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### Tell Me Your Story: Evaluating Health and Human Flourishing in Congregations in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

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# **Tell me your Story: Evaluating Health and Human Flourishing in Congregations in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods**

Isaac B. Voss, MPH, PhD



# A Little Background

- Budapest, Hungary studying MDR-TB.
- MPH from Boston University, International Health.
- Paul Farmer, MD, PhD



# A Little Background

- Lesotho, Africa doing HIV/AIDS work
- Watts Christian Health Center
- PhD, Poverty and Development Studies
- Vanguard University since 2015



# Goals for the Presentation

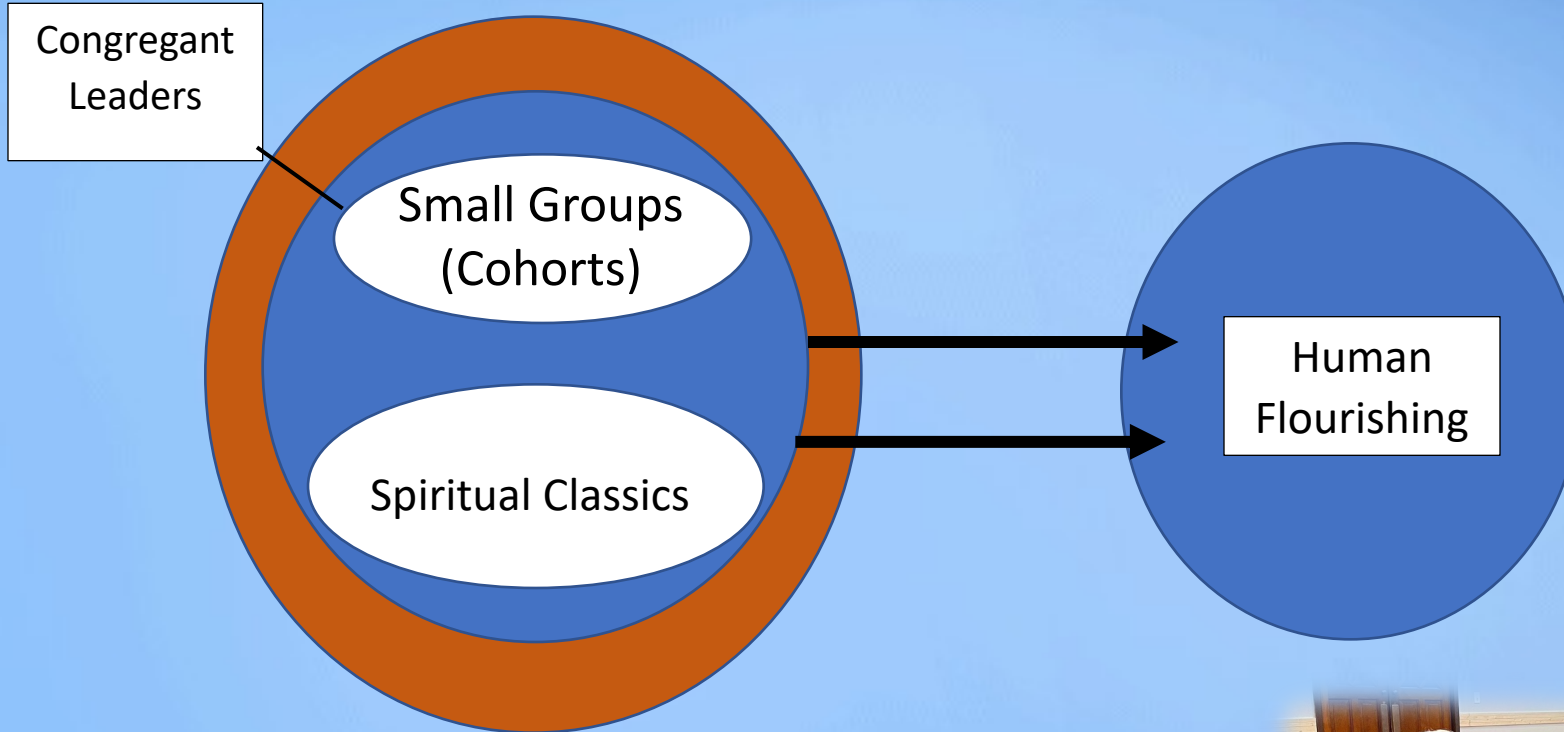
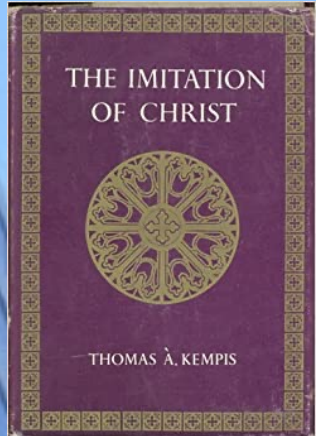
- Introduce the **Sacred Roots Project** and our **S.R. Research Project**.
- Describe Literature Review findings on the **impact** of the Covid-19 pandemic on Congregations
- Introduce a **framework** for Community (Congregational) Resilience.
- Identify critical **capacities** for congregations

# Sacred Roots Project

*"To equip and empower urban, rural, and incarcerated congregational **leaders** in under-resourced ministry contexts."*



# Sacred Roots Project



2021

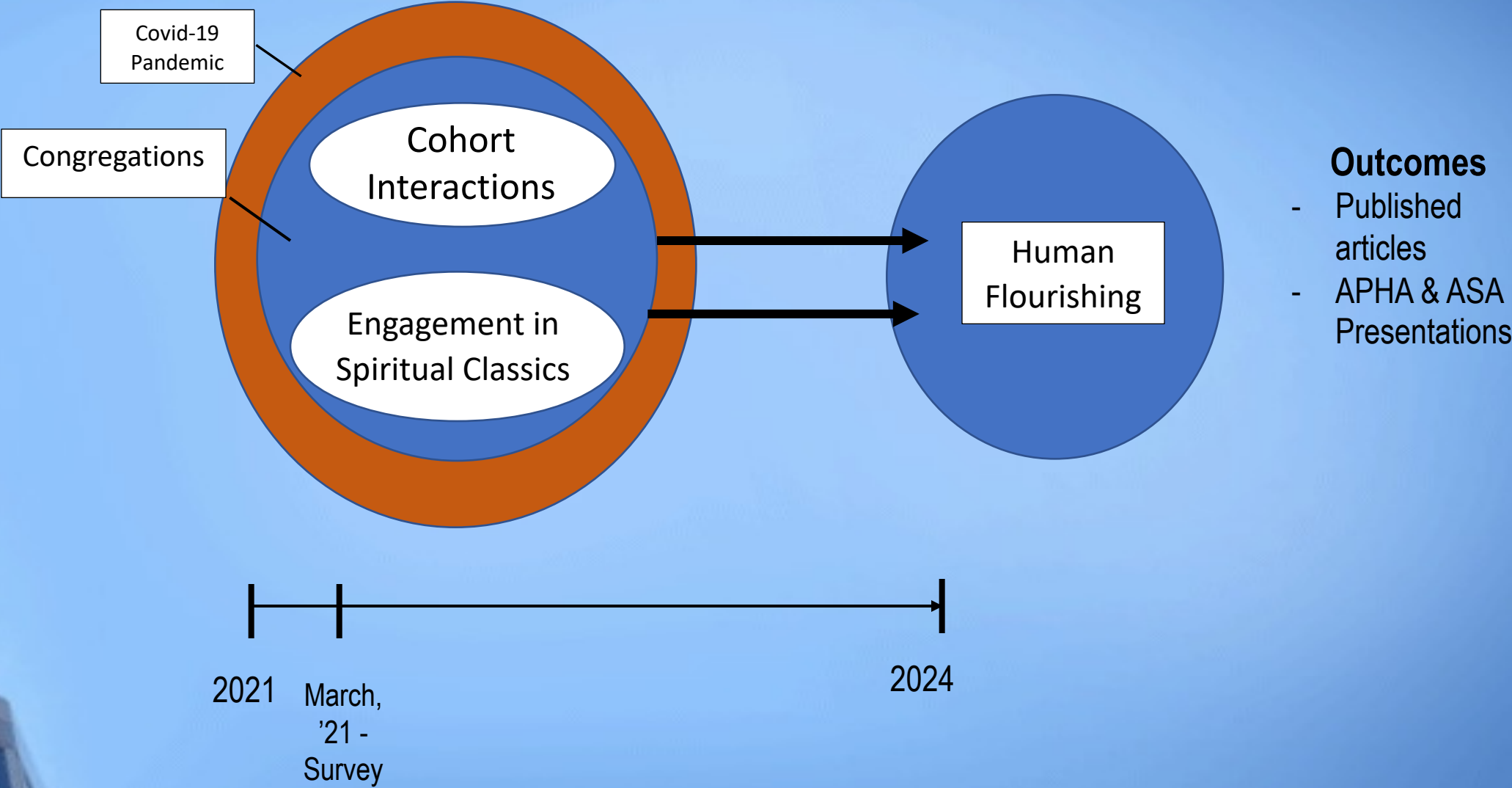
2024

Timeline

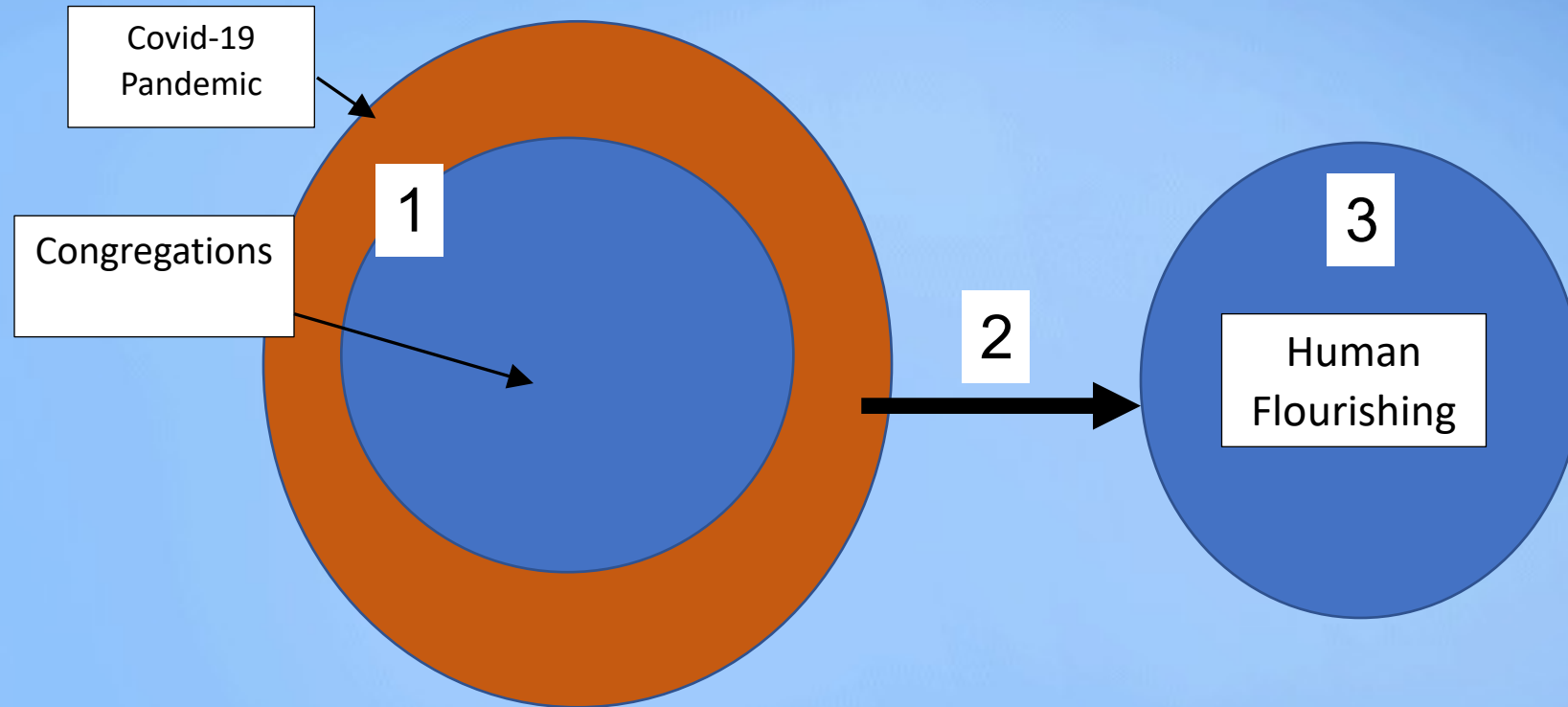




# Sacred Roots Research Project



# Focus of Today's Talk



1. **Impact** of the Covid-19 Pandemic – Literature Review
2. **Capacities** of congregations - Literature Review
3. Define **human flourishing**

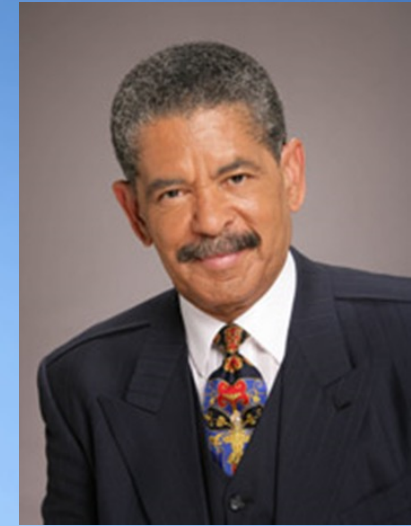
# The Public Health Impact of Congregations



- A *congregation* is a unique community-based organization or community of people who come together voluntarily for worship and other religious activities at a particular location and who share identity with one another (Yancey, et al, 2022).

Can you think of a congregation and identify one positive public health impact that it had during the pandemic?

# Impact of the Pandemic on Congregations

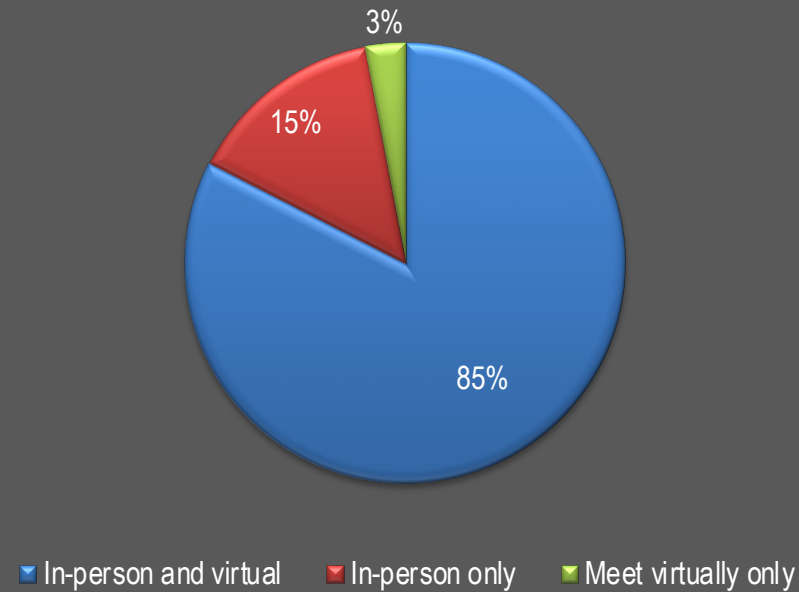


- 87% of congregations report members testing positive for the virus (2021, Dec).
- Approximately 200,000 church members died due to Covid-19 in the US.
  - *Hartford Institute for Religion Research (Dec. 2021)*

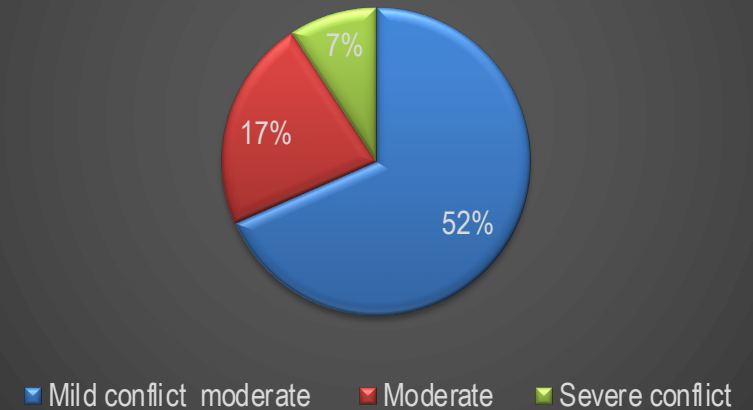
# Impact of the Pandemic on Congregations



## Type of Service (Dec. 2021)



## Conflict and Safety Measures (Nov., 2021)



A low-angle photograph of a modern building with a glass facade, viewed from the bottom left corner. The building's structure is composed of dark, rectangular panels and windows. The sky is a clear, uniform light blue. The text "What is Resilience?" is centered in the middle of the image in a bold, dark blue font.

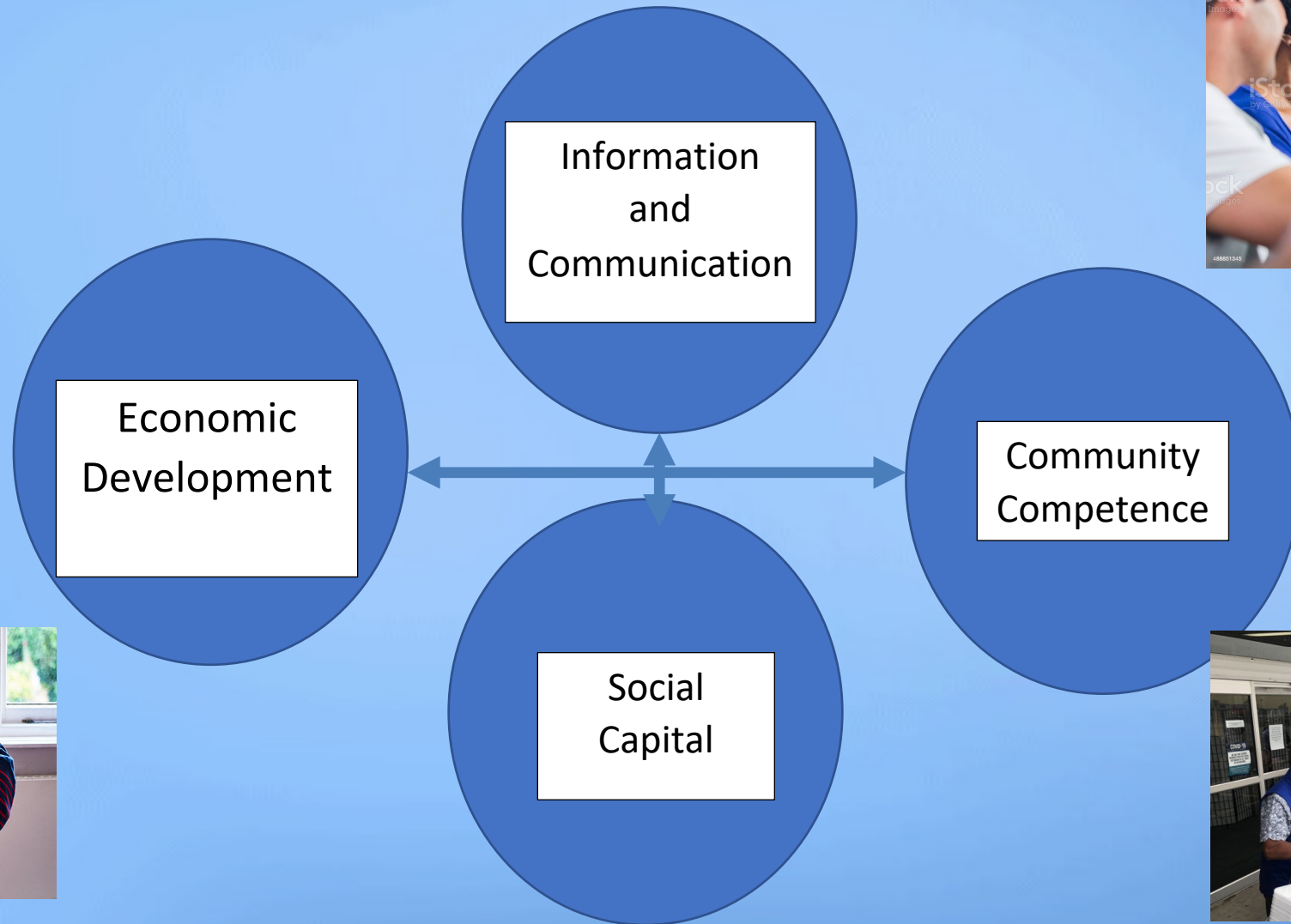
# What is Resilience?

# Capacities & Community Resilience



**Community (Congregational) Resilience** a *process of linking capacities/resources to adaptation after a disturbance or adversity (Norris et al, 2008).*

# A Framework for Congregational Resilience





# Critical Capacities



## Economic Development

- Congregants contributing financially, online giving.
- Economic stability (low job loss, or pay cuts) (Pew, 2020)
- Active in the local community

## Social Capital

- Significant lay involvement, volunteering
- Good at incorporating new people

# Critical Capacities



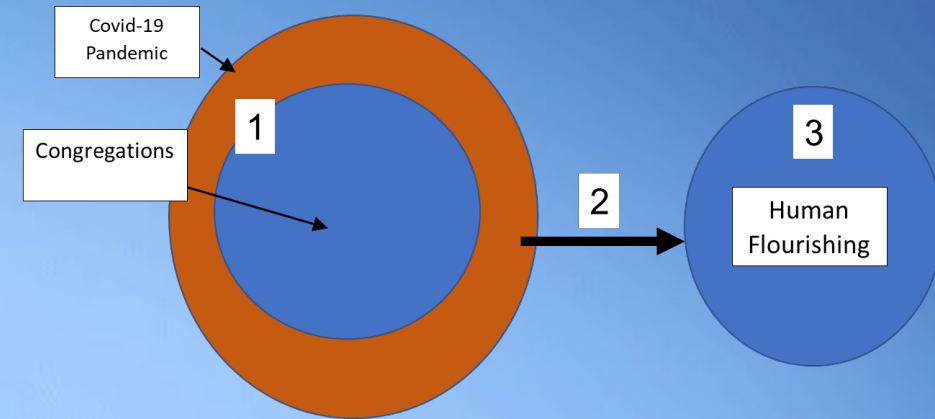
## Information and Communication

- A clear and compelling vision/narrative.
- A trusted source of information – “Clergy have the authority and trust of their members” (Pew, Oct, 2021).
- Effective use of technology

## Community Competence

- Innovative and open to change
- Vibrant, contextual worship
- Strong, adaptive leadership that fits with participants

# What is Human Flourishing?



# Domains of Human Flourishing

- happiness and life satisfaction;
- health, both mental and physical;
- meaning and purpose;
- character and virtue; and
- close social relationships
- financial and material stability. .

VanderWeele, T.J. (2017).

VanderWeele, T. J., PhD. (2018). *Is forgiveness a public health issue?* American Journal of Public Health, 108(2), 189-190.



# Conclusion

- The **Sacred Roots Project** and our Sacred Roots Research Project
- **Impact** of the Covid-19 pandemic on Congregations
- **Framework** for Community (Congregational) Resilience
- Critical **capacities** for congregations
- A vision of **human flourishing**

# Congregations & Neighborhood Flourishing

- 74% of churches reported offering some form of community service or ministry (2021).
- Nearly two-thirds began a new ministry during the pandemic.
- Outreach to elderly - shopping for/with them, rides to medical appointments, and technological support.



# Pandemic related health ministries

- Roughly 20% of churches engaged in pandemic-related ministries - making masks, hosting vaccine clinics, testing, support to medical workers.
- Churches hosted health fairs, blood drives (one church hosted 22 in 2021).



# Financial assistance

- 21% of congregations expanded or started a ministry of financial assistance. Examples included:
  - “Rental assistance for farm workers”,
  - \$40,000 in restaurant vouchers for small businesses,
  - Funding a food truck as a food center for a low-income community.





- In 2019, Christian Assembly partnered with RIP Medical Debt to cancel over 5 million dollars in medical debt for nearly 5,000 households in the LA area.
- In 2020, CA partnered with churches in 10 cities to cancel \$20 million in unpaid medical debt.



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**That's all folks!**

# Research Design



# Timeline

