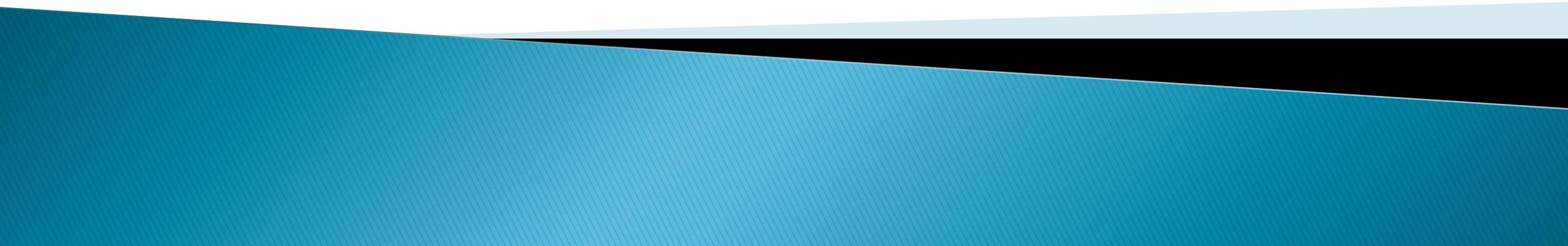
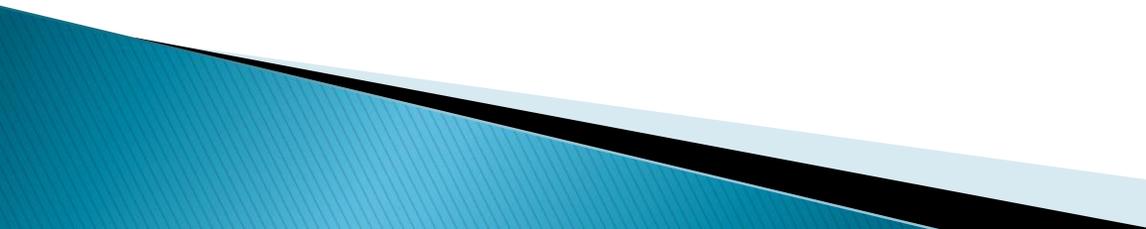


Investigative Journalism on the Religious Organization “Word of Life”

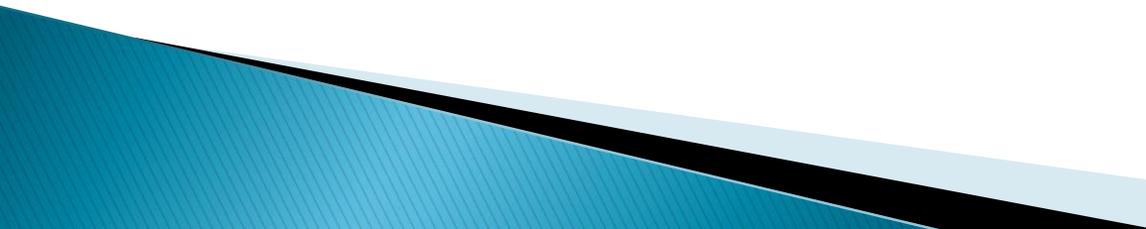
Capstone Project by Tatev Kaplanyan
Spring 2017



RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION “WORD OF LIFE”

- ▶ The largest neo-Pentecostal church of Armenia having more than 10.000 members
 - ▶ It is not recognized by the Armenian Apostolic Church
 - ▶ It was registered at the State Council of Religious Affairs of the Government of Armenia on 17/03/1993 and re-registered on 16/07/2000 by the chairman of the State Council of the Government of Armenia with order No. 29
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PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

- ▶ Members of “Word of Life” become isolated from the society
 - ▶ No other research has been conducted on this topic
 - ▶ The organization is becoming more popular day by day
 - ▶ The Armenian Apostolic Church considers “Word of Life” a sect
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Methodology

Qualitative

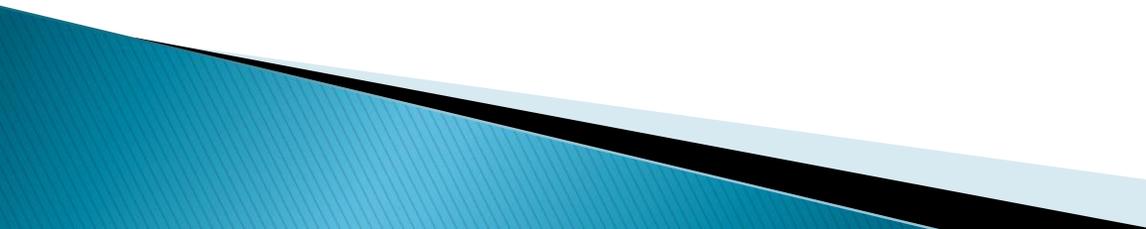
- ▶ Participant Observation
 - ▶ In-depth Interviews
 - ▶ Focus Group

Quantitative

- ▶ Survey Project

Research Question 1 : Is there a ground to claim that the religious organization “Word of Life” is a sect?

Findings:

- ▶ The term “աղանդ” (a sect) has no exact definition
 - ▶ According to the Armenian Apostolic Church, “Outside the Church there is no Salvation”
 - ▶ High involvement
 - ▶ Family relations
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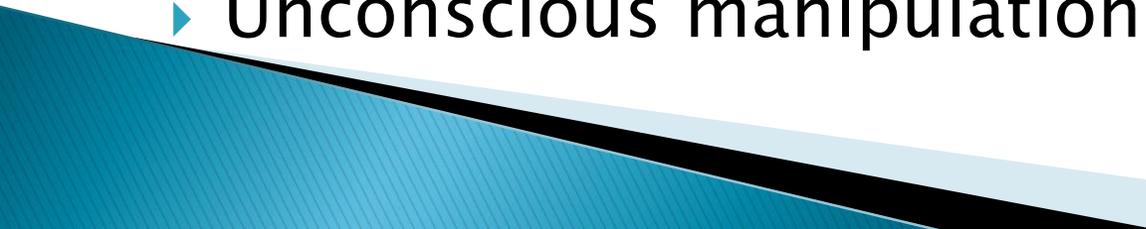
Research Question 2: How did “Word of Life” succeed in attracting so many parishioners when Armenia is so homogenous in terms of religion?

Findings:

- ▶ Formalities and rules in the Apostolic Church vs Freedom in “Word of Life”
- ▶ Friendly atmosphere, communication between members was highly encouraged
- ▶ High-equipped stage (light and sound effects)
- ▶ The strong feeling of belonging that increases a person’s self-esteem
- ▶ No restrictions related to gender

Research Question 3 : What kind of techniques does the leadership of “Word of Life” utilize to attract and keep members?

Findings:

- ▶ The absence of hierarchy
 - ▶ Pastors appear to be simple and ordinary
 - ▶ Simplified language on the stage
 - ▶ Visualizations of complicated situations by the usage of primitive and primarily exercised examples
 - ▶ Unconscious manipulation of the crowd
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Potential Members of “Word of Life”

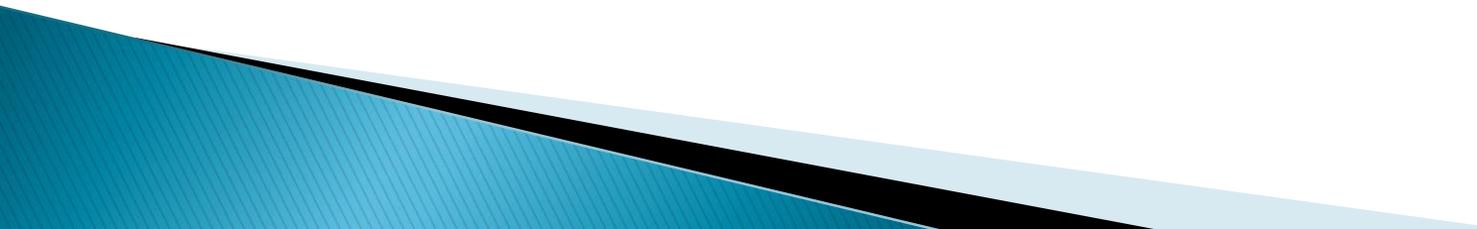
- ▶ People with hope and despair (the ones who are looking for motivation from the pastor)
 - ▶ People with enthusiasm (the ones that just need some inspiration)
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Research Question 4 : What is the role of glossolalia in “Word of Life” and charismatic religions overall?

Findings:

- ▶ Glossolalia is the term commonly used to refer to the phenomenon wherein the Holy Spirit is said to assume control of an individual's speech and to sing or speak through him in a language which he cannot otherwise use
 - ▶ A Holy Gift vs Abnormality
 - ▶ One cannot find any videos of glossolalia in the official videos of “Word of Life”
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FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

- ▶ Ten participants were shown two videos regarding glossolalia
 - ▶ All the participants were scared and shocked by the videos
 - ▶ While watching the official YouTube videos they showed relatively neutral attitude but after seeing glossolalia, all of them immediately changed their position
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Survey Results

- ▶ 80 respondents – 60 online and 20 paper-based
- ▶ Most of the respondents had higher education and permanent employment
- ▶ About 70% of the respondents had previously had health issues that were cured with the help of the church.
- ▶ 71% of the respondents were attending the church for more than 10 years
- ▶ 85% of the respondents made regular donations
- ▶ About 90% of the respondents were not the only person in their family who belonged to the church
- ▶ 79% gained new friends at the church
- ▶ 62% said that most of their friends belonged to the church as well

CONCLUSION

- ▶ Experts are very afraid and careful when speaking about this organization
 - ▶ People mostly become members for empathy rather than financial support
 - ▶ Glossolalia can be viewed as a potential danger for a person's health conditions and cause addiction
 - ▶ Lapidating this organization is never a good solution to the problem
 - ▶ This organization should attract many researchers that have opportunities and access to information
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Limitations

- ▶ Many people refused to help or showed an artificial help
 - ▶ Postponement of the survey results
 - ▶ Discomfort experienced during “Word of Life’s” gatherings: newcomers were being observed by “special” people
 - ▶ Both sides were interested in the research and shared sources beneficial from their own point of view
 - ▶ Difficulties in finding people for the focus group: people refused to take part in a focus group after they learned about the topic
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