principal investigator (Dr. Sharon Anderson).

**Would you be interested in participating in this study?**

If yes, please complete [this form](#). Once I have received your completed information form, I will contact you to set up a meeting. In this meeting, I will answer any questions you have, confirm the criteria for participation, review the informed consent process, and set up days and times for the interviews.

Please feel free to recommend other prospective participants or forward this message to colleagues in your network.

I appreciate you considering this request. If you have any questions, please contact me via email at [dimplepatel10@gmail.com](mailto:dimplepatel10@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Dimple Patel

## APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

### PROJECT TITLE

FAITH AND LEADERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH ON THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP ROLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### RESEARCH QUESTION

How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences?

Please complete the form below. If you have any questions please contact Dimple Patel at dimplepatel10@gmail.com.

1. FIRST NAME:  
*Free text box.*
  2. LAST NAME:  
*Free text box.*
  3. EMAIL ADDRESS:  
*Free text box.*
  4. PHONE NUMBER:  
*Free text box.*
  5. If you would like to provide the name and contact information for another person who manages your schedule please do so below.  
*Free text box.*
  6. What is the name of your current place of employment?  
*Free text box.*
  7. What is your title?  
*Free text box.*
  8. Highest Degree Earned  
*Free text box.*
  9. Please provide a brief description of your role and responsibilities.  
*Free text box.*
  10. Do you recognize that faith influences your leadership experiences?
    - a. *Faith* is defined as having a belief and trust in a transcendent being. The term *transcendent being* can be called, for example, God, Allah, Vishnu, Shiva, or another name. A commitment to a person, a religious group, and a set of religious beliefs and rituals can also be a part of faith but is not a requirement.
- Y O R N
11. Which religion do you identify with? If you do not identify with a specific religion please list "NA".  
*Free text box.*
  12. Please describe your faith in a few sentences.  
*Free text box.*
  13. Is your faith connected to a religion? Please explain briefly. If it is not, please leave it blank.  
*Free text box.*
  14. Which racial and/or ethnic identities do you most identify with?

*Free text box.*

15. Which gender identities do you most identify with?

*Free text box.*

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

**Institution:** Colorado State University

**Study Title:** Faith and Leadership: Understanding the Influence of Faith on the Leadership Experiences of Women in Senior Leadership Roles in Higher Education

**Name of Investigator(s):**

Dr. Sharon Anderson (Principal Investigator)

[sharon.anderson@colostate.edu](mailto:sharon.anderson@colostate.edu)

Dimple Patel (Doctoral Student Researcher)

[dimplepatel10@gmail.com](mailto:dimplepatel10@gmail.com) or 312-550-2149

**Protocol #:** KualI ID-6263

**Procedural Questions:**

- **Why is this research being conducted?**  
*This research is being conducted to gain a better understanding of how faith influences women leaders in higher education.*
- **What will I be asked to do and how long is my commitment time?**  
*You will be asked to participate in two semi-structured interviews up to 90-minutes in length each followed by an additional meeting for up to 90-minutes to confirm data analysis. After the interviews, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript and make corrections/additions to what was transcribed. The transcript review is estimated to take up to 60 minutes.*
- **What kinds of questions will I be asked?**  
*The interviews are semi-structured and consist of questions about your faith journey, leadership experiences and how faith has influenced your leadership experiences.*
  - *Describe your professional experiences to date.*
  - *Describe faith. What does it (faith) mean to you?*
  - *How does faith influence your leadership experiences?*
  - *Describe specific ways you practice your faith in your leadership role.*
- **Eligibility: Why am I being asked to participate in this research study?**
  - *You are a woman leader in a senior leadership role at an institution of higher education.*
  - *You also consider yourself a leader who is influenced by your faith in your leadership role and are willing to share your experiences.*
- **How many people will participate in this research study?**  
*We expect up to 30 people to respond to our request for participation.*
- **Where will this research take place?**  
*All interviews and meetings will take place over Zoom.*
- **Who will see the information about me?**  
*Your participation in this research study will be kept confidential, including in any reports or publications. Only the student researcher and the principal investigator will*

*have access to the recorded interviews and transcriptions. All information will be stored securely and destroyed after the research study is completed.*

**Risks:**

1. There is foreseeable risk for taking part in this research. There may be moments where you feel challenged by the questions as you reflect on your experiences. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study as well at any point.
2. We will make every effort to safeguard your data. However, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the internet.

**Benefits:**

You may not benefit personally from being in this study, but your answers could help us understand more about how women in senior leadership roles describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences.



**CONSENT**

**Permission to videotape interview(s):**

This study involves video/audio recording. The purpose of recording the interview is so the researcher can accurately reflect the conversation. The transcription and recording will only be accessible to the student researcher and principal investigator. The recording and transcription will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

If you do not agree to be recorded, you CANNOT take part in this study.

YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded.

NO, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded.

**Permission to use direct quotes:**

Direct quotes might be considered helpful to capture the true essence of a particular lived experience shared by the research participant. All identifiable information associated with quotes will be eliminated from the data and only accessible to the student researcher and principal investigator.

YES, I give permission to use direct quotes from my interview.

NO, I do not give permission to use direct quotes from my interview.

**Alternative Opportunities:**

We know of no alternative except not to participate in our study.

**Confidentiality and Future Use:**

We will keep your interview and questionnaire responses confidential to the extent allowed by law. You will not be identified when we write about the study.

We will not use your de-identified information in future research or share with other researchers.

**Complaints or Concerns:** If you have questions about the study, please contact the researchers using the contact information provided above.

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at [CSU\\_IRB@colostate.edu](mailto:CSU_IRB@colostate.edu).

Thank you for taking the time to consider our study. You do not have to participate in our study, but we hope you will. To ensure your responses will be included in our study, please complete the interviews on the mutually agreed upon dates and times.

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

---

Participant Name

---

Participant Signature

Date

## **APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW CANCELLATION EMAILS**

### **EMAIL 1**

Dear (Insert Name),

After speaking with my advisor and doing some initial analysis, I have been asked to put a pause on additional new participant interviews. It seems like I will reach data saturation this week. That said, I would like to keep our meetings on the calendar just in case I do need to continue interviewing.

I am sorry this is coming to you so late. The initial analysis and conversation with my advisor was just completed a short time ago this morning.

Thank you for reserving the time. I am grateful for your support and interest in this research project. I'll be in touch soon.

Dimple Patel

### **EMAIL 2**

Dear (Insert Name),

I will be pausing, for sure now, further participant interviews moving forward. I'm so grateful again to you for the interest you showed. Should anything change, I will let you know. I will remove the invites from our calendars.

Have a wonderful holiday season!

Dimple Patel

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

**Study Title:** Faith and Leadership: Understanding the Influence of Faith on the Leadership Experiences of Women in Senior Leadership Roles in Higher Education

<b>DATE:</b>
<b>TIME OF INTERVIEW:</b>
<b>ZOOM LINK:</b>
<b>INTERVIEWER'S NAME:</b>
<b>PARTICIPANT'S NAME:</b>

### **Research Study Summary:**

*The purpose of this research study is to understand how faith influences women who are senior leaders in higher education.*

### **Interview Information:**

*With your permission, I will record this interview. Zoom provides a transcription option that will allow me to download a transcript of our conversation. I will share the transcript with you for your review. You may make corrections to the transcript. If at any point during the interview you want me to stop recording the interview, I will do that. You can also let me know during the interview if you wish to not continue your participation in the research study. Upon being notified, the recording will be stopped, and all data from the interview will be disposed of. I will let you know if an additional follow-up interview will be required after I review the transcript of our first meeting.*

### **Interview Questions:**

*The interview questions are designed to address the main research question for this study: How do women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences? The interview protocol is semi-structured.*

### **Questions:**

1. Describe/define faith. What does it (faith) mean to you?
  - a. What are some of the first thoughts that come to mind when I say the word faith?
  - b. Is faith associated with God?
  - c. How did faith become a part of your life? What are some of your earliest memories of faith? Lessons learned from your faith?
  - d. Did you ever disengage from your faith?
  - e. Can you give examples of when faith was expressed during challenging times? During times of joy?

- f. Can you give an example from early in your life where you utilized faith to make a major life decision?
  - g. How does faith show up in your life today?
  - h. Tell me the difference between faith and religion, if religion is a part of your life?
  - i. How do you practice your faith?
  - j. Do you belong to a faith community?
  - k. In what ways have you or do you question your faith?
  - l. Speak about your faith as it relates to your gender.
    - i. Do you recall learning about your gender through your faith?
  - m. Rank your faith and your gender identity.
2. Describe your professional experiences to date.
    - a. How long have you been working in higher education?
    - b. What is your current title and name of institution?
    - c. Provide a brief summary of your responsibilities.
    - d. Describe what it means to you to be a woman who is a senior leader in higher education.
  3. How does faith influence your leadership experiences?
    - a. What does your faith tell you about leading?
    - b. How did faith influence your professional journey?
    - c. Give an example(s) of a recent experience in your leadership role where you were influenced by your faith.
    - d. How frequently do you integrate faith into your leadership experiences?
    - e. Share any examples of the influence of your faith on your leadership experiences in the context of your gender identity.
    - f. Is your faith in agreement with the leadership role you are in?
  4. Describe specific ways you practice your faith in your leadership role.
    - a. Describe experiences where you have had to hide or hold back the influence of faith in your leadership role.
    - b. Does your faith encourage you to share and speak about it?
    - c. How does it make you feel when someone shows interest in your faith and/or notices you lead through and with faith?
  5. How does your faith influence your communication style in your leadership role?
  6. How do your colleagues and team members know that your leadership is influenced by your faith?
  7. Share an example(s) when the influence of faith on your leadership experience was misunderstood.
    - a. Describe what this misunderstanding meant for your team members, colleagues, and/or other stakeholders.
  8. Share an example(s) of when your faith and a leadership experience(s) were in conflict with one another.
  9. What do you hope for the future regarding this discussion?
  10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about how faith influences you as a woman leader in higher education?

## **APPENDIX F: EMAIL COMMUNICATION TO REVIEW INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

Dear (Insert Name),

Thank you for allowing me to interview you for my doctoral dissertation project on how women who are senior leaders in higher education describe the influence of faith on their leadership experiences. I enjoyed learning more about you and continue to be grateful for the time you are giving me for this important work. As previously discussed, I want to now give you the opportunity to review the transcripts of our two interviews.

My ask is that you take some time to review the transcripts and confirm what we discussed. If you would like to strike anything from our conversation and/or elaborate on something, this is the time to do that. If you choose to strike something from the transcripts, I will not use this information in analyzing the data I have collected. I am sharing the transcripts with you in a format that allows you to input your edits directly into the document.

Please complete your review of the transcripts within one week of receiving this communication. If you have any questions please contact me at [dimplepatel10@gmail.com](mailto:dimplepatel10@gmail.com).

Thank you,

Dimple Patel

**APPENDIX G: EMAIL AND DESCRIPTION-DATA ANALYSIS CONFIRMATION  
MEETING**

Dear (Insert Name),

I hope this message finds you doing well! I am ready to schedule our final meeting for my dissertation project. This is a meeting to present some of my findings to you.

Would you have any availability the week of (Insert Date)? This meeting would take no more than 30 minutes.

Thank you for your help!  
Dimple Patel