



Stone Temple Client Report

DePaul University
PRAD 585

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Source: Honorary Chicago/Linda Zabors, 2022



Source: Book Club Chicago/Eric Allix Rogers, 2020

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Introduction

Listening with Intention: Insights from Black Women in North Lawndale

This report was developed in collaboration with Stone Temple Missionary Baptist Church to center and uplift the lived experiences, perspectives, and needs of Black women in the North Lawndale community of Chicago. For generations, Stone Temple has served as a spiritual and social home for the neighborhood. This study aims to deepen understanding of how Black women view leadership, history, belonging, and the types of support they seek within a faith-based setting.

A total of 73 survey responses were collected from individuals connected to the church, many of whom are women. Their responses highlight strong recognition of Black women leaders, along with a desire for more intentional spaces for dialogue, healing, intergenerational connection, and community building. With this report, Stone Temple can respond more intentionally to the role and contributions of Black women in both church and community life, ultimately creating a more inclusive and empowering spiritual and social space for all.

Business Problem

Stone Temple Baptist Church is launching an initiative to showcase Black female leaders in North Lawndale; women who have long been unrepresented and underappreciated. These women have uplifted the community while juggling work, family, and other obligations. Drawing on its legacy of powerful female leadership, the church will:

- Strengthen connections with women of all ages
- Amplify their voices and celebrate their achievements
- Offer platforms for them to share their stories
- Simplify access to church and community programs

By highlighting past, present, and future women pillars, Stone Temple aims to ensure these often-overlooked leaders receive the recognition and support they deserve.

Our goal was to understand the role of female leaders in the church and how this information could translate to positive, sustainable change for North Lawndale.



Business Problem Continued

Objectives

Based on the church's priorities, our team decided to focus this project on the following objectives:

- Objective 1: Build stronger ties with women of all ages in North Lawndale.
- Objective 2: Highlight women's leadership and amplify their voices.
- Objective 3: Present women leaders with platforms to share their stories.
- Objective 4: Make Stone Temple's programs easier to access and join for women in the community.

Key Challenges & Questions

To achieve these objectives, we also identified the following problems and challenges the church faces:

- Declining attendance: Parishioners have hesitated to return post-COVID.
- Polarization of religion and politics: individuals face challenges in aligning their values with the culture of their church.
- Community disengagement: Longstanding supporters feel less connected to programming.
- Awareness gap: Limited knowledge of the resources Stone Temple offers.
- Underrepresentation: Female leaders go unrepresented and unseen by others in the community.

Through this initiative, we sought to gather insights from Stone Temple parishioners regarding their perspectives on Black female leadership and the resources the church provides to women in North Lawndale.

Methods

To gather qualitative data, we distributed paper surveys during two Sunday church services in May 2025. We also created QR codes for online surveys promoted by the church. In total, we gathered 73 responses, all from the paper surveys.

Our questions asked for people's opinions on the value and quality of coverage of Black female leadership in North Lawndale, on a scale of 1 to 5. Participants were also asked to describe three words of being a Black woman in North Lawndale and what resources they would like to see in the church. These initiatives included mental health care, substance abuse counseling, leadership development, bible study groups, mentorship programs, and support for single mothers.

Demographic questions asked for people's gender, age, and length of residence in North Lawndale.

The team also conducted an over-the-phone interview with one referred church member to detail her experience as a Black, female leader in the neighborhood. Five questions were asked about her upbringing, community contributions, volunteer work at the church, visions for the community's future, and advice for young Black women.

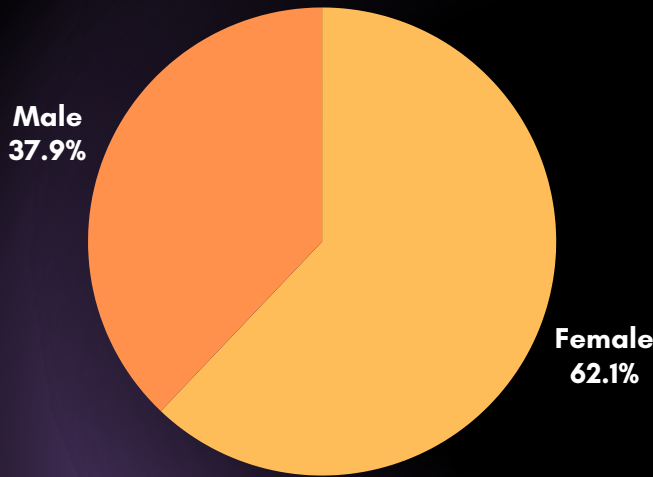
56.2% of the respondents were female, 34.2% were male and 9.6% did not disclose their gender. The majority of respondents were over 60 years of age. Most had been in North Lawndale for over eleven years.



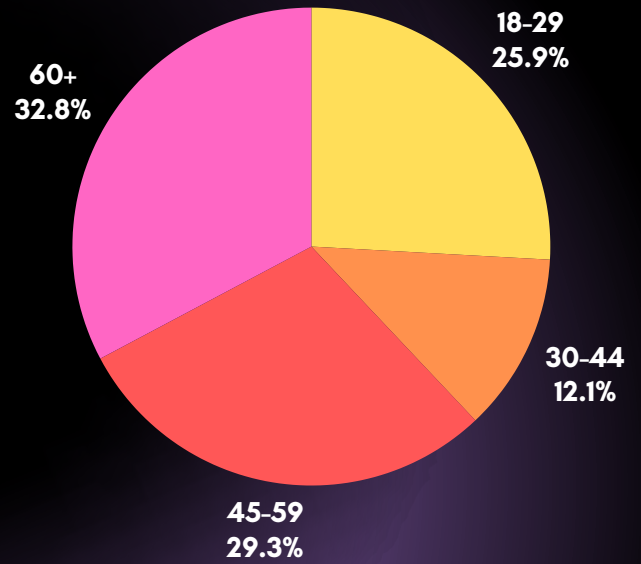
Source: The Chicago Community Trust

Methods By The Numbers

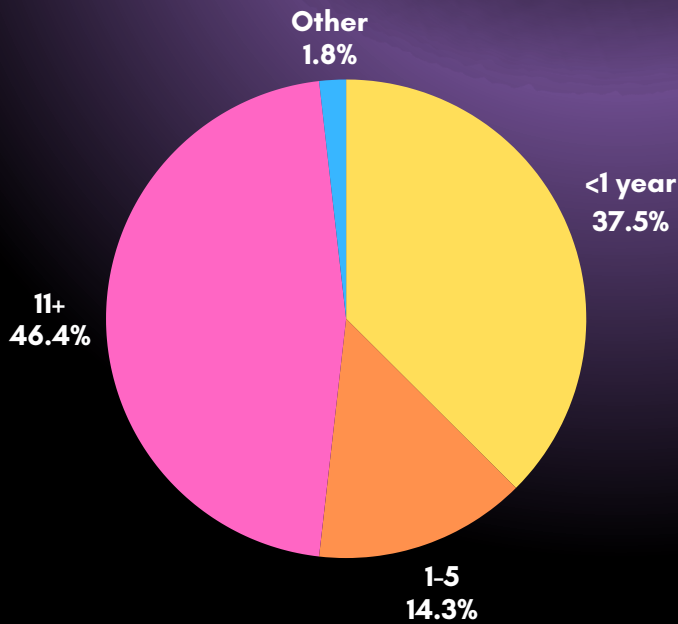
Gender Distribution



Age

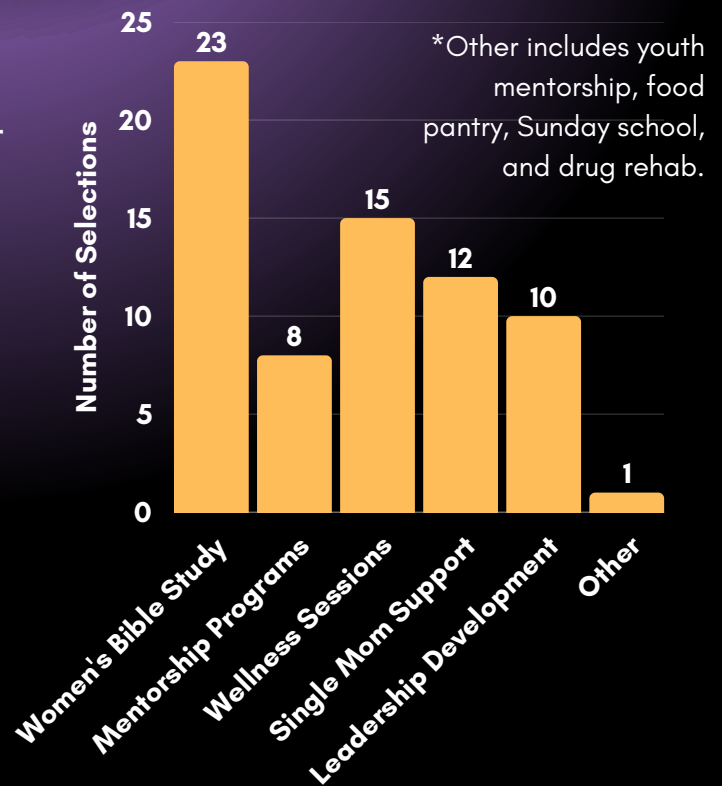


Years in North Lawndale



*Other denotes people who wrote they work but do not live in North Lawndale.

Meaningful Church Programs for Women



Findings

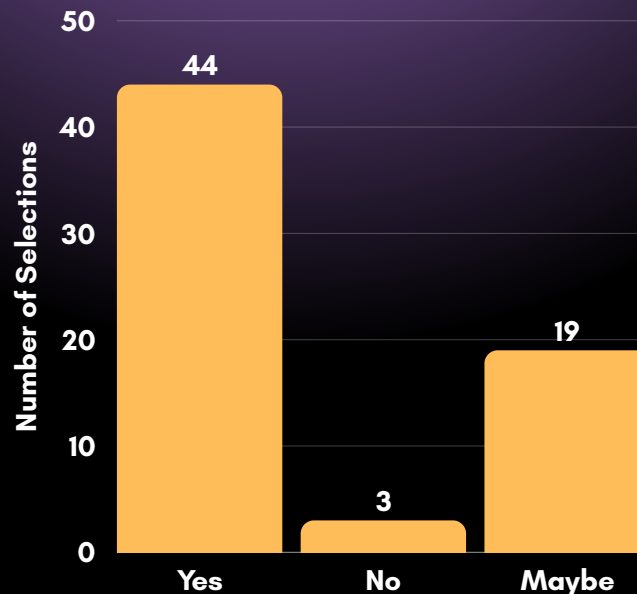
Our findings indicated a generally positive perception toward the impressions, awareness, and value of Black female leaders in North Lawndale. When asked to rank the strength of value, visibility, and power regarding Black female leadership, the majority of respondents answered seven, the highest choice on our 1-7 scale.

When asked to rank their awareness of Black female leaders in North Lawndale (1-5 scale), the majority of respondents answered 5, indicating they had a high awareness of these leaders. The second most frequent answer was no awareness at all, with a fifth of respondents choosing 1 as their answer.

The majority of respondents also answered “yes” when asked if they would attend a monthly gathering for Black women. 44 of 73 respondents said “yes.” The top three most meaningful proposed church programs for women were a bible study group, a mentorship program, and mental health sessions.

In summary, our qualitative findings indicated that attendees of Stone Temple Baptist Church agree that Black women’s leadership is highly valued, powerful, and visible in the community. While some were unaware of specific leaders, they still feel their leadership is highlighted throughout the neighborhood.

Likelihood to Attend a Monthly Gathering for Black Women



Findings Continued

Our interview with Janice Bickom, a long-time volunteer of over 50 years, revealed a strong dedication toward supporting the church's financial and ministerial work along with choir participation. Bickom relayed that women in North Lawndale, like herself, played a crucial role in introducing children to the community. They helped them socialize and get to know their neighborhood, in part because most women were stay-at-home mothers at the time.

Bickom's leadership was most evident in her voluntary visits to seniors in the community. They are unable to attend church, so she brings communion to them. She fosters a community of spirituality outside of the church. She also relayed her belief that the neighborhood would flourish with the addition of new stores and a consumer hub as it once did in the 1950s.

The ethnographic research provided insight into how leaders can bring church initiatives to the community, further informing the church on which initiatives North Lawndale is interested in participating in (i.e., women's Bible study).



Limitations

While we had access to the church, some people were unable to participate in the survey due to a language barrier.

We reached out to a few people for interviews, but some were unable to contribute during our time frame. Most surveys were captured during service which could have influenced a bias toward their feelings about Black women leaders being represented in the church.

Because all the data was self-reported, it supports some of our ideas through correlation, but it doesn't prove cause-and-effect or explain the cultural nuances behind the findings.



Source: Luz Magdaleno Flores/South Side Weekly

Business Strategy

Strategic Goals

- Increase engagement of Black women
- Cultivate a consistent monthly gathering (e.g., a Women’s Fellowship or Bible Study) that responds to the 61% of people interested
- Develop outreach that is segmented to ensure intergenerational participation
 - Bring younger generations back into the church at the same rate as older generations.

Elevate the Visibility of Black Female Leaders

- Introduce a “Leader Spotlight” series—short multimedia features highlighting past and present women pillars (such as Janice Bickom’s outreach)

Facilitate Accessible Program Participation

- Streamline enrollment for women-focused initiatives by offering in-person sign-ups during Sunday service and a permanently available QR code linked to an online calendar of events
- Partner with local organizations to co-host sessions in neutral community spaces, reducing stigma or logistical barriers

Foster Sustainable Community Partnerships

- Establish formal collaborations with at least two community service providers (such as mental health professionals or substance abuse counselors) to address top-ranked needs: Bible study, mentorship, and mental health support
- Leverage Stone Temple’s existing networks to serve as volunteer leaders

Business Strategy Continued

Target Audience and Segmentation

Based on demographic data (page 5), the majority of survey respondents were over 60 years old and identified as female. To maximize reach, consider the following:

- Older Adults (60+): Focus on legacy-oriented activities (a dedicated space to allow storytelling)
- Middle-Aged Women (35-59): Emphasize leadership development and mentorship that offers structured “Next Generation Leadership” workshops that train participants to co-run Bible studies or community forums
- Younger Women (18-34): Leverage digital channels like Instagram to promote monthly gatherings, peer mentorship circles, and volunteer opportunities, recognizing that some expressed lower initial awareness of specific Black female leaders
 - 20% of respondents selected 1, the lowest option, for awareness



Stone Temple must consider how they will target different age demographics of women.

Source: The Chronicle of Philanthropy

Strategic Initiatives

A. Monthly Women's Gathering ("Sister Circle")

- Rotate between Bible study, guest-speaker panels, and roundtable discussions on topics such as leadership, mental health, and community entrepreneurship
- Alternate between Stone Temple facilities and nearby community centers to reduce travel barriers. Provide on-site childcare or youth-led programming to encourage attendance among mothers

Promotion:

- Announce during Sunday services with a dedicated segment
- Distribute printed flyers and maintain a website link or visible QR code on social media for resources (i.e., link in bio for easy access)
- Engage existing participants as ambassadors to invite new peers

B. "Leadership Spotlight" Multimedia Campaign

Content Development:

- Record short video interviews (3-5 minutes) with women who have served or currently serve as community leaders (ex: Bickom's senior visitation ministry)
- Compile written testimonials and photographs for a rotating digital display in the church foyer and on the church website.
- Distribute in the weekly church bulletin (print and digital), Stone Temple's official social channels, local newsletters, and partner mailing lists
 - Use relevant community hashtags (i.e., #NorthLawndale)

Metrics for Success:

- Track digital engagement (video views, post shares, and comments)
- Monitor in-person attendance when a particular leader is featured
 - Ex: Are family members coming to support them being celebrated?

Strategic Initiatives

Continued

C. Mentorship Program and Networking Events

Program Structure:

- Pair the established “Mentor” cohort (women over age 50 with church or community leadership experience) with the “Mentee” cohort (women under age 30 interested in skill building and leadership)
- Quarterly “Speed Mentoring” mixers to facilitate relationship-building in a structured 15-minute rotation format

Resource Requirements:

- Secure meeting space after Sunday service
- Provide light refreshments to create a welcoming environment (budgeted under community engagement)
- Develop a simple “Mentor/Mentee Intake Form” capturing interests and skill areas (leadership, entrepreneurship, mental health advocacy)

D. Mental Health and Wellness Workshops

- Partner with a licensed counselor or mental health nonprofit to lead monthly “Wellness Wednesdays.”
 - Topics can include stress management, grief counseling, self-care for caregivers, etc.
- Integrate faith-based reflection (i.e., scriptural passages tied to resilience) to align with the church’s spiritual mission
- Host in Stone Temple’s multipurpose room or a local community center, ensure confidentiality and provide a safe space for all who attend
- Offer childcare support during sessions to reduce barriers for single mothers

Moving Forward

Marketing and Communication Plan

- Develop a unifying tagline for all women's initiatives (ex: "She Leads, We Rise")
- Maintain a visual identity (ex: incorporate the church's colors, create a unique symbol representing sisterhood, or feature professional photos of leaders)

Digital Outreach :

- Update the church's website with a dedicated "Women of North Lawndale" section that features:
 - An events calendar
 - "Leader Spotlight" video, photo, or short blog archive
 - Sign-up forms for mentorship and wellness programs

Traditional & Grassroots Channels

- Print quarterly "Women's Network" bulletins distributed in person (church foyer, community board near local grocery stores, and other easily accessible places).
- Host occasional "Coffee & Conversation" pop-ups at local businesses to engage community members who may not attend church regularly.
- Encourage existing survey respondents and interviewees to become "Community Ambassadors," providing personal testimony on the value of upcoming programs.

Partnership Development

- Connect with local high schools and colleges (IE: Chicago Public Schools campuses & UIC satellite programs) to recruit younger women and advertise volunteer opportunities.
- Collaborate with North Lawndale nonprofits, such as mentorship organizations.
- Engage small-business owners in North Lawndale to provide in-kind sponsorships (refreshments, venue support, etc.) for high-visibility gatherings.

Moving Forward

Continued

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Program Attendance & Retention:

- Monthly Women's Fellowship: Aim for at least 25 unique attendees in 1 month and a 10% increase each month after
- Mentorship Program: Secure 15 mentor-mentee pairs by Month 3. Measure active pairings and track match satisfaction with a brief survey after

Visibility & Awareness:

- 30% engagement on the "Women of North Lawndale" page within six months
- Achieve 200 combined video views for the "Leader Spotlight" series within the first quarter

Community Partnerships, Resource Mobilization & Sustainability:

- Establish at least two formal partnerships with a nonprofit or mental health provider by month 3
- Document all volunteer hours and target 100 volunteer hours by month 6
- Identify and apply for at least one external grant by month 6

Quarterly Impact Reviews

- Produce a one-page "Women's Initiatives Scorecard" summarizing attendance, engagement metrics, and partnership status
- Host a "Stakeholder Feedback Session" each quarter, inviting congregation members, featured leaders, and partners to gather suggestions for refinement

Annual Strategic Retreat

- Gather leaders to evaluate year 1 outcomes with the KPIs above
- Refresh strategic goals for year 2
- Adjust resource allocation based on lessons learned
 - Ex: Increase digital marketing if online engagement increased significantly or improve the user-friendliness of the website if engagement is the same

Further Research

Further research could include ethnographic interviews and focus groups with Black female community members. This would provide a more diverse range of experiences, depicting what leadership within the church looks like. Additionally, research into how community members would like to access information about Black female leaders would also better inform us on how the church can continue to empower Black women, possibly through new programs.



Conclusion

This study serves as foundational research for Stone Temple Baptist Church, aiming to explore the role of female leaders in the church and how this information could translate to positive, sustainable change for North Lawndale. The four objectives below guided our study:

1. Build stronger ties with women of all ages in North Lawndale.
2. Highlight women's leadership and amplify their voices.
3. Present women leaders with platforms to share their stories.
4. Make Stone Temple's programs easy to access for women in the community.

Using qualitative research—primarily surveys and interviews—the study presented an overwhelmingly positive perception of Black women leaders in the church. Participants highlighted the significant impact these leaders have made in the congregation and the North Lawndale neighborhood. Particularly, the work of Pastor Bickom followed in the footsteps of those who came before her and continues to cultivate empowering transformations for the church and community.

Like many qualitative-based studies, this study faced limitations, including time constraints, participant bias, and the subjectivity of self-reporting. Further research could benefit from more qualitative methods, such as ethnographies and longitudinal interviews to explore non-secular perspectives.

Overall, the work of this study sheds light on the vital contributions of Black women leaders in faith-based spaces, specifically in an underserved area of Chicago's West Side. The findings offer a meaningful foundation for continued dialogue, community engagement, and strategic planning at Stone Temple Baptist Church and beyond.

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