

The Remnant Fellowship Female Leadership Success

by
Asya Craven

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
from the University Honors College

Term Spring 2021

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Thesis Director

Dr. Rebekka King, Thesis Committee Chair

The Remnant Fellowship and Female Leadership Success

by Asya Craven

APPROVED:

Dr. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Thesis Director,
Philosophy and Religious Studies

Dr. Rebekka King, Thesis Committee Chair,
Philosophy and Religious Studies

Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Gray-Hildenbrand, who helped foster thesis ideas with me throughout the years. Being a young Business major, I would have never considered adding a Religious Studies minor without her influence.

Participating in Dr. Gray-Hildenbrand's lectures has expanded my knowledge on religion, feminism, and, most importantly, life. She pushed me to tap into my unrealized potential as a religious scholar and student. Without her teachings, guidance, and motivation, I would not have been able to accomplish an achievement such as this.

Secondly, I thank the Remnant Fellowship for being the heart and soul of my thesis. The Remnant Fellowship's continuous goodwill and charm attracted my initial interest and held it. I appreciate the kindness and accommodations offered to me in my investigation of the church and its leader Gwen Shamblin Lara. My research would not have proven as valuable without their essential contributions.

Finally, I want to say a special thank you to my family and friends who have supported me in my journey and endured countless hours of theological discussions. The love and happiness they have given me have kept me motivated. Our experiences have inspired me and contributed to who I am and thus contributed to this thesis's development.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iii
Introduction	1
Thesis	5
Methods	6
Participants	6
Evaluation	7
Painful Beginnings	8
“Becoming More Godly”	10
Gifted From God	11
Fruit of Change	14
Charismatic Leadership	15
Unique Challenges	17
Traditional Christian Beliefs	20
Establishing Authority	22
Unique Teachings	23
Weigh Down	24
Gender Roles	26
Weddings	28
God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit	29
Traditional Teachings	30
Conclusion	31
Bibliography	35

Appendix: IRB Approval	41
Appendix: IRB Approved Recruitment Script	45

Introduction

My Remnant Fellowship journey began over four years ago when I met a congregation member at undergraduate orientation. This encounter did not seem significant at the time – simply two young students excited to begin our collegiate careers. However, this was a truly crucial moment that would lead to my fascination with the Remnant Fellowship. That same year in 2017, I had my first visit to the church's Brentwood location. As soon as I entered the doors, I was completely astonished by the sights that lay before me. The church's architecture and design were something beyond the norm and extraordinary. The ceilings reach great heights drawing your eyes up to the gold and black accents that are irresistible to admire. I attended a wedding that was not only filled with glamour and grace but also gospel and faith. The wedding began with a great show of the intertwined nature of religion and marriage. Gwen Shamblin Lara, the creator and leader of the Remnant Fellowship spoke to the audience about God and the importance of marriage. During the enthusiastic reception, Shamblin Lara gleefully greeted individuals as she made her way through the crowd. She left behind her a swarm of euphoric members, ecstatic to have had their moment with her. I was honored to also receive a handshake from this powerful leader as she walked by. This incident was met with awe and excitement from the members who invited me to the wedding celebration. Despite not becoming a Remnant Fellowship member, this encounter was life-altering and spurred a great interest within me. I was inspired from that moment to research the church and its leader – eager to learn more about such an awe-inspiring congregation.

According to a 2020 Pew Forum survey, 81% of Tennesseans identify as Christian, a religion with nearly 2.2 billion followers (The Future of World Religions:

Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050, 2015). The Remnant Fellowship is a nondenominational church of the Christian faith, with headquarters in Brentwood, TN. The Remnant Fellowship and its members can be found in over 170 cities worldwide, including but not limited to countries such as Australia, Mexico, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. The church demonstrates its size and influence with over 2,600 YouTube subscribers, and more than 21,000 persons checked in via Facebook. The church uses its influence for the benefit of the local community providing food banks, job placements, financial assistance, summer camp, tutoring services, clothing consignments, and more while still maintaining international outreach and ministry. The Remnant Fellowship's central tenet is based upon an individual creating a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. While this is not unique in Christianity, what is truly unique about the Remnant Fellowship is its leadership – Gwen Shamblin Lara.

This congregation is one of very few in the predominantly Christian state that has a female leader. Gwen Shamblin Lara founded the Remnant Fellowship in 1999, recruiting others “who shared her passion for God” to establish the church (*Our History*, n.d.). Shamblin Lara felt led to help others to “live fully for God,” following her passion for God that began during childhood. Shamblin Lara was born, birth date unknown, in Memphis, Tennessee – home to the Mason Temple, the Church of God's international headquarters in Christ, and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church's headquarters (Church of God in Christ, 2015; Cumberland Presbyterian Church, n.d.). Her Memphis roots set the stage for Shamblin Lara to be entrenched in Christianity from a young age and foster her love and dedication to God. Tennessee is also the origin of Shamblin Lara's medical background, where she followed her M.D. father's footsteps (*Our History*, n.d.).

Shamblin Lara attended the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, graduating with a master's degree, graduation date unknown, in Nutrition with an emphasis in Biochemistry and an undergraduate degree, graduation date unknown, in Dietetics. After obtaining her degree, Shamblin Lara returned to Memphis as an instructor of Foods and Nutrition at the University of Memphis for five years (*Our History*, n.d.). Her altruistic nature was evident even at this time as she worked for five years with the City Health Department to help children, pregnant women, and those suffering from obesity. Shamblin Lara decided to remain in Tennessee when establishing the Remnant Fellowship in Brentwood, Tennessee. Shamblin Lara's two adult children, Michael and Elizabeth, now also reside with their spouses close to her home and have followed their mother's footsteps in the church. Shamblin Lara met her spouse, Joe Lara, at the Remnant Fellowship and in 2019 married him in front of a packed house of members (*Our History*, n.d.).

During her college studies, Shamblin Lara noted that experts and practitioners in Nutrition virtually ignored the impact and power she believed God had, which spurred her suspicion in dietetics (Shamblin Lara, 2018). In 1979, her calling to incorporate religion into the diet was fully realized and put into action. By the late 1980s to 1990, Shamblin Lara began "bringing good health back to the church where it belonged" by combining faith and health practices (Shamblin Lara, 2018). Shamblin Lara became a sensation by 1992 after her faith-based weight loss program called "Weigh Down Workshop" was made public in 1986 (Remnant Fellowship, 2020). The program had been spread to churches all over the country and received coverage from Larry King Live and the New Yorker (Griffith, 2004). The program is based on the idea that God will

reveal truths that will set you free from food desires (Shamblin Lara, 2018). In other words, this freedom will prevent individuals from overeating and will result in weight loss. Shamblin Lara claims that this, unlike dieting, is a permanent solution to keeping the “extra” weight off (Shamblin Lara, 2018). The success of this unique faith-based weight loss program created immense momentum that allowed Gwen Shamblin Lara to extend her outreach seamlessly, creating the Remnant Fellowship. Shamblin Lara’s new teachings, expertise in both religious and medical fields, and charisma made it easy for her devoted members to renounce their previous religious beliefs and transition into Shamblin Lara’s church, helping the Remnant Fellowship become the incredibly successful congregation it is now (*Fellowship*, n.d.).

With Gwen Shamblin Lara’s previously mentioned success as a female leader, questions are raised about why female leaders are seen so rarely. Despite the continued importance of women in supporting and building up Christianity, women rarely hold leadership roles in Christianity (Valenze, 1985). A 2010 survey found that only 10% of pastors or religious leaders are women, despite women being 20-25% more likely to attend a weekly service (Hartford Seminary, 2006; Zwerneman, 2016). Additional surveys also found that, on average, congregations are roughly 61% female and 39% male (Zwerneman, 2016). Aside from women making up the majority of congregations, women also find church to have a larger impact on their lives. “More than seven in ten U.S. Christian women (72%) say religion is “very important” in their lives, compared with 62% of the country’s Christian men,” according to Pew Research Center’s 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study (Fahmy, 2018). There is also a great disparity between the pay of male religious leaders as compared to female leaders. One survey found this

difference to be as high as 27% in 2016 (Zwerneman, 2016). While these numbers are clearly bleak, experts state that fifty years ago, there were little to no women religious leaders (Christian Century, 2018). The Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention comprise the two largest religious groups in the United States, and neither permit women to become ordained. Women also comprise less than a third of students enrolling in Master of Divinity programs and are less likely to have a job offer upon completion of the program (Christian Century, 2018). It is evident that while women may have an immense impact on a congregation's makeup, they are often left out of leadership and upper-level positions in the church.

Thesis Statement

Limited information is publicly known about the Remnant Fellowship and its successful female leader, Gwen Shamblin Lara. My research into the Remnant Fellowship sheds new light on the congregation and has led me to conclude that there appear to be two main methods for women to obtain successful Christian leadership positions, particularly in protestant churches similar to the Remnant Fellowship: 1) charismatic style of presentation and 2) unique teachings, both of which are appropriately feminine. This thesis investigates the Remnant Fellowship as an example of successful female leadership within Christianity today. My research examines the unique challenges and benefits that female leadership, specifically at the Remnant Fellowship, has experienced.

Methods

To prepare for the writing portion of this thesis, I began by researching the Remnant Fellowships website and reading *Weigh Down Works!* by Gwen Shamblin Lara. *Weigh Down Works!* is based on one of Shamblin Lara's most significant literary successes, *Weigh Down*. This information was helpful to understand the beliefs and practices that the Remnant Fellowship follows and to develop the foundational knowledge necessary about Gwen Shamblin Lara herself. To gain a more informed understanding of Gwen Shamblin Lara's success following this introductory search, I conducted four anonymous interviews with the Remnant Fellowship members. These members were randomly selected and had diverse backgrounds, including different ages, careers, genders, and hometowns. I compared these interviews with publicly published testimonies from the Remnant Fellowship website to gather common themes and unique experiences.

Participants

The interviewing process's goal was to provide insight into the key points behind Shamblin Lara's success, an insider's point of view on the Remnant Fellowship overall, and how Gwen Shamblin Lara contributed to the overall success of the Remnant Fellowship. Each interview began with collecting demographic information such as their place of birth and what attracted them to the Remnant Fellowship. This provided information on each participant's background to help clarify the makeup of the congregation at the Remnant Fellowship. Participants were asked at their level of involvement within the church. The involvement included but was not limited to services,

groups, and events. The involvement that a participant has within the church can correlate to how committed the individual is to the Remnant Fellowship and shows the diversity of activities that the Remnant offers to help give the members a sense of community and belonging. Finally, participants were asked what, in their opinion, makes the congregation's leader, Gwen Shamblin Laura, a successful figure in a male-dominated role within Christianity. An important aspect of my thesis is to analyze the congregation members' reactions and opinions of the church and, more specifically, the religious leader.

To abide by the IRB Exempt protocols, participants remained anonymous and could withdraw from the interview at any time. These interviews were not recorded, and I took notes on the informal interviews using paper and pencil to ensure the participant's identity remained anonymous. To maintain safety during the pandemic, these interviews were held virtually using Zoom or voice calling. The interviews abide by the approved IRB exemption, protocol ID 21-1017-2v. This includes having participants read and initial the IRB consent form with the date. See appendix for IRB documentation.

Evaluation

Following the conducted interviews, I qualitatively reviewed interview notes to examine common themes or specific insights made possible through the Remnant Fellowship members' contributions. Compared to those raised in the church, participants who joined the church noted that their lives were previously "unfulfilled" and life was "full of hurt and pain." The same participants that spoke somberly about the past quickly transitioned into a cheerful tone as the discussion shifted to their new lives that the

Remnant Fellowship and Gwen Shamblin Lara have significantly improved by teaching members to become “more godly.” All the participants in my study expressed, “God has given her the ability” to “gift” others with her insight on the Bible. This has made her succeed not only worldly but spiritually as well. Based on this understanding, participants strive to be the “fruit of change” that the Bible instructs them to become.

Painful Beginnings

The most compelling demographic question inquired what attracted the participants to the Remnant Fellowship. This was when the participants began to open up more, ready to share what brought them to something so life-changing. You could feel the pain the participants were experiencing as they began to recall their past encounters with religion before the touch of Gwen Shamblin Lara. A deep sense of despair and hopelessness clouded their lives before the Remnant Fellowship. Participant 3 described faith always being present in their life as they “gr[ew] up going to church,” but despite this fact, “life was not what it should be” (Participant 3, 2021). Participant 4 noted that there was “a lot of hypocrisy in [the previous] church” they attended, and this contributed to the “anger and hate growing in [their] heart” (Participant 4, 2021). Participant 1 recalled that they used to try “so many hobbies” and revolve their lives around worldly things because they were searching for a greater meaning and purpose in life (Participant 1, 2021). Participant 1’s life was in such dismay that their young child said, “Pop, you have to go with us [to the Remnant Fellowship]. Us, boys, have to stick together” (Participant 1, 2021). The participants identify that their situations were not yielding the desired results, which left them with a desperate need for God begging to be satisfied.

Participants and members went through issues in their previous personal lives, specifically their family relationships and weight gain. Participant 3 recollects that after their marriage, they and their partner gained a significant amount of weight (Participant 3, 2021). Jill Snapp, a member from the Remnant Fellowship with a testimonial posted on the website, says that her marriage was disconnected because it “was all about food and self” (Jill Snapps, Member Since 2005, n.d.). Another member’s posted testimonial, Blake Zaroni, discusses his addiction to food and says that “the more I shoved food down my throat, the emptier I felt” (*Blake Zaroni, Member Since 2001*, n.d.). A married couple’s online testimonial recalls that they became “miserable at home” with one another to the point that they wanted a divorce (*Al and Jan Voorhis, Members Since 2002*, n.d.).

Although gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins, according to Remnant Fellowship, many Christian Churches fail to abstain from overeating adequately. Christian tradition teaches that the seven deadly sins, also known as cardinal sins, are “against the root of Christianity” (*What Are the Seven Deadly Sins?*, n.d.). Nevertheless, 40% of adults from ages 20 to 39 and 44.8% of adults 40 to 59 are obese, according to an article posted in 2021 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*Adult Obesity Facts*, 2021). Many churches possibly encourage gluttony by holding large potluck dinners where members are often encouraged to eat multiple plates, take food home, and indulge in largely non-nutritious foods, e.g., Calvary Baptist Church’s weekly dinners (*Calvary Baptist Church*, n.d.). For church members, statistics and instances like these prove that Christian biblical teachings of overeating have been inadequate.

These members also see a failure in churches to teach them strategies to build their relationships stronger. Marriage to Christians is considered a sign of God's love and is believed to not only take place in the view of God but also with God (*Christian Relationship*, n.d.). According to the Census Bureau, in 2020, there were 137,772,000 married people in the United States, yet in the same year, there was a 14.3% divorce rate (*Historical Marital Status Tables*, 2020). Based on those statistics, approximately 9,850,698 marriages from 2020 will result in divorce. Aside from those who divorce, nearly 26,176,680 of these individuals are likely to report being unhappy in their marriage to some degree (*eHarmony*, 2018). These numbers clearly illustrate why couples are reaching out for Shamblin Lara's help to build and maintain a solid and happy marital relationship.

“Becoming More Godly”

Many participants spoke of “becoming more godly” when discussing how their lives have changed since joining the Remnant Fellowship. The participants utilized the phrase “more godly” to indicate that they are becoming closer to God and practicing the gospel. The use of this phrase is not meant to be interpreted as a belief that Gwen Shamblin Lara or any members of the Remnant Fellowship can become a God or a God equivalent. The Remnant Fellowship respects and beliefs in the “line of authority” that the Bible teaches (Participant 1, 2021). The line of authority begins with God, Jesus, Apostles, and lastly, church leaders (Participant 1, 2021). Shamblin Lara has the ability to transform those who lack godly qualities into those who are more godly followers of the creator, God. Participant 1 was attracted to the church due to their wife's transitions into

“becoming more godly” (Participant 1, 2021). The website offers instructions and guidance for members to become more godly, such as raising godly children (*Excerpts from How to Raise Godly Children*, n.d.). To raise godly children, parents need to guide their children to God by encouraging them to pray and reinforcing this by having the child record their prayers and following up with the outcomes. Shamblin Lara also advises parents to teach the importance of “loyalty, faithfulness, truthfulness, honor and courage” (*Excerpts from How to Raise Godly Children*, n.d.). These are godly characteristics that are important to instill into children. While parents are raising more godly children, they are also becoming more godly themselves by acting selflessly to take care of God’s creations, i.e., their children. An essential aspect of the Remnant Fellowship is it gives members a closer relationship with God that members felt that they were previously lacking. The opportunity to not only get closer to godly people but also become godly themselves is enticing. Participant 2 said that “anyone can do it if you’re willing to put [Shamblin Lara’s] teachings into practice” (Participant 2, 2021).

Gifted from God

Every participant stated that God has gifted Shamblin Lara the ability to share her insight on the gospel. The participants credit this great insight as a gift given by God. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them... for the common good” through the message of wisdom, knowledge, healing, speaking of tongues, or interpreting of tongues (1 Cor. 12:4-9, New International Version). The gifts are given to assist those who are called upon by God to do his will. Shamblin Lara has been gifted with wisdom and knowledge by God to guide others on their religious path, utilizing this

skill to show others what they cannot see alone. She has a tremendous amount of intelligence and foresight to see what people's wants and needs are because she is a "shepherd at heart" (Participant 3, 2021). Participant 1 explained that, despite never admitting the fact, Shamblin Lara is a subject matter expert on many topics (Participant 1, 2021). Participant 3 also credited some of Shamblin Lara's success to the fact that she is "incredibly insightful [and] can see things that need to be done [such as] Weigh Down" (Participant 3, 2021). Her relationship with God has enabled her to share her God-given gifts with others. These gifts have provided members with insights on the Bible through literature, video, and audio mediums, to help others obtain the relationship with God like she has achieved. Participant 1 said that a person should listen to anyone with the logical insight capabilities if they get you closer to God, more godly, similar to how Shamblin Lara has used her gifts and connections to inform others (Participant 1, 2021).

According to the participants, Shamblin Lara has also been gifted with the characteristic of bravery. Shamblin Lara "was being suppressed" and could not do what God called her to do (Participant 3, 2021). Despite this active repression, "she stood up" and accomplished her calling from God, which took an incredible amount of courage (Participant 3, 2021). "God has given her that ability... to address bold subjects" in order to assist others on their path (Participant 4, 2021). God gifted Shamblin Lara with bravery so that she could not only stand up for her beliefs but also lead others who share these ideals. If Shamblin Lara did not have a God-given gift, then she would not be able to have the strength to touch so many lives. Shamblin Lara has devoted her life to guiding her congregation to a strong and lasting relationship with God (Participant 2, 2021). This feat is no small accomplishment, and Participant 3 said that they would not have had that

same courage as Shamblin Lara exemplified (Participant 3, 2021). Shamblin Lara has also faced much scrutiny from the media and others, yet she remains in her position and steadfast in her beliefs. In facing these criticisms, Gwen Shamblin Lara has shown great bravery in the face of adverse circumstances.

Shamblin Lara has also utilized her gifts to inspire the congregation and help members realize their God-given gifts. Members are encouraged to use the “gift that [G]od has given [them] for His purposes” to assist the community with their physical, spiritual, and outreach needs (*Ministries*, n.d.). One way that members use their gifts to help these needs is by joining church service group committees. One hundred percent of the participants were involved with multiple church service groups or committees that serve as outreach for the community and the church itself, such as the housing committee, ushering, and the welcome committee. The housing committee organizes available member homes for visitors that need accommodations. Ushers set up chairs, tables, or other furniture, for services and events, then guide members to the service or event’s correct locations. The welcome committee ensures that new members or visitors feel connected and involved within the church. These are ways for members to use their gifts to help the congregation. As an example, those with housing connections may use those gifts and relationships to aid the housing committee, and similarly, those who may be gifted with extraversion and an outgoing demeanor can use those aspects to connect new members into the church. Participant 3 said that members are “unified by the church,” so being involved in several groups and committees is “joyful” and “not a burden” (Participant 3, 2021). “Everyone is doing their part for God” (Participant 3, 2021). This

quote, as well as the commitment to action in the church, illustrates the importance of God's gifts continuing to provide for the community and positively impact others.

Fruit of Change

During the interviews, participants talked about becoming the fruit of change. The Bible says, "A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit... you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions" (Mat. 7:17-20). One must be obedient to the word of God and surrender to God's will in order to bear good fruit (*Nicolette*, n.d.). Mark and Therese Marie Jost say they are "bearing the fruit of the Spirit of God" and are living and having faith "to pass down a Holy seed to the next generation" (*Mark and Therese Marie Jost*, n.d.). In the process of becoming "good fruit," the Remnant Fellowship works to accept all those who seek to do so regardless of their current self. Participant 1 said, "we are all trying to be good fruit" because everyone can improve. If someone is attending the Remnant Fellowship Church and is "genuinely interested, there is not going to be any judgment" because anyone can become good fruit as long as they are willing to put Shamblin Lara's teachings into practice (Participant 2, 2021). This aspect of the Remnant Fellowship is unique compared to many other churches and religions that may instead pass judgment on those deemed "bad fruit," Participant 4 noted this from their past, stating that there was "a lot of hypocrisy in [the previous] church," they attended (Participant 4, 2021). This concept of the "fruit of change" is common among the members of the Remnant Fellowship and is clearly an important part of this culture.

Charismatic Leadership

Returning to the unique woman leadership at the Remnant Fellowship, I propose that charismatic leadership is one contributing factor. Charisma was once held as a strictly theological concept and was referred to as a gift from God, gifting one with a grace similar to God himself to perform exceptional tasks (Lepsius, 1986). Charisma gifted from God allowed individuals to channel divine authority into leadership and gain power over individuals. Those in these leadership positions with this charisma were considered to have been given a legitimate representation of God's grace that enabled them to lead others the way that God leads the congregations. Max Weber, the famous German sociologist, brought the concept of charisma into the social sciences. In bringing charisma to the social science field, the religious context of charisma was left behind. As the religious context was left behind, Weber caused charisma to now be defined as "any quality of a person that is regarded as supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional and inaccessible to ordinary people" (Lepsuis, 1986). Based on this definition, charisma has become more so quality of leadership referencing social patterns and behaviors rather than God's grace.

Christian women have honed a style of presenting to be adequate to both genders, utilizing this charisma to bridge the gap between them. Gwen Shamblin Lara uses a conversational manner filled with passion and warmth to draw in her audience (Shamblin Lara, 2018). Participant 2 said that when Shamblin Lara feels very strongly on a topic, "she becomes very charismatic and passionate... [and] her passion makes us feel passionate." Participant 1 noted that Shamblin Lara's presentation style is so relatable that "you feel like [the service] was directly [spoken] to you" and that "your spirit

leading” is attracted to the gift that God has given Shamblin Lara. “Spirit Leading” is letting God lead you to a moral transformation (Keener, 2020). It is through this conversational manner that Shamblin Lara exemplifies charismatic leadership over the Remnant Fellowship.

Shamblin Lara is also knowledgeable on subjects that she presents and creates a presence that attracts attention to this previously mentioned gift of God. Participant 4 refers to Shamblin Lara as a “dynamic speaker” because she reads the scripture and then makes the Bible applicable (Participant 4, 2021). Participant 2 describes Shamblin Lara’s presentations as straightforward and lays out all the information for the congregation (Participant 2, 2021). Shamblin Lara is “incredibly insightful on life and the Bible” (Participant 1, 2021). Members leave services feeling challenged and hopeful of a positive change (Participant 1, 2021). During these changes, it is essential to keep in mind that “it is about the heart, you do stumble... but if you have a heart for God, it will help you” (Participant 1, 2021). Her presence and knowledge have given the congregation members the ability to feel comfortable in these changes and feel confident enough in the knowledge they have that any problems are approached in stride.

Participants noted that Shamblin Lara’s loving nature contributes to her success. Shamblin Lara’s loving essence “is incredible and something to look up to” (Participant 1, 2021). Shamblin Lara has a deep-rooted concern for others, and this compassion is an extension of her “love for God and love for his people” (Participant 4, 2021). “Shamblin Lara practices what she teaches, which is especially true when it comes to taking care of the congregation’s needs” (Participant 3, 2021). The Book of Acts describes the establishment of a church taking care of its members’ needs, and Participant 3 stated that

this is what the Remnant Fellowship is modeled after (Participant 3, 2021). This care for one another is a large aspect of the inspiration for the congregation to participate in multiple service groups and provide outreach for the community and the church. Participants consider this joyful because everyone does their part to spread God's love (Participant 3, 2021). Shamblin Lara acts as an exemplary individual that helps others achieve their journey to have their own experience. Her nature and care for others have inspired others to find that journey as well as feel supported in pursuing it. Although charisma's current definition has strayed from a gift of God, it appears that Gwen Shamblin Lara's gifts from God align perfectly with the theological definition.

Unique Challenges

Many unique challenges have arisen in the development of the Remnant Fellowship and Gwen Shamblin Lara's choice to lead the congregation. One potential cause of the discrepancy between men and women in churches is a historical prevalence of men in the ministry continually trickling down with more men in leadership – a form of misogyny in Christianity's past fostered in today's congregations. Male interpretations of the Bible were commonplace and often explicitly excluded women from holding leadership roles (Livingston, 2009). These male interpretations often also removed much, if not all, of the autonomy for women living in these times by supporting civil laws, essentially rendering women as property of men with no rights to their own earnings, their own property, and even their own children. This “cherry-picking” of Bible verses has created a stigma against women in leadership of any kind, held by some even outside of the church (McCluney, 2018). Such verses include “A woman should learn in

quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). It is evident that certain verses prohibit women from obtaining leadership roles even if not explicitly stated. The long-standing discrimination against women creates a systematic bias preventing women in modern times from ascending to leadership positions in faith despite the seeming progress in the rest of the world.

One potential challenge for female leaders in general and one that has greatly impacted Shamblin Lara has been the mainstream media discreditation. The connection between cult status and female leadership in American religious history overall is well documented. Religious leaders such as Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins were condemned and ridiculed for leading despite being forbidden in mainstream denominations of Christianity (Harley, 1995). People try to discredit female religious leaders by attacking the woman’s character or defaming her belief system. Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science congregation was criticized for being a” ‘profitable confidence game’” because she charged pupils for teachings in mind and health (Jenkins, 2000). Emma Curtis Hopkins was a student following Mary Baker Eddy and fought similar persecution for continuing those teachings. Shamblin Lara has also been slammed by society with similar allegations because of her financial success with books and *Weigh Down*; some were going so far as to call the Remnant Fellowship a cult by those outside of the church (Griffith, 2004; GotQuestions Ministries, 2020). Another example of the public’s discrediting tactic was accusing women like Ellen G. White and Madame Blavatsky, two prominent women in religion, of plagiarism (Jenkins, 2000). Shamblin Lara also faced these unfounded accusations and attempts at discreditation. This similar

tactic was used against her as some say that her scriptures are used out of context and teach a “patchwork gospel” to trick members into joining her false religion (Brooks, n.d.). With harsh allegations and criticisms like these, it is not difficult to see why so few women can obtain and maintain leadership positions in religion.

Additionally, contributing to the rise of media discreditation, the Remnant Fellowship’s creation fell into a period of a resurgence of cult concern in the media (Jenkins, 2000). Phillip Jenkins described a cult and anticult cycle diagram that forms a table to show the parallels in the time of anticult reactions. The categories of these time periods are labeled as emergence, reaction, speculation, and second peak. Focusing on the latter half of this cycle, the speculation period is when the media leads speculation of cult problems. The second peak is when a new wave of cult scandals leads to a resurgence of popularity. Jenkins notes that the speculation period is historically the most intense phase of the cycle as marginal religions spiral and snowball into wildly created fantasies (Jenkins, 2000). Cult allegations over the last century have become more damning that the term itself is only used on “enemies” (Jenkins, 2000). The Remnant Fellowship’s creation falls within the speculation and second peak of concern, making the Remnant Fellowship an easy target for critics and the media to similarly create rumors and reports that spread like wildfire.

Following the widespread criticism of the Remnant Fellowship as it was thrust into the spotlight again in 2000, church leaders across the nation called for a Weigh Down classes’ cancellation (John, 2002). Backlash targeting the Remnant Fellowship created a sense of “good” and “bad” religion in the community (Oris, 2005). True or “good” religion represents Christianity’s traditional viewpoint, which holds the belief in

the holy trinity as a central tenet. Critics were quick to claim the Remnant Fellowship as a “bad” religion, fearing that the Remnant Fellowship would spread misinformation regarding their viewpoint on “good” religion. This illustrates that no aspect of the Remnant Fellowship was safe from mainstream media scrutiny as even the basic tenet teachings were under fire.

Traditional Christian Beliefs

Although the Remnant Fellowship is a nondenominational church, they do belong to the overarching Christian faith. Traditional Christian teachings are often firmly planted around the belief in the holy trinity. This holy trinity refers to the three divine beings within Christianity: “‘The Father’ or God, ‘The Son’ or Jesus Christ, and the ‘Holy Spirit’ or the ‘Holy Ghost’” (Mahoney, 2018). It is said that these three spiritual beings are how God has chosen to speak with his followers in different ways. Despite the different names, each part of the trinity is said to be a representation of the one God in different forms. Traditional Christians view “The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit” as separate parts that are each at their core God (Ham, 2010). The Bible does not directly mention the trinity’s development or structure. However, Christians contend that the trinity’s existence is revealed throughout the Bible’s scripture (Ham, 2010). Such verses include those that state explicitly “...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” and “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (Mat 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14).

As previously mentioned, women do have a powerful impact within the church which extends to those with traditional Christian beliefs as well. However, this impact

and the role of women in church are restricted to the congregation's supportive roles in the viewpoint of churchgoers. The male interpretations of the Bible "excluded women from leadership roles in the Christian Church and also gave support for civic laws that allowed men to have custody of their wives and control of their children, denied married women the right to property, gave men the right to their wives labor and earnings, and generally opposed any genuine autonomy for women" (Livingston, 2009, 366). While most traditional Christians believe that women hold an essential role in the church, women are shunned from leadership roles within the church (*The Role of Women*, n.d.). Many regard women as "spiritual equals" to men; however, women are often slated with the "responsibility" of submitting to their husbands (*The Role of Women*, n.d.). This phrasing itself shows the power that women have as they are not told to submit but rather given a responsibility to submit to their husbands. Interestingly, this traditional viewpoint often does not extend beyond the church. Many Christians have flexible definitions of gender roles within outside roles such as at work. A Christian woman commented that women should have the ability to be a leader at work if "God has given her the ability" (Manning, 1999). The same woman later states that women are "simply not capable of the same job as a man" and that "God created [women] to be: helpmates" (Manning, 1999). These quotes from a woman herself illustrate a traditional Christian viewpoint that women can be capable of leadership, but only if that leadership is outside the church. Church leadership roles are traditionally reserved for men, even in the mindset of female congregation members.

Establishing Authority

Many female presenters utilize different techniques as a way to legitimize their presentation. These strategies invoke, analyze, interpret, or reinterpret religious authority by using personal experience, religious text, and religious community to support an argument (Gray-Hildenbrand, 2020). Shamblin Lara also includes these religious authority techniques to establish her credibility. These women's charisma applies to their writings, and presentations must be heard by an audience but embraced as a legitimate source.

A speaker's use of personal experience as a religious authority is an excellent technique to establish authority as critics cannot refute it. One cannot deny what has happened or discount an individual's experience because it is uniquely their own. Gwen Shamblin Lara uses personal experience to create powerful arguments that inspire change as well. Shamblin Lara discusses her own personal struggles with weight loss and growing up in a family where "delightful" foods led to a largely unhealthy lifestyle (Shamblin Lara, 2018). Shamblin Lara realized that she struggles with weight and being overweight came as a direct result of inefficient diet culture. After coming to this realization, Shamblin Lara began "going to God for help and staying in the Word of God" (Shamblin Lara, 2018). Including God in this process allowed her to focus on her relationship with God rather than focusing on food, causing Shamblin Lara to eat less over time. This example of personal experience helped establish the religious authority in the scenario and helped inform the congregation of how "filling" a relationship with God can be. A relationship with God is more filling and satisfying than a three-course meal. Members of the congregation echo this conclusion as Participant 1 described life

becoming “more full” through their time at the Remnant Fellowship rather than simply revolving around sports. This example illustrates how Gwen Shamblin Lara’s use of personal experience can help directly translate to impact within the congregation.

Another way women have frequently established their authority is through directly citing religious texts to further their point. While presenting and writing, Shamblin Lara routinely uses Bible scriptures to support her ideas (*Fellowship*, n.d.). Participant 1 recalled a service where Shamblin Lara held up the Bible and said, “if you revere this book,” then your heart will change. This display was noteworthy for the participant because it exemplified what was missing from previous Christian services and strongly illustrated the use and reliance on the Bible within the Remnant Fellowship and Shamblin Lara’s teachings. Participant 2 noted that Shamblin Lara “does not have her own teachings because [the message] is all from the Bible,” indicating that Shamblin Lara utilizes biblical messages spoken from her perspective to establish authority. Participant 4 said that “you hear the words, but you are drawn in because [Shamblin Lara] has a great way of making the Bible applicable.” These examples clearly show that Gwen Shamblin Lara uses the Bible to relate her ideas and sermons to the congregation.

Unique Teachings

The Remnant Fellowship has not only gained success from having a female leader but by having unique teachings that are rooted in biblical teachings. The unique teachings I will be examining are Weigh Down, gender roles, the significance of weddings, and the rejection of the holy trinity. The Remnant Fellowship has many other striking teachings, such as their stance on divorce and guidance on raising children. The specific teachings I

will be discussing were mentioned by participants in my interviews. Thus, guiding my focus to the unique teachings that the participants found noteworthy to include in their interviews. These teachings are not necessarily new ideas because they are inspired by the Bible but are presented in a new light that attracts and benefits members.

Weigh Down

One of Shamblin Lara's most unique ideas is her program Weigh Down. This program has not only ignited change within the Remnant Fellowship but also other Christian followers as well. The Weigh Down program focuses on gluttony. While many other devotional diet cultures exist, they often focus solely on weight loss. Although Shamblin Lara's Weigh Down program still focuses on weight loss, the program is unique in that it utilizes bodily fitness as a vehicle rather than a goal. Bodily fitness is used as a tool to help develop close and satisfying relationships with God (Griffith, 2004). Participant 2 said the "Weigh Down diet wasn't about weight loss; it was about the connection to God" that solidified the results for them (Participant 2, 2021). Weigh Down encourages participants to incorporate prayer into decisions, including those that revolve around food, such as when, where, and how much to consume. This is slated to help members focus on religion and distances their thoughts from overeating. Strengthening your relationship with God will also enhance your control over food and other addictions. The Remnant Fellowship believes that every "man, woman and child- each individual-can find their own personal relationship with God... which gives them God's Spirit to guide them hour by hour in all decisions" (*Foundational Beliefs*, n.d.). Shamblin Lara is giving members control over their lives through giving God power and,

more importantly, control over their sin by guiding members to a relationship with God. The world, and thus the people, have become “enslaved” and “controlled” by man-made propaganda to make decisions based on man-made rules, but Shamblin Lara can guide those “enslaved” and “controlled” to the salvation of God (*Foundational Beliefs*, n.d.). It is through the Weigh Down program that Shamblin Lara proposes she can help bring those people who have been targeted and controlled by this propaganda back to God.

“Thin Eaters” is a term utilized frequently in the Weigh Down program. Gwen believes becoming a Thin Eater is by overcoming head hunger and listening to stomach hunger. With this method, she has found that she “craves” God more than she does food, insisting that following this method will work for her congregation as well as they reach for God. This inclusion of one’s relationship with God frequently throughout the day has helped members find a more meaningful purpose in life. Participant 1 talked about how he previously centered his life around sports. The Remnant Fellowship and Shamblin Lara’s teachings have changed Participant 1’s purpose to “having a zeal for god in every aspect of life” instead of his life revolving around just “being a fan” of sports. It is evident from even the congregation that Shamblin Lara’s unique teachings are influential and inspire others. This could be because individuals felt that their previous religious group did not yield results like the faith-based weight loss program. Members see a physical transformation of weight loss and a spiritual change as they get closer to God. This physical transformation has even been noted by the congregation members themselves. Participant 3 said “Gwen was showing [their] wife how to put the Bible in practice,” and this created an “outward change of weight loss but an inward change of hearts” (Participant 3, 2021). This statement indicates that these tangible physical results

led to other changes within themselves as well—a unique point not made by other religious leaders. Shamblin Lara presents a more result-oriented message that attracts members that seek results to the Remnant Fellowship.

Gender Roles

Gwen Shamblin Lara also presents a unique viewpoint of gender roles beyond her own presence as the ministry's leader. Shamblin Lara fuses together nontraditional and traditional Christian gender roles to effectively present to the congregation. Her ability to lead and teach are displaying these traditionally masculine characteristics in traditional Christianity. Still, 100% of participants said that Shamblin Lara also exhibits traditionally feminine characteristics such as humility, love, and compassion. Participant 3 said that Shamblin Lara embodies the characteristics of the “fruit of the spirit” (Participant 3, 2021). In the Bible, Paul lists nine behaviors that result from God's influence in Christina's life: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). The fruit of the spirit has the traditionally feminine gender roles associated with it. Making the connection of the fruit of the spirit and Shamblin Lara both exhibit these feminine attributes. This juxtaposition has made her appealing to members as she ascends across the levels to become more godly and also assist others on their journey to a godly life (Participant 4, 2021). This quality is admired by members that seek similar goals and reach to become more godly as well. This fusion of non-tradition and traditional characteristics is refreshing to the members. It is unique in its ability to be rooted in traditional beliefs and additionally incorporates new theological interpretations.

Gwen Shamblin Lara's unique ability to mesh old and new religious themes helps provide members the results they were unable to find with their previous religious involvement, helping them finally feel "full." The Remnant Fellowship blends not only nontraditional and traditional Christian gender roles for the leader but also the congregation members. Shamblin Lara teaches that the wife has the power to improve her marriage by "following the example of a Godly, respectful woman" (*The Christian Wife*, n.d.). This statement gives women the ability to take charge and lead their marriage into a better state rather than simply allowing men to control the pathway of their marriage. It exemplifies the fusion of gender roles in nontraditional and traditional beliefs. Women, in traditional Christianity, do not have the ability to lead in a Godly manner. This would have to be accomplished by the husband. Yet, it has undertones of traditional gender roles that often appeal to those who were raised in the traditional manner and hold onto those tenets. The use of the phrase "respectful woman" indicates that women have specific roles that must be followed that are uniquely feminine. Shamblin Lara's teachings are leading women to take the lead but also follow the traditional wifely characteristics. At the Remnant Fellowship, this idea of women taking the lead is noted among the members. Participants 1 and 3 noted that their wives, like many others, incorporated Gwen's teachings first, and then the rest of the family joined in (Participant 1, Participant 3, 2021). Participant 3 specifically said, "Gwen was showing [their] wife how to put the Bible in practice," which led the entire family to following suit. A woman with "noble character is dedicated to the Most High God and dwells in His Spirit" (*The Christian Wife*, n.d.) Women are not traditionally considered to have nobility as a characteristic. To possess this and dwell in God's Spirit places women closer to God than traditional

Christianity would consider women. In traditional Christianity, the evidence of women's presence and significance has been "in neglected texts" (Karen, 1998). The statement also reveals the traditional characteristic of dedication or servitude that women hold. The deeper meaning of these statements and the messages from Gwen Shamblin Lara clearly indicate a fine balance that includes both traditional and non-traditional Christian gender roles. With many biblical interpretations neglecting the abilities of women, it is distinctive to find a message that shifts the narrative of gender roles for a Christian woman.

Weddings

Marriage is a significant event in Christian life as it begins a path with a partner to share and rejoice in your love with one another and God. Christians consider marriage a true gift from God that exemplifies a "declaration of love and commitment" (*Marriage and Weddings*, 2009). It is even explicitly understood that God ordained marriage as one of His many great acts (*Re-establishment of the God-Fearing Family*, n.d.). The Remnant Fellowship values this religious-based ritual and puts efforts into ensuring each wedding is special. Weddings are presented beautifully through the message, vows, attire, decorations, dancing, food, and fellowship, which are accredited to God's creativity and the work of scores of volunteers and donations from the church (*About - Remnant Fellowship Weddings*, n.d.). The Remnant Fellowship weddings go "beyond the outward appearance" of weddings and into "a deeper relationship with G[od]" (*About - Remnant Fellowship Weddings*, n.d.). This is accomplished by the couple writing and presenting their own "Vows of Commitment," a "special message of Truth," which is a gospel

lesson. Church leaders are also incorporated to validate that the couple is “living righteously” (*About - Remnant Fellowship Weddings*, n.d.). The weddings are well documented, with pictures and videos posted on sub-websites for the Remnant Fellowship. This website allows viewers to see past weddings and upcoming weddings. It also offers wedding ideas and resources free for the congregation or the public to view. Most of the weddings are recorded and made available for members and nonmembers to view virtually. Generally, most weddings are posted publicly and open to the public. These weddings are clearly of the utmost importance to the Remnant Fellowship, making God’s ordainment a central aspect of their actions.

God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit

The holy trinity, as previously discussed, is a widely held belief that Christians maintain. The Remnant Fellowship does not agree with this ideal. Shamblin Lara teaches that the holy trinity is a “man-made creed” that was created “[t]hree hundred years past the death of Christ” (*The Essence of God & Christ*, n.d.). The “Godhead” in traditional Christianity has three persons in one God, but the Remnant Fellowship believes that God is one almighty instead of three (*The Essence of God & Christ*, n.d.). Shamblin Lara backs her and the church’s belief in one entity once again by utilizing the Bible and religious text to establish this authority. According to the Bible, “[t]he Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). “The Bible does not mention the term “godhead” or “trinity,” and these man-made terms create “a whole new religion” (*The Essence of God & Christ*, n.d.). “‘Christian’ and ‘trinitarian’” are not words that go together because there is not adequate scriptural evidence to support the holy trinity’s beliefs (*The Essence of God &*

Christ, n.d.). Shamblin Lara says that “[e]veryone has a soul and a spirit,” but this does not mean that every person equals two people (*The Essence of God & Christ*, n.d.). This lack of belief in the holy trinity is extremely different from other Christian churches and denominations.

Traditional Teachings

Shamblin Lara grounds her unique teachings alongside many beliefs shared by other Christians. Shamblin Lara and the congregation utilize the New International Version of the Holy Bible. Traditional Christian’s primary sacred text is the Bible which comprises the Old Testament and the New Testament (*Christian Sacred Texts*, 2015). The Bible is important to Christians because they believe it transmits the thoughts and will of God (Schimmel, n.d.). Charla Walston credits her happy life to the “Bible-based teaching of Remnant Fellowship” because it has taught her to live out the Bible’s teachings (*Charla Walston*, n.d.). Shamblin Lara frequents the biblical scripture in her presentations. The Remnant Fellowship also uses scriptures to support interpretations and claims.

The Remnant Fellowship is God-fearing like traditional Christians. Being God-fearing reminds Christians not to fall into temptations of a “sinful nature” (Bolinger, 2020). God-fearing goes beyond respect and astonishment; it is the recognition that God’s will must be followed because of God’s aversion to sin (Bolinger, 2020). The Remnant Fellowship believes that being God-fearing is a loving act that teaches members wisdom and humility (*Re-establishment Of The God-Fearing Family*, n.d.). The Bible says, “Wisdom’s instructions is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor”

(Proverbs 15:33). Gaining a “holy fear of God” is the key to gaining a relationship with God (*Re-establishment Of The God-Fearing Family*, n.d.).

The Remnant Fellowship believes in taking “care of the needs of the members,” as the Book of Acts instructs (Participant 3, 2021). Shamblin Lara teaches that each family is important, and everyone should “take care to help each family become all that it should be” (*Re-establishment of The God-Fearing Family*, n.d.). The church has ten full-time employees and around 300 volunteers offering guidance and or assistance for any member with physical, emotional, spiritual, or financial needs (Participant 4, 2021). With this ideal in mind, it makes sense why the Remnant Fellowship has so many service groups for the congregation. These groups offer services such as food banks, automobile services, legal assistance, and job placement. Though some churches do not offer the wide variety of services that the Remnant Fellowship has, the idea of serving their community is like-minded. The congregations put into practice watching over themselves and “all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,” where the flock refers to all followers of God (Acts 20:28).

Conclusion

I would have never predicted that I would begin my collegiate career with a business minor and end my collegiate career with a religious studies minor, a change fueled by my interest and passion spurred by the Remnant Fellowship itself. The Remnant Fellowship has broken many odds by becoming successful worldwide. Although being Christian in the state of Tennessee is not in itself unique, the Remnant Fellowship distinguishes itself from other Christian faiths. Gwen Shamblin Lara’s early

beginnings in health and religion were just the beginning of what was to come in the future. When she realized that her two passions were not combined as they should be, *Weigh Down* was born. Gwen Shamblin Lara persevered over the Christian faith's traditional beliefs to become a successful female church leader, effectively breaking the glass ceiling in religious leadership. Shamblin Lara's success can be attributed to features of her sermons, such as her charismatic style of presenting and unique insight into the Bible. These insights continue to attract and fascinate individuals with their blended nontraditional and traditional values. Shamblin Lara's presentation style and teachings were revealed by researching the online resources that the Remnant Fellowship offers, *Weigh Down Works!*, and interviews.

The participants in the informal interviews contributed essential insight into the congregations' values and beliefs. These interviews also revealed the members' previous lives were full of despair because of unhappiness in their previous churches, home, and a lack of life purpose. This all changed when the participants joined the Remnant Fellowship and began to become more godly. Through this process, their personal happiness increased, their family's relationship became more united, and their spiritual life was enriched. This is all possible through Shamblin Lara's teachings. According to interviewees, God has gifted Shamblin Lara with the abilities to serve God's will to help the community get closer to God. Her gifts have also ignited the gifts within the congregation. The members want to become the good fruit of change by being obedient to God. The inspiration to become the fruit of change for God and serve the community came directly from Shamblin Lara's charisma gift. She clearly has a gift to invoke

passion into others and inspire change. This charisma is rooted in her ability to convey her vast knowledge of the Bible in a loving nature.

Although Gwen Shamblin Lara has grown the Remnant Fellowship into a large and well-respected congregation, the Remnant Fellowship has not always been highly revered. The church has received significant backlash from the mainstream media for having a female religious leader, even going so far as to attempt to discredit Shamblin Lara. In traditional Christian beliefs, there are often concrete tenets that are mostly unwavering across denominations, such as belief in the holy trinity and the ideals regarding submissive women. As the Remnant Fellowship deviates from these widely-held ideals, she must go beyond typical teachings to spread her unique messages.

The Remnant Fellowship will always be a significant memory and experiencing the Fellowship firsthand was a truly impactful chapter of my life. The incredibly high and ornate ceilings of the Remnant Fellowship may have been planned to simply be an ornate decoration, but looking up at the high ceilings will serve as a reminder that the glass ceilings imposed upon one by the world are meant to be broken. Shamblin Lara is a clear example of new heights being reached, exploding through the religious glass ceiling. With any great struggle, there will be arduous challenges but also great benefits. Gwen Shamblin Lara's example shows that the key is handling those obstacles with grace, embracing the benefits as they come, and using that momentum to change the world ahead. Although this chapter of my life may be complete, the lessons learned and the impact of both the Remnant Fellowship and Gwen Shamblin Lara will be lifelong. Additionally, the impact of this research shines a light on the positive impact that female religious leaders may have on their congregations and demonstrated a pathway for them

to achieve their successes. A review of the literary works, as well as the statements made by members of the Remnant Fellowship, exemplify that the success of this church is not by chance but by the continued dedication of Gwen Shamblin Lara - an inspiration to young women everywhere.

Bibliography

About - Remnant Fellowship Weddings. (n.d.). The Weddings of Remnant Fellowship.

Retrieved April 12, 2021, from <https://remnantfellowshipweddings.com/about-remnant-fellowship-weddings/>

A Church Ready for a Change. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved February 23, 2021,

<https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/Welcome-to-Remnant-Fellowship>

Adult Obesity Facts. (2021, February 11). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

Al and Jan Voorhis, Members Since 2002. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 4,

2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/Testimonies/Read-Member-Testimonies/Marriages/Al-and-Jan-Voorhis>

Blake Zanoni, Member Since 2001. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 4, 2021,

from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/Testimonies/Read-Member-Testimonies/Freed-from-Overweight/Blake-Zanoni>

Bolinger, H. (2020, October 28). *What it Does and Doesn't Mean to Be 'God-Fearing'.*

Crosswalk. Retrieved April 12, 2021, from <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean-to-be-god-fearing.html>

Calvary Baptist Church. (n.d.). Calvary Baptist Church. Retrieved April 12, 2021, from

<https://www.cbcol.net>

- Charla Walston*. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/Testimonies/Read-Member-Testimonies/Women/Charla-Walston>
- Christian Relationship*. (n.d.). BBC. Retrieved April 2, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zpjwb82/revision/2>
- Christian Sacred Texts*. (2015, March 17). Religion Facts. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://religionfacts.com/christianity/texts/>
- The Christian Wife*. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/The-Christian-Wife>
- eHarmony*. (2018, February 8). Cision. Retrieved April 12, 2021, from <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/64-percent-of-americans-say-theyre-happy-in-their-relationships-300595502.html#:~:text=Meanwhile%2C%20while%2019%20percent%20of,respondents%20over%20the%20age%2065>.
- The Essence of God & Christ*. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/The-Essence-Of-God>
- Excerpts from How to Raise Godly Children*. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved March 29, 2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/How-to-Raise-Godly-Children>
- Fahmy, D. (2018, April 6). *Christian women in the U.S. are more religious than their male counterparts*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved February 19, 2021, from

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/06/christian-women-in-the-u-s-are-more-religious-than-their-male-counterparts/>

Foundational Beliefs. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from

<https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/What-We-Believe-Video-Resources>

The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. (2015, April

2). Religion & Public Life. Retrieved March 20, 2021, from

<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

Gray-Hildenbrand, J. (2020). “Women and Religion-Second Wave Feminism” Handout.

Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee. n.d. Print.

Griffith, R. M. (2004). *Born Again Bodies*. University of California Press.

Ham, J. (2010, October 13). *Why Is the Trinity Important?* Answers in Genesis. Retrieved

March 21, 2021, from <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/biblical-authority-devotional/why-is-the-trinity-important/>

Historical Marital Status Tables. (2020, December). United States Census Bureau.

Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html>

Jenkins, P. (2000). *Mystics and Messiahs*. Oxford University Press.

Jill Snapps, Member Since 2005. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 4, 2021,

from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/Testimonies/Read-Member-Testimonies/Freed-from-Overweight/Jill-Snapp>

- John, K. W. (2002, December 9). *Gwen Shamblin's new Jerusalem: Remnant Fellowship grows, but critics see 'graceless legalism.'* (North American Report). Christianity Today, 46 (13), 15.
- Karen, K. L. (1998, April). *Women In Ancient Christianity: The New Discoveries*. Frontline. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.html>
- Keener, C. (2020, May 4). *What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?—Galatians 5:18*. Bible Background. Retrieved March 20, 2021, from <https://craigkeener.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-led-by-the-spirit-galatians-518/>
- Livingston, J. C. (2009). *Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Religion: The Status and the Roles of Women-Relations Between Religion and the State*. In *Anatomy of the Sacred An Introduction to Religion* (Sixth ed., pp. 362-393). Pearson.
- Mahoney, K. (2018, 12 23). *Understanding the Holy Trinity*. Learn Religion. Retrieved March 21, 2021, from <https://www.learnreligions.com/how-can-god-be-three-things-712158>
- Manning, C. (1999). *God Gave Us the Right*. British Library.
- Mark and Therese Marie Jost. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/Meet-Our-Leaders/Mark-and-Therese-Jost>
- Marriage and Weddings*. (2009, June 23). BBC. Retrieved April 12, 2021, from http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/ritesrituals/weddings_1.shtml#:~:text=Christians%20believe%20that%20marriage%20is%20a%20gift%20from,is%20a%20public%20declaration%20of%20love%20and%20commitment.

Meet the Members of the Remnant Fellowship Church. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship.

Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/Meet-the-Remnant>

Ministries. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved April 8, 2021, from

<https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/Our-Ministries>

New Living Translation. (2015). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+7%3A17-20&version=NLT>

Nicolette, V. (n.d.). *What Does it Mean to Bear Much Fruit?* Active Christianity.

Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://activechristianity.org/what-does-bearing-fruit-mean-a-john-15-bible->

[study#:~:text=Bearing%20the%20fruit%20of%20the%20Spirit%20is%20not,Word%20of%20God%20and%20the%20Holy%20Spirit%E2%80%99s%20promptings.](https://activechristianity.org/what-does-bearing-fruit-mean-a-john-15-bible-study#:~:text=Bearing%20the%20fruit%20of%20the%20Spirit%20is%20not,Word%20of%20God%20and%20the%20Holy%20Spirit%E2%80%99s%20promptings.)

Noyes, P. (n.d.). *What Are the Fruits of the Spirit.* Retrieved April 12, 2021,

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holy-spirit/what-are-the-fruits-of-the-spirit.html>

Our History. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved February 23, 2021, from

<https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/Our-History>

Participant 1, “personal communication, February 23, 2021.

Participant 2, “personal communication, February 23, 2021.

Participant 3, “personal communication, February 26, 2021.

Participant 4, “personal communication, March 5, 2021.

Peterfeso, J. (2020). *Womanpriest*. Fordham University Press. The Role of Women.

(n.d.). GraceChurch. Retrieved March 20, 2021, from

<https://www.gracechurch.org/about/distinctives/role-of-women>

Re-establishment Of The God-Fearing Family. (n.d.). Remnant Fellowship. Retrieved

April 12, 2021, from [https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-](https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/Re-establishment-Of-The-God-Fearing-Family)

[Church/What-We-Believe/Re-establishment-Of-The-God-Fearing-Family](https://www.remnantfellowship.org/About-Our-Church/What-We-Believe/Re-establishment-Of-The-God-Fearing-Family)

Schimmel, I. (n.d.). *The Bible*. enotes. Retrieved April 12, 2021, from

<https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/why-bible-important-christians-358691>

Shamblin Lara, G. (2018). *Weigh Down Works!* Remnant Publishing.

What Are the Seven Deadly Sins? (n.d.). Bibleinfo. Retrieved April 3, 2021, from

<https://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/what-are-seven-deadly-sins>

Appendix: IRB Approval

IRB

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office of Research Compliance,

010A Sam Ingram Building,

2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd Murfreesboro, TN 37129 FWA: 00005331/IRB

Regn.. 0003571



IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Thursday, September 17, 2020

Protocol Title ***The Remnant Fellowship Female Leadership Success***
Protocol ID **21-1017 2v**

Principal Investigator **Asya Craven** (Student)
Faculty Advisor Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand
Co-Investigators NONE
Investigator Email(s) *amc2dc@mtmail.mtsu.edu; jenna.gray-hildenbrand@mtsu.edu*
Department/Affiliation Honors College (PI) and Philosophy & Religious Studies (FA)

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category **(2) Educational Tests, surveys, interviews or observations of public behavior** (virtual interviews). A summary of the IRB action and other particulars of this protocol are shown below:

IRB Action	EXEMPT from further IRB review***
Date of Expiration	7/31/2021 Date of Approval: 9/17/20 <i>Recent</i>
Amendment: NONE	
Sample Size	TWENTY FIVE (25)
Participant Pool	Healthy adults (18 or older) - Congregation members
Exceptions	Verbal consent is permitted
Type of Interaction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Virtual/Remote/Online Interview/survey <input type="checkbox"/> In person or physical– Mandatory COVID-19
Management (refer next page)	Mandatory Restrictions 1. All restrictions for exemption apply. 2. The participants must be 18 years or older.

3. Mandatory ACTIVE informed consent. Identifyable information including, names, addresses, voice/video data, must not be obtained.

4. NOT approved for in-person data collection. *Approved IRB Templates*

IRB Templates: Informed Consent

Non-MTSU Templates: Recruitment Script

Research Inducement NONE

Comments NONE

***Although this exemption determination allows above defined protocol from further IRB review, such as continuing review, MTSU IRB will continue to give regulatory oversight to ensure compliance.

IRBN007 (Ver: 2.0; Rev: 08/14/2020)
Institutional Review Board, MTSU

FWA: 00005331
FWA: 00005331

IRB Registration. 0003571
IRB Registration. 0003571

Summary of the Post-approval Requirements:

The PI and FA must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer “Quick Links” in the bottom):

- **Final Report:** The Faculty Advisor (FA) is responsible for submitting a final report to close-out this protocol before **7/31/2021**; if more time is needed to complete the data collection, the FA must request an extension by email. REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT. **Failure to close-out (or request extension) may result in penalties** including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol or withholding student diploma.
- **Protocol Amendments:** IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as: ○ Ad

- addition/removal of subject population and sample size. ○ Change in investigators.
- Changes to the research sites – appropriate permission letter(s) from may be needed.
- Alternation to funding.
- Amendments must be clearly described in an addendum request form submitted by the FA.
- The proposed change must be consistent with the approved protocol and they must comply with exemption requirements.

□ **Reporting Adverse Events:** Research-related injuries to the participants and other events, such as, deviations & misconduct, must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu.

- **Research Participant Compensation:** Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Exempt protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and MUST NOT include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- **COVID-19:** Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the FA.

COVID-19 Management:

The FA must enforce social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an “adverse event.”
- The FA must enforce the MTSU’s “Return-to-work” questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled and signed by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use
- **FA’s Responsibility:** The FA is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the FA must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the PI will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would not result in the cancellation of the protocol’s eligibility for exemption. **Only THREE procedural amendments will be entertained per year** (changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).

Date	Amendment(s)
IRB Comments	
NONE NONE.	NONE

Post-approval IRB Actions:

The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Mandatory Data Storage Requirement:

All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application.

IRBN007 – Exemption Notice (Stu)

Page 2 of 3

Institutional Review Board, MTSU
0003571

FWA: 00005331

IRB Registration.

The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additionally, the Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer “Quick Links” below for policy 129*). Subsequently, the data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects. **The IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this notice.** Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

- Post-approval Responsibilities:
<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php>
- Exemption Procedures: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExemptPaperWork.php>
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal:
<https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php>

Appendix: IRB Approved Recruitment Script

Study Title	<i>The Remnant Fellowship Female Leadership Success</i>	
Principal Investigator	Asya Craven	IRB ID: 21-10172v
Faculty Advisor	Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand	Approval Date: 08/31/2020
Contact Information	amc2dc@mtmail.mtsu.edu (931) 316-6258	Expiration Date: 07/31/2021

APPROVED Recruitment Script

You may deliver these statements verbally.

Hello,

My name is Asya Craven, and I am a student enrolled with Middle Tennessee State University's Religious Studies department. I am conducting a research study as part of my honors thesis, and I would like to invite you to participate in the study. If you would like to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your opinions on the Remnant Fellowship and its history. Your entire time in the study should take no more than 10 minutes.

All participation in this study is voluntary. At any point in time during the study, you may withdraw. Your identity and responses will remain anonymous. Your reactions will be kept on a locked hard drive until the completion of this study. Following, they will be kept in a locked office on Middle Tennessee State University's campus. There are no apparent risks associated with this study. Although there are no direct benefits to you, the increase in knowledge gained will be extremely worthwhile.

If you would like to participate, please notify Asya in person.

Thank you so much for your time and participation,

Asya Craven

Middle Tennessee State University