Exploring the Meaning of Church Lifelong Education Participation Experience through Coaching of Middle-Aged female lay Ministers

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Abstract

Research Purpose: This study originated from a request for education and counseling to reassess the role of middle-aged lay women in the church. The research purpose is to analyze the significance, transformation, and impact of learning participation by investigating how individuals' needs are addressed through a lifelong education program designed as a pilot course. The study aims to examine how middle-aged women who have actively participated in church activities, reflect on their faith, ministry, and life through the church's lifelong education program. Research content and method: The study examines the process in which middle-aged women who have actively collaborated in church activities reflect on their faith, ministry, and lives through church lifelong education programs. The research method involves qualitative research focused on observation journals and interviews. Participants are selected through preliminary interviews based on having over 13 years of church ministry experience and an interest in lifelong education. Data is collected primarily through stories experienced in ministry. The research results are categorized into motivation for participation, learning experiences, and the meaning of participation. Firstly, the motivation for participation was seeking better self through identity restoration and challenges. Secondly, learning experiences were moments of healing and restoration in redesigning oneself. Thirdly, the meaning of participation was relational restoration and expansion. Ultimately, it was found that coaching through church lifelong education facilitated the recovery and transformation of participants' faith and ministry. Conclusion and Recommendation: Church lifelong education through coaching restored and brought about change in the faith and ministry of the research participants. To summarize the meaning of the experience of participating in lifelong learning, it involves: first, 'recognizing the meaning and possibility of one's own development,' second, 'healing and restoration of self-esteem,' third, 'restoration and expansion of relationships,' and finally, 'the discovery of one's true self.' Middle-aged women who have lived a role-centered life rather than focusing on individual faith have a strong desire to live as their complete selves. Therefore, a program should be developed that provides time for individuals to reflect on and diagnose their lives, while also seeking new visions. Therefore, we propose follow-up research with the hope that a variety of coaching-related church lifelong education will be developed and provide practical assistance to numerous lay ministers.

Key Words

Middle-aged Woman, Lay Ministers, church Lifelong Education, Coaching, Learning Experience

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중년여성 평신도 사역자의 코칭을 통한 교회평생교육 참여경험 의미탐색

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논문 요약

연구 목적 : 본 연구는 교회 내 평신도 중년여성의 사역을 재고하기 위한 교육과 상담의 요구로 시작되었다. 연구 목적은 파일럿 과정으로 기획된 평생교육 프로그램을 통해 어떻게 그들의 요구가 충족되는지 과정을 살펴봄으로써 학습 참여의 의미와 변화. 영향력을 알아보는 것이다.

연구 내용 및 방법: 교회 활동의 적극적인 협력자 역할을 해온 중년여성들이 교회 평생교육 프로 그램을 통해 자신의 신앙과 사역, 삶을 성찰하는 과정을 살펴보는 것이다. 연구 방법은 관찰 일지와 인터뷰를 중심으로 한 질적 연구로 진행하였으며, 연구 참여자는 13년 이상 교회 사역 경험이었으면서 평생교육에 관심이 있는 자로 예비 면담을 통해 선정하였고, 자료는 사역을 통해 경험한이야기를 중심으로 수집하였다. 연구 결과는 학습 참여 동기, 학습 경험, 학습 참여의미로 나누었다. 첫째, 참여 동기는 정체성 회복으로 더 나은 자기를 찾고 도전하는 것이었고, 둘째, 학습 경험은 자신을 새롭게 디자인하는 치유와 회복의 시간이었으며 셋째, 학습 참여의미는 관계 회복과학장이었다. 결과적으로 코칭을 통한 교회평생교육은 연구 참여자들의 신앙과 사역을 회복하고 변화를 일으켰음을 발견하였다.

결론 및 제언: 평생학습 참여 경험의 의미를 정리하면 첫째, '자신의 발전 의미와 가능성을 알아차림'이고, 둘째, '치유와 자존감의 회복'이며 셋째, '관계의 회복과 확장' 마지막으로 '진정한 나다움의 발견'이다. 개인의 신앙보다 역할 중심의 삶을 살아온 중년여성들은 온전한 자신으로 살아가고픈 욕구가 크다. 따라서 자신의 삶을 성찰하고, 진단하는 시간과 함께 새로운 비전을 찾아가는 프로그램이 개발되어야 할 것이다. 이에 코칭 관련 교회평생교육이 다양하게 개발되어 많은 평신도 사역자들에게 실제적인 도움을 줄 수 있는 후속 연구를 제안한다.

《 주제어 》

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I. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic brought major changes in society and culture, and the church also experienced inevitable challenges. In a situation where gatherings had to be avoided, most churches switched to video services, and laypeople who worked with pastors ceased their usual activities. The non-face-to-face phenomenon in the new normal era has led to Christians demanding new changes (Jeong & Seo, 2022). At this time, middle-aged female lay ministers, who primarily guided and cared for the spiritual life of church members, encountered challenges in determining how to engage with current volunteer activities. We considered the necessary preparations and efforts to reestablish a sense of community with believers that has been weakened by the lack of face-to-face interaction. There was a tendency to reassess and revitalize past ministries through personal counseling or church lifelong education (Good News, 2021).

The research participants are lay ministers who have dedicated themselves to the community on the front lines of the church for a long time. During the pause in field ministry, they wanted to take time to reflect on their faith and roles while field ministry was halted. Those who provided empathy, comfort, advice, and guidance to believers first felt the need to care for themselves as healthy individuals and sought systematic education to do so. Due to these demands, a church lifelong education program with coaching was planned as a pilot course. The key to understanding the soul in coaching is to live a life guided by a human calling, values, or forces beyond ourselves. Sometimes, it is our convictions, intuitions, and instincts that steer our lives (Kimsey-House et al., 2016). The study began with the expectation that the coaching program would address the needs of middle-aged female lay ministers for counseling and edu- cation. The purpose of the study is to observe the learning experience and meaning by examining how the needs of middle-aged female lay ministers are met through program participation. In other words, we aimed to investigate the satisfaction levels of middle-aged women who actively engage in church activities with regard to their opportunities for reflecting on their faith, ministry, and life through the church's lifelong education program. Additionally, we sought to explore the dynamics and changes they encountered as a result of their participation in educational activities. As per Seo(2023)'s study, lifelong education in the church should be structured as an education of harmonious shalom, serving neighbors in a proper personal relationship with God. As an alternative to this, a coaching program was planned.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Middle-aged female lay ministers

Middle age is a life where the desire to explore one's true self and understanding of others intensifies, leading to a crisis of self-identity, social and psychological conflicts, and physical decline (Levinson, 1978). On the other hand, the level of immersion in education is high due to the desire to adapt well to learning and demonstrate their abilities through voluntary engagement, affinity, and intimacy with active relationships within society (Lee, 2000). Cooley (2007) mentioned the importance of trust, friendship, and gatherings as factors that help women learn. He also revealed that deep relationships within a group bring about changes in the perspective of meaning.

Middle age is considered the developmental stage of life from ages 40 to 65. This is a transitional period where eras intersect, forming the broad structure of the life cycle and allowing for numerous variations in the course of an individual's life. The three developmental tasks that must be accomplished in this transition are the termination of life structures, individuation, and the beginning of new structures (Levinson, 1996).

On the other hand, voluntary willingness to learn and actively forming relationships are factors that enable middle-aged female students to adapt well to learning. Cooley emphasized the significance of trust, friendship, and gatherings as factors that facilitate women's learning. He also revealed that profound relationships within a group lead to changes in semantic perspective.

The word "layman" is used in the Bible to refer to God's people or Christians in general (Arndt & Gingric, 1957). The term originally refers to "one of the

church members, one of the ordinary Christians who receive the teachings and guidance of a pastor." Their primary focus is on the church, and they are viewed as individuals who lead by example for other believers by dedicating time and passion to serving the church (Gibbs & Morton, 1979).

Ministers become faithful Christians by concretely applying in their lives what they have learned through prayer, meditation on the Word, and Bible study (Chae & Lee, 2005). In the process of learning, they discern and obey the voice of God. Laity, who constitute the vast majority of church members, are not the objects of the church but active participants in the church (Ok, 2006). Lay people trained by pastors serve the church through volunteer work, and together pastors and laity build the church, the body of Christ (Ahn, 2013).

Middle-aged female lay ministers experience a midlife crisis and physical decline, but strive to fulfill their calling in the church. It also promotes the growth and development of the church by caring for and nurturing church members alongside pastors.

2. Church lifelong education

Church life-long education combines vertical life-long education, as expressed in the principle of education "from the cradle to the grave," with education for the community, education in cooperation with the community, and horizontal life-long education that is interconnected with all fields. It can be seen as referring to lifelong education (Shin, 2012). Park (2006) defines church lifelong education as "based on the Christian worldview, integrating all forms of education with learners at all stages of development, and merging educational theory and practice to cultivate disciples of Jesus Christ through continuous education." defined. If you examine the church's lifelong education activities through the lens of lifelong learning, they can be categorized as social education provided by religious institutions. If you consider the principle of lifelong education, the church's lifelong education also aims to create a 'learning society'. Therefore, Shin (2012) suggested that the concept of the church's role in lifelong education can be redefined as a 'community society', which can be viewed as 'lifelong

education activities in the local community'. The significance and importance of lifelong church education can be observed within the church community. Since the church engages in missionary activities aimed at the local community, it serves as a foundation for coexisting and living with residents (Park et al., 2023). Church life-long education is defined as overseeing all educational activities that transform society, a place of life and salvation, into a site of the Christian Bible and change (Eun, 2007). Church life-long education should focus on all aspects of education, encompassing not only individuals but also families, schools, and society. Just as churches engage in missions, they should also prioritize education (Smart, 1954). Lay ministers must continue to invest time and effort in getting to know the Bible and God's ways through lifelong church education to learn what is necessary as ministers (Yoon, 2017). In addition, if education in the church so far has been based on dedication and ministry (Lee, 2023), there is a need for lifelong church education that progressively emphasizes diversity and expertise.

3. Coaching

Coaching is an individual service that guides a client from their current position to their desired destination (Kim, 2012). This process involves a coaching expert entering into a contract with a coachee and offering support to address the coachee's challenges. It refers to a partnership that cooperates to achieve an agreed-upon goal, which involves an interactive process (Cho & Park, 2011). Coaching can be defined as an action-oriented and goal-oriented process that focuses on the coachee's development potential and continuously supports the coachee to solve his or her problems and grow (Lee, 2014).

If we connect the definition of coaching to the learning aspect, it can be seen as an individual learning strategy that helps learners bring out their potential according to their individual ability and knowledge level and allows the learner to grow independently (Yang, 2009). Coaching aims to address an individual's need for knowledge and preparation for learning by establishing an interactive relationship between life experiences and learning. This process is akin to self-

directed, goal-oriented learning in adult education (Griffiths, 2005).

Coaching focuses on the potential that exists within humans. Hidetake (2009) expresses, "All the answers a person needs are within the person." The argument posits that the answer is a resource inherent in humans from birth, waiting to be awakened and discovered. This means that when there is a belief that the coachee has more abilities than are currently revealed, the coach can help them realize their potential (Whitmore, 2007). Coaching-based education can be viewed as a process that helps learners uncover their potential, utilize resources, and guide modern individuals who may be experiencing depression and lethargy toward recovery. Therefore, it is expected that the coaching program will have a positive impact on the subjects of this study, middle-aged female lay ministers, by helping them examine their lives and faith, and revitalize their existing ministry. The convergence of lifelong learning and coaching must be developed into a target-specific program that can be practically applied (Park & Jeong, 2022), which will play a crucial role in effective church lifelong education.

III. Research method

1. Research participants

This study was planned in response to requests for counseling and education from middle-aged women who have been actively serving in a medium-sized church in the metropolitan area for more than 10 years. It aimed to provide an alternative approach to how to restore their religious and daily life. The research participants are active ministry members who faithfully fulfill their responsibilities in the church. They were aware of the problem of how to revive face-to-face worship and communication, activities that had been halted for a long time due to COVID-19. The initial composition of the research participants consisted of middle-aged female laypersons who had been leading a religious life for at least 25 to 40 years, had over 13 years of experience in church ministry, and were interested in educational activities within the church. They were selected through

preliminary interviews and data was collected focusing on stories experienced through ministry.

(Table 1) Personal information of research participants

name (pseudonym, age)	Period of religious life/ ministry training	Ministry field (Role within ministry)	family	Experience participatin g in church lifelong learning
Min Ji-young, (63 years old)	37 years (30 years)	parish leader, cell leader,	husband, Married son 2 Unmarried son 1 4 granddaughters, 1 grandson	no experience
Seok Young-ae (57 years old)	27 years (25 years)	parish leader, cell leader,	one son	Diverse learning experiences
Won Ga-hee (60 years old)	55 years (40 years)	Church school teacher, choir, parish leader, cell leader,	Husband, married son, daughter-in-law	Emotional Coaching, Mother wise
Jeong Seon-ye (63 years old)	25 years (13 years)	parish leader(6 years), cell leader, Deacons' Association President, One-on-one parenting	Husband, married son, married daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, granddaughter 4	no experience
Kim Nam-seon (58 years old)	30 years (7-8 years)	parish leader, cell leader, Disciple training, ministry training, Barnabas training, evangelism explosion training, Bible college	husband, son, daughter	no experience
Park Yi-seon (63 years old)	37 years (37 years)	parish leader, cell leader, Intercession Team Leader	Husband, married son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter 2	no experience

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted by intentionally selecting subjects who could express their thoughts honestly. Purposely sampled subjects were interviewed individually and finally selected as research participants with their consent. The

interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, and a guide was prepared to ensure that the researcher did not miss the focus and essential details of the research topic. However, variability was allowed depending on the participants' responses. This approach has the advantage of enabling research participants to share their experiences and thoughts in greater depth and breadth since the format of their responses is relatively less constrained. The questions focused on motivation for participating in education and changes in experience and perception as a result of education. The observation log documented the on-site environment, formal and informal interactions, and non-verbal communication, with a focus on the words and actions of the research participants throughout the program. The observation was conducted through non-participant observation. Although this method has limitations in achieving realism, it can bring out the attitudes of research participants as naturally as possible. This approach helps avoid the awkwardness or artificiality that may arise from researchers' or observers' intervention in the field. To enhance the validity and reliability of observational data, systematic and continuous observations were repeated under different conditions and contexts at the observation site.

Observations were conducted a total of four times, individual interviews were conducted once or twice, and group interviews were conducted three times: before, after the second class, and after the last class. The interviews took place 1 to 3 times, each lasting more than 40 minutes, at small group meeting places in churches or cafes. The interview method began with daily conversations to establish rapport and included sharing general experiences as well as conducting in-depth interviews. The interview content was recorded with the consent of the research participants, and a content verification procedure was conducted. The recorded content was converted into text using the Clovanote app, and any unclear content was checked and analyzed by listening to it again.

For the analysis, the entire content was composed by extracting meaning from the converted text and reinforced through individual interviews. All processes and contents of the study were confirmed by the research participants. At the same time, we received confirmation from two experienced doctors of education specializing in qualitative research. Their expertise helped us prevent subjective

interpretation of the research results and minimize interpretation, procedural, and methodological errors.

IV. Results and Analysis

This study aimed to explore the significance and influence of middle-aged female lay ministers' involvement in church lifelong education programs. Through on-site observations and interviews with program participants, motivations for participation, learning experiences, and the significance of learning were summarized based on the interview content.

1. Motivation to Participate in Learning

Study participants engaged in education with various motivations. For example, it was a recommendation from a colleague, interest in coaching, recovery from mental fatigue, and a hope for a positive change. They were of a similar age and shared a desire to rediscover their sense of self and identity amidst life's challenges, struggles with their roles, and the yearning to break free from them. There was a common motivation to improve low self-esteem and the will to live a life in which ministry and roles are well integrated by discovering oneself.

"I'm tired of living my daily life, constantly trying to meet roles and justifications that are not fulfilling me. I feel exhausted and worn out. I need a program or a break to rest and recover.

I have always contemplated this in my mind without taking action, but I have remained faithful. Now, I am considering exploring more opportunities to reflect on myself and assess whether I am on the right path. I always had this thought in my mind, so I believe it was a good source of motivation."(F).

"Because of my lack of knowledge, I used to find training and educational programs burdensome. However, as I immersed myself in my religious life, reading the Bible extensively, and receiving special guidance from God, I gained various insights and developed a curiosity about psychological factors."(C).

Most of the research participants attended out of interest in coaching and a

desire to examine their own religious life and ministry. After the first round of the program, a task involving communication with the family was introduced. Time was allocated for sharing the results, and students were encouraged to freely express their stories using an activity sheet. As each session progressed, they demonstrated an active attitude toward group activities and self-disclosure.

2. Learning Experience

During the learning process, all lecture materials were provided to help students follow the class smoothly. Background music was also played during activities to prevent students from feeling rushed. The program presented the content to be learned, experienced, and implemented at each session so that participants could apply it in their daily lives. However, some participants demonstrated discomfort when asked questions about newly acquired knowledge or how to apply it.

"When I first started looking forward to it, the church provided extensive ministry and discipleship training. That's just rote learning. But now that I have transitioned from receiving only that type of training to receiving this training, it is very convenient. This does not mean killing me, but finding the person that God created. You have your own unique look that God created. Instead of concealing it, altering it, or succumbing to societal pressures, you should embrace and celebrate it because it is inherently beautiful. It was so comfortable and felt so good. It was fun and very comfortable."(B).

The participants in the study struggled due to being unfamiliar with content and formats different from what they had experienced before. However, they claim that through 'active participation and attempts to expose their inner selves, they were able to discover confidence.'

"I was very happy with the program that loved and comforted me. That time is very precious to me. In doing so, I believe that even today, I am shaping my own identity. Change is then created within it. As you recover, the wisdom that God gives you begins to flow, and new knowledge is acquired. I enjoy it. I have found so much happiness in the journey of self-discovery."(A).

Participants felt comfortable and satisfied as the education progressed. They ex-

pressed satisfaction by acknowledging that change was occurring as they redefined themselves through the necessity of lifelong learning and the program's content aimed at self-love and healing.

3. What it means to participate in learning

Research participants reported that 'they experienced recovery by praising, comforting, and acknowledging themselves during the educational process.' 'I knew that God loved me as I was, despite my shortcomings, but I had an experience that made me feel more certain.' This statement seems to have been influenced by coaching that assists individuals in uncovering their potential and possibilities. Their long time and experience in ministry were said to be connected to the program content and had the effect of increasing immersion.

"I am new in my faith. That's why it's so comforting to approach it by combining faith, spirituality, and worldly knowledge in such a harmonious way. When giving medicine to a baby, mixing it with yogurt and feeding it to the baby can disguise the taste of the medicine." (B).

"I just looked straight ahead and ran, but even if I turned around at some point, I didn't catch anything. If you turn around and realize that this is not the case, you won't be able to catch that thing if you just look forward and run. That's exactly what I'm thinking. Don't just look ahead and run too much."(D).

"That person is so different from me, and he did that because he didn't know me... Now I started thinking about it again."(E).

'The breadth of understanding that acknowledges differences in human relationships has expanded, and I have experienced the transformation of judgments about others into understanding.' Research participants reported that they attempted to shift to a positive mindset through the program. It has also become possible to acknowledge differences, listen to what the other person says, and empathize with them. This appears to be a process of change where the inner self is restored.

"Through education, I can understand the other person's mind and interpret their gestures as a form of language. gestures... I need to be more careful and calmer.

I believed that it was necessary to manage my emotions effectively, as my impulsive heart was not aligned with God's will, and my thoughts should not take precedence." (F).

Lay church leaders say that 'coaching broadened the range of possibilities for actively implementing what they learned and transformed the pressure of failure or mistakes into confidence. Education has provided me with the freedom from my previous job and has motivated me to explore new opportunities. This can be seen as the result of the discovery that while the previous ministry was passive and onesided, coaching enhances the effectiveness of learning by emphasizing individual initiative and interaction. In practice, we facilitated and implemented effective communication with spouses and children. Through this process, we realized the importance of maintaining this practice by incorporating new language and actions in both the world and the church.

V. Conclusion

The purpose of lay minister education is to help learners understand the identity and significance of lay ministers, prepare themselves as ministers, and develop the practical ability to carry out ministry (Park, 2006). Learners' motivation to participate can be divided into active, passive, and unconscious. Participants fell into three categories: those with high demands and expectations for the training, those who felt burdened and reluctant because they perceived it as in-depth training on their roles, and those who attended without understanding the intention and purpose of the training through invitation. Although each participant attended for different reasons, the training had a positive impact. Through group counseling, she gained new will and vitality. F, who was contemplating giving up her ministry, showed a willingness to apply what she learned to her ministry and a desire to present ideas for the church community. E had no hope in life and was struggling because she could not interpret what was happening to her. She demonstrated her will to enter the seminary through education. Afterward, she entered the seminary as a full-time student and reported that she had successfully overcome her learning difficulties and completed the semester. The training, which lasted for four weeks, was a time for self-reflection, spiritual rejuvenation, and professional development, leading to significant transformations in one's life. The meaning of the experience of participating in lifelong education through coaching by church lay ministers is summarized as follows. First, it is 'awareness of the meaning and possibility of one's own development.' Although some responded positively, stating that it helped them find their own identity, there were also opinions that the relationships within the church, formed over a long period of time, actually served as a limitation to self-expression. Most learners report that coaching has led to an examination of their daily lives, religious practices, and ministry. They also mention that the challenges they encountered as communicators, stemming from a lack of formal training as lay ministers, were partially addressed through precise and targeted feedback. Due to selective listening, I was unable to empathize widely, but through self-examination, my understanding of the other person broadened. The mind that used to judge easily changed to the thought, "It could be like that," and I was able to embrace the boundaries of relationships that had been defined by preconceived notions.

To understand laypeople as adult learners, efforts must be made to innovate the existing concept of dependent learners by emphasizing the aspect of learning rather than teaching and strengthening learning methods that leverage the learner's experience and initiative (McKenzie, 1982). The time of self-sharing through learners' experiences and activities provided opportunities for proactive self-discovery and played a role in facilitating personal growth. Second, 'healing and restoration of self-esteem'. I learned that my weakness could be used as a tool for good, and through this, I gained freedom without fear. I gained the confidence to naturally express my talents rather than seeking attention or recognition from others. I learned to value and love my wounds, mistakes, and incompetence. The similar age group and experience of ministry within the church formed a consensus. Through sharing our religious life, we discovered recovery and the will to engage in healthy ministry. As a vulnerable individual who perceived her wounds as significant and challenging due to his inability to connect with others, I was able to observe the circumstances of others and recognize my own emotional well-being. As the obstacles in their lives are

broken down, they realize how precious they are. This transformation is attained through learning experiences and can result in inner healing and the restoration of self-esteem by reinterpreting and reevaluating oneself. Third, 'restoration and expansion of relationships'. The learner, who expressed that a healthy ego creates positive emotions and can control them, becoming a 'wound-healing detox', said that by loving herself first, she was able to feel love for God and others more easily. She said that she learned how to embrace people, pace herself, and consider situations. Through education, she was able to understand others and gained the courage to approach them.

The coaching program, which is designed to break away from the framework of ministry and roles and focus entirely on oneself, enables learners to recover in their daily lives, faith, and ministry. It helps learners heal wounds, improve relationships, and raise low self-esteem through integrated self-discovery of their identity. Coaching is a process that helps individuals develop self-reliance, recover, recharge, and pursue new tasks. It serves as a guide for interaction, emphasizing listening and empathy instead of pointing out, criticizing, evaluating, forcing, or making demands. Education conducted as a process of accepting others as they are and recognizing each other's potential and possibilities will enable effective collaboration within small group meetings of each organization, especially church organizations. I believe that this will help expand the scope of lifelong church education by providing educational opportunities that enable each believer to deepen their understanding and restore their autonomy, competence, and relationships.

Lastly, it is the discovery of my true self. Middle-aged women who have lived a life centered on roles rather than personal faith have a desire to live as their whole selves, away from work and family. However, they often experience an emptiness that cannot be filled. We must find our 'self' rather than a role and live a life that fulfills our calling. Accordingly, in the future, there will be a need for a program to discover a new vision, allowing time for reflection, exploration, and examination of one's life. This indicates that the initial phase of this study should focus on developing a recovery program for middle-aged women within the realm of lifelong education. Accordingly, it is hoped that follow-up research will develop a church lifelong education program related to coaching that will provide practical help to

many laypeople.

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