

MOUNT ZION AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY
FOLLOWING A SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROCESS

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of Drew University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY FOLLOWING A SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROCESS MOUNT ZION AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Mattie Ard Carmon

The Christian Church is in need of spiritually-mature and spiritual-minded people to serve the present age. Many of our members attend Church school as children. However, most do not continue any formal study of the Bible as adults. To fulfill the “Great Commission” lay leaders must be equipped to do the work of ministry. The work of ministry involves more than a cursory introduction to Christianity. It requires that each member engages in life-long Christian practices that promote spiritual growth. The training of lay leaders at Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Plainfield, New Jersey, is available through traditional instructions in New Members/Discipleship Training, weekly Church school, and Bible study.

Mount Zion is a traditional AME Church steeped in denominationalism. Like many Christian churches who have been around for centuries, a new strategy is required to do the work of ministry in a postmodern context. Similar to most traditional churches, lay leadership is seemingly challenged and insufficiently grounded in spirituality to successfully meet the changing and shifting demands of ministry. On the other hand, pastoral leaders are not adequately trained to motivate laity for ministry to expand beyond the walls of the church. This project revealed the nuances and changed paradigms that shape congregations today.

This project attempts to address these shortcomings through a spiritual formation process, to deepen and nurture the spiritual growth of the individual. The goal of the

project is to employ Christian practices to nurture spiritual growth and facilitate spiritual transformation for the next generation of disciples. The participants were guided over a six week period in meaningful Christian practices for spiritual growth. The methods included a period of personal Bible study and discussion, writing a series of short prayers, and writing and articulating personal narratives. Discipline and routine played a significant role for each participant to apply this strategy. The success of the project depended on the willingness of the team to engage in this spiritual formation process.

DEDICATION

To God be the Glory for great things He has done!

To my husband and partner in ministry, Rev. Wilbur Golden Carmon, Sr., for your love and support. I am grateful for this journey in partnership. Our children Shanel, Andrea, Wilbur II, and Robyn your encouragement is greatly appreciated. This work is also completed in memory of my parents for their love and nurturing, Johnny and Mary Ard, as well as Benjamin and Betty Simmons, whose kindness and strength I shall never forget. And last but not least, I dedicate this work in memory of Sandy and Ellen (Nan) Donahue Simmons; especially Nan for raising me with love and nurturing me in the faith and teaching me the importance of making God a priority in my life.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Code Breaking

Code breaking is having the ability to read the culture and translate ministry into a biblically faithful and culturally appropriate expression of church.

Equipping the Saints

Equipping the Saints means to prepare Christians for the ministry of service to God. It involves making them ready to become evangelists, to go with confidence with power and authority to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Before they go out, they must be trained in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Lay Advisory Committee (LAC)

The LAC is a group of 10 lay persons who worked in collaboration with the candidate to develop, implement, participate in, and evaluate this professional project.

Personal Narrative

Personal narrative is a story told from an individual personal point of view. It may contain personal information, experience, and anecdotes.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is an intentional Christian practice that has as its goal the development of spiritual maturity that leads to Christ-likeness. It is the process by which God forms Christ's character in believers by the ministry of the Spirit, in the context of community, and by biblical standards. This process involves the transformation of the whole person in thoughts, behaviors, and styles of relating with God and others. Such life change is manifest in a growing love for God and others—a dying to self and living for Christ.

Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us for the glory of God, through which we are changed for the abundance of our lives, and for the sake of others. (Galatians 4:19; Romans 8:29; Romans 12:1, 2)

Spirituality

Spirituality is a process of transformation to become more like Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

My Personal Journey

My belief in Christianity is a result of a lifetime of exposure to the church. My family, the church, religious education, and personal experiences have all contributed to my current understanding of Christian thoughts and ideas. Early in my life, I understood the importance of “seeking God first,” and its message as central to my life and the life of the Church.

My faith and belief in God are grounded in biblical principles that are cultural in nature. My introduction to God and the Bible is deeply rooted in the Black church, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Notwithstanding, my viewpoint is grounded in the theology of the Black Church, with a hermeneutic of liberation, but not a theology as pervasive as those found in the writings of James Cones and Cornell West. I grew up attending church every Sunday and early on understood the importance of my role as a Christian.

My experience validates God’s revelation and activity towards us. God reached out to me when I was a young child between the ages of four and five. I am clear about the period because of where the family was living, and it happened before my first year of grade school. My search for God began in my mind perhaps even my spirit. I became obsessed in this mental search for God to the point of getting headaches. The church

assisted me in my quest, and it became the origin of my new birth. The Church prepared me for whom I would become. For ten consecutive years, while attending Church school, I repeated the Decalogue, commonly known in my tradition as the Ten Commandments, and the Apostle's Creed. Of course, this would be my governance and credo for the rest of my life and in many ways influenced my relationships both private and public. Finally, it established my covenant relationship with God at the age of 12 when I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

As a youth, I received basically two modes of instructions through Sunday school and Sunday worship. Although Bible study was not a formal practice in my community within the confines of the church, however, it was common for adults to sit around and talk about God, various books in the Bible and discuss biblical narratives. Some of these narratives included the stories of Daniel in a lion's den and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the three Hebrew boys thrown into a fiery furnace. It was during my childhood years that I learned the biblical language, the language of God. Often I found myself mimicking what I was taught. For example, Samuel was told to say, "Here I am Lord, send me" (1s 6:8). The Twenty-Third Psalm was another passage that I often quoted because I heard my paternal grandmother frequently refer to it.

Growing up in the AME Church meant reciting the Decalogue or Ten Commandments, at the opening of each Sunday school session. The Ten Commandments were always a part of the liturgy in every worship service. I learned to live by those laws, and they became etched upon the tablets of my heart. Early on, my view of God was this character making moral demands upon my life. The Ten Commandments was the reinforcement, with language causing me to fear God, with words like "Thou shalt not..."

Bible study, on the other hand, was unheard of as a separate curriculum in the church where I grew up. I knew a great deal about the stories but did not understand their full meaning for my life. Though an avid reader, I read the Bible, but could not comprehend most of its contents. In fact, I never truly considered most to be relevant to me. However, the Deuteronomic Laws and the Gospel had a tremendous impact on me.

The biblical knowledge I received came from regularly attending Sunday school and church. Many of the stories around biblical characters gave meaning to my life as a Christian. These teachings shaped my belief and the way I practiced my faith in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that he came not to do away with the law, but to fulfill the law (Mt 5:17), and that was good enough for me. The God language that shaped my life was and is that Jesus is the Son of the living God who loved me so much that he died to save me. He died that I might have an abundant life (Jn 10:10). The God who would send His only begotten Son that whoever believed in him would have everlasting life (John 3:16) became the God I knew without a doubt loved me, no matter in what event or circumstance I found myself. These snippets of biblical truths were the beginning of my spiritual transformation.

Bible study was introduced to me as a young adult when I needed to know more about its contents. I knew a lot about the characters in the Bible but realized I knew very little about its Creator and Maker. It was between 1970 and 1984 while living in South Carolina I attended Chappelle Memorial AME Church and attended Bible study and Sunday school regularly along with my children. All that I had heard and learned, the stories of the Bible came to life, and I connected these stories to my life. It was during this period that my first husband, the father of my children and I separated and eventually

divorced. The commandments echoed, “You shall not commit adultery,” (Dt. 5:18). As I lived my life as a divorcee, I contemplated whether or not I could ever marry again, given my interpretation of Matthew 19:6. Jesus’ teachings on the writ of divorce and remarriage, “Therefore, what God has joined together let no one separate” (Mt. 19:6), also resonated and caused lots of anxiety for me. I took the vows I made in the presence of God very seriously. Now that I was divorced, I felt sinful. It took me two years to work through how God could still love someone who had violated what was deemed as truth in the scripture. It happened while attending Bible study that I learned about God’s grace and mercy, God’s love and compassion. God’s love “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14), gave new meaning and purpose to my life. I came to know that God’s love abounds even in sin when one has truly repented and is sorry for their wrongdoing. I had heard and recited these words every First Sunday as part of my confession before receiving the Lord’s Supper. It reads:

We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for our misdoings. Have mercy upon us...forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in the newness of life, to the honor and glory of your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹

Another Scripture that came alive for me was 2 Corinthians 5:17, which states, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creature, everything has become new.” I became new. All that I had done was in the past, and I could receive God as a new person.

However, it was twenty years later before God granted me the opportunity to join in holy matrimony once again. I met, Rev. Wilbur G. Carmon. I am confident that our coming together was by divine appointment. On May 26, 1998, I took advantage of

¹ *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: The AMEC Sunday School Union, 2012), 481.

AT&T's early retirement package and retired September 30, 1998. I was not aware that God had a wonderful man waiting to take this new journey with me. Two weeks after turning in my retirement papers, Wilbur and I entered into a relationship, and by God's grace on September 18, 1998, we united in holy matrimony. And in 2001 we began our journey together as partners in the pastoral ministry. There was more to learn before this journey began.

When I was 25, I joined the missionary society in my church and dedicated my life to its mission. Its focus was to provide service to the community with an emphasis on such issues as alcohol and drug abuse, personal development, and teenage sexuality while communicating Christian values. By the time I was 27, divorced with two children, I felt again the desire to become a nun. I knew now that I could not possibly become a nun, so I started spending personal time reading the Bible and building a personal relationship with God. Although I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at the age of 12, I was still bound by the limitations of gnosis. With this renewed sense of spirituality, it seems that I became one with God. I re-dedicated my life to Christ. Here I am Lord, send me, came alive. And I spoke these words aloud. However, this was not the first time I said these words aloud. The first time I spoke these words, "Here I am Lord send me, I was only 17. As a young adult Christian, I was eager to learn more about the Bible and wanted to devise ways for others to know more about God. At the same time, my desire to participate more in the ministry of the church grew. I can recall wanting to become a nun. I knew only that nuns dedicated their lives to the service of the church. I could never figure out how to make this happen. Since I knew nothing about the Catholic Church,

only what I had seen on television, such as *The Lillies of the Field* and *The Flying Nun*, eventually this idea dissipated.

Although I heard a lot about God and Jesus but not much discussion on the Holy Spirit in the way of Scripture. However, there were many images present to make me aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit working in and through the life of people in the church. For instance, there was always shouting and often some elderly person would say, “It feels like fire shut up in my bones” (Jer. 20:9). I did not learn until much later that they were quoting from Jeremiah.

It was 1989, after taking an assignment in New Jersey that I began to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. I realized that the Holy Spirit led me to New Jersey and particularly to North Stelton AME Church. Here I learned about operating in the gifts of the Spirits (prophecy, preaching, teaching, etc.) and the fruits of the Spirit (love, peace, joy, etc.). North Stelton AME Church was the place where I first encountered female preachers. In fact, there were two women on staff. I do believe seeing these two women played a major role in my response to God’s call to the ordained ministry. Of course being called into the ordained ministry meant having to attend seminary.

In 1996 I began my seminary training at The New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS). At NBTS I found that I had more to learn about the Bible, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. After taking several introductory courses, I pondered, how could I use what I was learning in the church as a future pastor. Two years later I began to see that what I thought I knew about the Triune God, the Bible, and the Church was limited. Seminary training broadened my perspective, opened my mind to a new language, and many new possibilities for understanding God. While there were many

questions, and very few answers, I discovered that unless we have a personal encounter with God and experience the power of the Holy Spirit, we would not find the answers to the mysteries of the Bible.

I began a quest for how to assimilate and transfer this knowledge to others. My Christian aspiration, as a result, is to guide others toward freedom in the power of salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Christian practices set by his example. I was encouraged by the words of Matthew 6:25-34.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”²

These words laid the foundation for me to trust God for myself. God and the righteousness of God became a priority as a path to meeting my needs and desires.

In 2001, while leading a Bible study group, the Spirit of God led me to an understanding of how to care for God’s people. I began to recall my own journey through the careful study of the Bible and its liberating power in my life. My approach was to discover what God wanted us to know through meditation and reflection, and to search

² The New Revised Translation will be used throughout this paper.

for answers amid the established norm of interpretation. This phase of the spiritual journey began with reading and meditating on scripture, followed by prayer. The journey continued as I began telling others about my experience along the way. The Spirit of the Lord led me to focus my attention on Jesus and the beginning of his ministry. According to Luke Jesus was given a scroll from the Book of Isaiah to read. Jesus read these words, from Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...” This revelation is the foundation for my ministry and context.

My Passion and Mission

Before entering the Doctor of Ministry Program at Drew Theological Seminary, my passion and mission were and remain to help others uncover biblical truths, because I believe the Bible opens the door to healing physically, spiritually, emotionally, as well as economically, and should be experienced by all people. The Masters of Divinity program at The New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) taught me the principles of doing exegetical work through research, interpretation, and the application of biblical truths. I passed on this knowledge and information to help others increase their understanding of the Bible, through various ministries.

I believe that if through the revealed word of God a person can see God in the midst of the episodic events in their lives, like death and grief, sickness and distress, crime and violence, etc., a person can be set free to experience God’s presence in a lifetime. The early disciples who passed on the good news of Jesus were set free by the word of their testimony as recorded in Revelation 12:11, “But they have conquered him

by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” Under the power of the Holy Spirit they carried the word of God through the Roman provinces, they drew on the power and authority given them by Jesus and were able to overcome the demonic forces they encountered. We too have the power and the authority to overcome the episodic events in our lives. However, after many years of teaching and sharing biblical truths, unanswered questions remained regarding the unchurched, church attendance, church activities, church growth, and personal growth.

Impetus for the Project

The unfolding of my personal spiritual journey gave impetus to this project, “Equipping the Saints,” and the need to develop and implement a spiritual formation process to deepen and nurture the spiritual growth of lay leaders at Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The concern for spiritual growth did not begin with the members at Mt. Zion. The concern grew over time, through six congregations, serving in various capacities. In three congregations I was a lay member and leader, and in three congregations I was an ordained clergy. My personal spiritual journey and experience influenced this project with consideration given to the need for personal Bible study, prayer, meditation and reflection, as well as the ability to relate in narrative form a personal spiritual journey. Although this project made use of the Psalms for study, I do not believe that the study of the Bible should begin with the Psalms. The study of the Bible for every individual, should start with the Book of Genesis, the beginning of Jesus’ story.

My initial thoughts began to develop around the amount of activity in the church with various ministries looking forward to their annual days. The members became

energized around these activities, with attention given to the specific details of making this one-day event spectacular. However, I noticed that planning did not consider the event as an opportunity to invite the unchurched. Their plans centered on the guest preacher, the choir, raising funds, inviting friends from other churches, and having a great meal at the end of the event. I am not suggesting that these activities are not necessary in the life of the church. The church, however, needs to examine itself and return to the basics of who we are as Christian disciples.

Albert L. Winseman believes that institutional religion is part of the problem. He says that “In order to be the Church, congregations need to achieve and maintain an optimum level of spiritual health.”³ In other words, an engaged church works more toward “being the church” and not just “doing church.” The good news story of Jesus Christ and the unfolding ministry of his first disciples is a place to start. Our preaching, teaching, and church activity must bring us back to the reality of the mission of the church. Thus, the church needs to not only be in the community but part of the community. The reality is, there appears to be a lack of spiritual commitment, on the part of both clergy and laity. According to Winseman, “Spiritual commitment reflects a personal depth of spirituality.”⁴ Spiritually committed people are those who nurture their spirituality in preparation to “become” the church.

Motivation for the Project

The motivation for this professional project, to develop and implement a spiritual formation process to deepen and nurture the spiritual growth of lay leaders at Mount Zion

³ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 8.

⁴ *Ibid*, 50.

AME Church, demands that each member matures in their faith to meet the requirements for ministry today. The Bible is full of examples where the children of God are to be taught (Dt. 4:10, 11:19). In local churches, importance on training the youth concerning the biblical text of Proverbs 22:6. It suggests that a trained child will continue their participation in the life of the church as they become mature adults. However, this is often far from the truth. I have crossed the path of some adults who attended church school regularly as a child but currently do not go to church.

There are many distractions and several spheres of influence affecting this behavior; music television, extracurricular activities, etc. Family life, work responsibilities also impact the ability for some to engage in meaningful ways. Culture and the learning process raise tension for future Christians and even some who refer to themselves as Christians. Also, cultural norms impact the learning style of individuals. The friction becomes even greater when looking at age and gender. My experience within the context of my tradition shows conflicts and tensions among persons trained within the same tradition. The previous list of challenges supports the need for training of laity, and the need to develop strategies around these tensions.

Training in Christian Practices

More immediate to this project is what I discovered after many years of being a Bible study facilitator and instructing new members in the foundations of their faith. I learned that some members have never received formal training in Christian discipleship. The New Members and Discipleship Training classes I teach unearth many of my concerns.

The primary source material used for this training is "The S.A.T. Manual on African Methodism: A Study Guide to the Faith, Beliefs, History and Structure of the World's Oldest Denomination Founded by Blacks," written by Gregory G. M. Ingram. The book covers topics on salvation, Christianity, what we believe as Methodists, a brief history of the AME Church and its structure, Christian stewardship, worship and components of worship, concluding with a chapter on the church at work.⁵ It provides a very sound basis for any new convert and particularly useful to those who have been in the church for a while and may need to review the basics of Christianity and knowledge of the AME Church. Following the completion of the class, each member is encouraged to continue his/her studies by regularly attending Sunday school and Bible study. However, most never attend, which I contend are the underlying reasons for the lack of spiritual growth. David Platt writes the book, entitled *What Did Jesus Really Mean When He Said, Follow Me?* In addition to the training, each member is given Platt's book to read for quick reference to understanding the meaning of their Christian responsibility.

This professional project validated my original thoughts that more training is necessary. My personal observation that those individuals who complete their period of study involve themselves in various church ministries and activities. A properly trained member who nurture his/her gifts, talents, and skills through spiritual discipline is well on their way to becoming a Christian disciple, one who is willing to share his/her Christian experiences with others in the community. However, the quandary surrounding many of our churches is the lack of strategies to assist with the spiritual development of members.

⁵ Gregory G. M. Ingram, *The S.A. T. Manual on African Methodism: A Study Guide on the Faith, Beliefs, History, and Structure of the World's Oldest Denomination Founded by Blacks* (USA: Gregory G. M. Ingram, 2011).

A Way Back to God

Further, I observed the actions of lay leaders and clergy across the denomination and concluded that the church has lost its way, and needs to find its way back to God.

The research for this project led to the writing of Carlyle Stewart on prophetic ministry, the basis for its inclusion in this work. As Stewart speaks primarily to the African American Community he says,

The primary goal of the prophetic church is to call the people back to God. We must, by developing ministries and programs which increase spiritual awareness, take the lead in promoting personal and social transformation. The primary objective of the prophetic church is the transformation, liberation, and personal empowerment of African American people, so that they might actualize their optimum potential and realize human wholeness.⁶

Certainly, Stewart's statement is relevant to all people across cultural boundaries and denominational lines. In America, there is a fast growing number of individuals who call themselves Christians who are unchurched and need to experience this call back to God. Perhaps a way to reach the "unchurched Christians" is through Christian Education.

Spiritual Formation Shaped by Christian Education

Christian education is as important to the body of Christ as secular education is to the broader society. Spiritual formation as a process, like conversion and salvation all require time. It takes time to acquire information and knowledge to become productive adults. M. Robert Mulholland provides a working definition of spiritual formation as a layered process. He describes it, "as (1) a process, (2) of being conformed, (3) to the

⁶ Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 19.

image of Christ, (4) for the sake of others.”⁷ By definition, the spiritual formation process requires time and consideration for education in biblical knowledge. In the secular world, education begins with kindergarten and culminates with high school graduation, yielding 13 years of schooling by the time a child reaches the age of 18. Advanced training is also offered at colleges and universities supposing that the more advanced the education, the more one has to contribute to society. Lawrence Cremin defines education as “the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort.”⁸ Thomas H. Groome defined Christian Education this way,

Christian religious education is a political activity with pilgrims in time that deliberately and intentionally attends with them to the activity of God in our present, to the Story of the Christian faith community, and to the Vision of God’s Kingdom, the seeds of which are already among us.⁹

An understanding of both Cremin’s and Groome’s definition of education and Christian religious education encompasses the activities of the whole person in their secular and religious pursuits. Both definitions reflect the need to be “deliberate,” and “intentional” as the church educate its members.

Drawing on my personal pursuit of Christian education, I discovered that a simple building block approach is a practical way for laying a foundation that leads to spiritual growth. “Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for

⁷ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to A Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15.

⁸ Lawrence A. Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), 134.

⁹ Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1980), 25.

the sake of others.”¹⁰ Given this understanding spirituality, spiritual maturity, spiritual transformation, and spiritual formation are all elements in the process of salvation.

The Apostle Paul gives us the reasons we should receive instructions from the Bible. He said, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Each stage or level of Christian education should prepare the saints for the work of ministry, beginning inside the four walls of the church, and ultimately actualizing the desire to go into the community for the sake of others.

Approaches to Christian Education comes from at least two perspectives; programmatically and didactically. Both methods are relevant, though I choose to take the programmatic approach. Much of my success from my corporate background showed my ability to establish processes for the team and customers I supported. Christian education informed by an intentional step-by-step process is a practical means to develop the spiritual discipline. Through this spiritual discipline, God forms Christ’s character in believers by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The next few paragraphs reflect the voices of theologians; I studied during the first class of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Drew. Dr. Kevin Miller; presented these modern day scholars through reading assignments and writing reflection papers. The initial course opened new possibilities to be considered for transforming lives. The spiritual growth or spiritual maturity of an individual is a precursor to church growth, and it starts with getting people involved in the work of the church. One strategy for church

¹⁰ Mulholland, 12.

growth as mentioned by Michael Christensen is to “actualize the priesthood of all believers.”¹¹ He defends this view with the belief that involving the laity in all aspect of ministry will mobilize them in our communities. Christensen’s small group approach seems to be a way of engaging a congregation and preparing them for ministry. His view demands that every Christian receive training for the work of ministry.

The prophetic voices of Carlyle Fielding Stewart III and William D. Watley, as well as their knowledge of the African American church and context, provide a way forward for speaking prophetically to African American people. The practical and concrete ways these theologians communicate church growth in the African American church context is representative and unique to the community of believers I serve.

Christian education is the cornerstone of Rev. William D. Watley’s preaching ministry. According to Watley, God wants each of us to grow as he trains his congregation from the pulpit using the recurring theme of church growth. Watley’s reference to church growth starts with the individual Christian who must see the vision of growth in their own personal lives before imagining growth for the local church. God wants us to grow because “growth is a sign of life,” says Watley.¹² Individual maturation resonates with me as I believe that one must evolve and go through a spiritual transformation to realize the fullness of who he/she is becoming. Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, addresses the primary issues facing churches in North America today, one of

¹¹ Michael J. Christensen and Carl Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 12.

¹² William D. Watley, *God Wants You to Grow* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 4.

which is the prophetic voice of calling people back to God.¹³ I became particularly interested in this call back to God for the African American people because the issues in the community I serve are consistent with people who have lost their way, people who have no vision for their lives. They are people whose lives seem to validate the absence of justice; therefore, no faith and no hope for freedom. Stewart says,

The basic tasks of the educational ministry in the growing prophetic church are to raise critical consciousness, help people develop a pragmatic and viable faith, and assist them in the acquisition of spiritual principles, through the development and implementation of meaningful programs.¹⁴

Stewart presents a complex view of transformation that is characteristically programmatic. He proposes that an understanding of these matters within a community, speaking to these matters as a prophetic witness, and creating meaningful programs to address those issues, “will bring about positive transformation of both individuals and communities.”¹⁵

Another dimension of spiritual growth comes from examining the movement of the Spirit addressed by Henri Nouwen. These movements pertain to the hearts of individuals and the ability to go deeper in their relationship with God. Nouwen says,

The journey inward is the journey to find the Christ dwelling within us. The journey outward is the journey to find the Christ dwelling among us and in the world. The journey inward calls for the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer, meditation, contemplation, and attentiveness to the movements of our heart. The journey outward in community and mission calls for the disciplines of care, compassion, witness, outreach, healing, accountability, and attentiveness to the

¹³ Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 19

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

movement of other people's hearts. These two journeys belong together to strengthen each other and should never be separated.¹⁶

Nouwen's view of Christian religious education does not entirely reject Stewart's or Watley's thoughts. Nouwen would undoubtedly add that it is as much about a person's inner life as it is about what they know and what they do. The missional aspect of Nouwen's view speaks first to getting in touch with the spiritual presence of God through spiritual disciplines. The second point suggests that the cultivated inner spirit will lead to a missional journey into the community. Cardoza-Orlandi says, "Mission is spiritual discipline, informed by prayer, devotion, communal worship, biblical study, and critical theological reflection."¹⁷ Cardoza-Orlandi and Nouwen's observations see the twofold approach to spirituality; inward and contemplative, yet intentional and externally focused. Understanding Orlandi's broader view of missions suggests that spiritual formation will occur as we acknowledge that God is at work both inside and outside the church as we journey inward and outward.

Developing intentional strategies and methods are critical components to church growth. Intentionality is evident when internal focus through training prepare existing members to reach out externally. Both the revolving door for those who join churches as well as sustaining that growth is problematic and require a strategic plan for continued growth. The strategic plan that might work best for Mount Zion is to move "from programs to processes," which "recognizes that the local congregation should function

¹⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca J. Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), 123.

¹⁷ Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 14-15.

just like the human body (1 Cor. 12:12-20).”¹⁸ Stetzer and Putnam believe in a process that places emphasis on the individual and not the on the entire congregation. The voices of these theologians provided the basis for a step-by-step process that is suitable for nurturing the spiritual growth of lay leaders at Mount Zion.

I expressed my earlier valuation on church growth by the number of members joined within a given period. However, over the years, I have come to understand that before a church can grow numerically and sustain that growth, the spiritual growth of each individual is paramount. Church growth may be difficult to maintain if members are not growing spiritually. Personal spiritual growth equals church growth. This idea is made clear in Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples who were waiting in the Upper Room. The disciples in the room advanced the Christian church and the church grew; it seems as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, and the power and authority given for the work of evangelism. The question is: How do Christians become disciples?

Discipleship Shaped by Christian Education

Those involved in Christian education believe there is a relationship between discipleship and praxis that leads to transformation. Discipleship is about being a student of Jesus Christ and willing to tell others what you have learned. Brad Waller defines discipleship as “the process whereby we seek to teach others the Word of God.”¹⁹ He suggest that this occurrence is over the lifetime of an individual and by example others

¹⁸ David Putnam and Ed Stetzer, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 60-62.

¹⁹ Brad Waller, “Discipling Every Age,” *The Journal of Christian Education* 77, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 12.

are taught the way to live out their Christian experience. The church bears the responsibility for educating members through various forms of study. The goal of our current Episcopal leaders is to establish the conviction that discipleship is at the heart of everything our churches are about—in worship, education, social action, stewardship, fellowship, etc.²⁰

The class leader, small group structure of the AME Church is an effective strategy for nurturing new members and a great opportunity for facilitating spiritual growth. Janet Munn draws on the ministry of Jesus to identify four essential components of discipleship, all evident in Jesus' relationships with his disciples and others he met throughout his ministry. She believes relationships through mentoring and role models, small group participation, personal spiritual ministry, and mission opportunities provide the impact to keep people connected.²¹ Even though I agree with Munn, to fully implement, the depth of cultural problems, values, behavioral norms, and the willingness to engage in these meaningful steps is contingent on simple, well-defined steps. I am more inclined to agree copiously with Ed Stetzer as he believes in explaining the strategy, and "Identifying the challenges of genuine discipleship and committing to a process that works through them are the first steps to cultivating a church filled with on-mission disciples."²²

²⁰ Gregory G. M. Ingram, *The Bishop's Word* (handout, June 8, 2014).

²¹ Janet Munn, "Four Essential Components of Discipleship," *The Journal of Christian Education* 76, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 7.

²² Ed Stetzer, "Better Discipleship: 5 Broken Views of Discipleship and How to Fix Them," *The Journal of Christian Education* 77, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 8.

Each church must identify its own challenges before adopting strategies and solutions, which requires work. I believe the major work that is absent from some churches is teaching, which brings me back to the words of Thomas Groome in his definition of Christian education, previously stated are highlighted in the following way:

1. It is deliberate and systematic
2. It requires sustained effort to transmit
3. It evokes, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort²³

Teaching members the way of discipleship is repeated throughout the ministry of Jesus. He taught his disciples many things, but two that stands out is; how to pray, (Lk 11:1-4; Mt 6:5-13); and how to become fishers of men (Mt 4). For three years Jesus disciples spent most of their time following Jesus learning the things of God and how to become a Christian believer. After his death, burial, and resurrection the disciples were left to reflect upon his teachings and put into practice what they learned. Discipleship, like its other companions: conversion, salvation, and spiritual formation requires a life-time of commitment to the process. The Church is obligated to inform the members that the experience of salvation is a life commitment and their confession of faith is only the beginning.

²³ Cremin, 134.

CHAPTER TWO

MINISTRY CONTEXT

Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church

This area of research began with my understanding of Mount Zion's history, its current involvement in ministry, and its problems and concerns. Second, it acknowledges the challenges within the church and the community. Third, it sought to understand the nature of the community, the City of Plainfield. Fourth, it acknowledges the denomination's power to influence the local church, based on the historical significance still relevant today. Finally, it affirms the opportunity to educate members utilizing resource material produced by the Christian Education Department of the AME Church.

Mount Zion AME Church in Plainfield, New Jersey was established in 1894, a few years after the founding of the City of Plainfield, New Jersey – making it one of the oldest churches in Plainfield. In 1893, a small group with a sincere desire to have a church of their own began to worship in a small hall on West Fourth Street in Plainfield in Union County. This year Mount Zion celebrated 124 years of service in the community. Thirty-three pastors have served this congregation, including the current pastor whose tenure is 11 years and counting. The majority of its members are over sixty, 80 or 90 percent of its members are residents of Plainfield, mixed with “blue collar” and “white collar” workers, retirees, and the rest are youth and young adults. On April 1, 2010, the church moved to its new location situated on the east end of town.

Mount Zion boasts of several ministries which include three administrative boards consisting of stewards who have responsibility for spiritual vitality, trustees who are responsible for temporal concerns (including buildings and grounds), and Stewardship and Finance Commission who oversee the finances of the church. Mount Zion has several outreach ministries which include the Women's Missionary Society, the Young People Division, and Culinary Ministries in partnership with the Plainfield YMCA and their Feed the Homeless Program. Along with those, Mount Zion support families in distress, sponsor health awareness fairs and workshops, and other outreach programs. An additional seven ministries are responsible for supporting worship, the elderly, youth, and education.

Through the church's economic development corporation the church has engaged the community on one major front. Since Plainfield is the third largest city in the State of New Jersey with reported cases of HIV/AIDS, the church has partnered with Iris House, Inc. to provide education and testing to teens and young adults in Union County and surrounding cities. A second partnership was established July 2016 with Nurturing Heart, LLC whose mission is to provide affordable, creative, therapeutic services to those in the urban community who are more likely to experience mental illness at a disproportionate rate. Nurturing Heart's goal is to empower, promote wellness, relieve suffering, and restore mental health in a safe and nurturing environment. In process is a third partnership whose mission will provide personal development and training in literacy skills necessary for employment.

The ministry context and its ability to engage the community has its challenges. The facility where we engage in Christian ministry since April 2010, was formerly owned

by the Lutheran Synod, who closed their doors five years earlier from loss of membership. If we are not careful, the same will happen to Mount Zion. With all these things going on in my church context, I seized the opportunity to develop a project that is basic, yet will inspire members to want to go deeper in their experience with Jesus and expand their work into the community.

Statement of Concern

Over the past several years the pastor and I, discussed ways to effectively spread the good news and engage the unchurched, especially since our community is experiencing a cultural shift; its context is changing. We acknowledged our individual weaknesses. We did not know how to move the congregation beyond the walls of the church and into the community. A few years back, we came to the realization that most churches have the same concerns. We took personal inventory to identify our shortcomings. One strategy we discussed involved examining our leadership skills and style, determine our strengths and weaknesses and intentionally use the skills we know are our strengths. A second strategy included understanding what God is calling us to do, individually and as a ministry team. Acknowledging that times have changed and the need to redirect attention to what God is doing currently. We constructed our current mission statement:

God has given us the opportunity of promoting Christ's ministry. And God has given us the privilege of proclaiming Christ's message. Thus our mission is to do this as we fulfill God's 'Great Commission' to go into Plainfield and the surrounding communities, to minister to the needs of our fellow citizens. Our mission also includes doing this through our continued partnerships with community organizations such as Iris House, the local YMCA and Salvation Army. We welcome all who desire to join us on this divine mission, that together we might fulfill God's mandate to 'go and make disciples in all nation (Matthew 28:19-20).

We agreed on the need to establish methods for engaging the congregation in fresh ways with new ideas of openness and collaboration around clearly articulated vision and mission statements, and set goals, to achieve the objective for church growth and to connect with the community. Finally, we acknowledged that the lay leadership is also spiritually challenged.

Mount Zion's Mission Field

The City of Plainfield is informally known as “The Queen City,” was once a place where the affluent lived, filled with economic opportunities. During the riot of 1967, the racial tension created unrest resulting in looting and burning causing business owners and wealthy residents to pack up and leave. Acquiring the facts of Mount Zion's ministry context is first revealed through The First View Report of 2012, a product provided by Percept Group, Inc.¹ The good news coming out of this report shows that within a five-mile radius of the church, there is the opportunity for growth, primarily because of the church's current location, on the east end of Plainfield. The selected area includes other more affluent communities, unlike Plainfield with an average six-figure income of \$110,443. However, a closer look at the average income of Plainfield, the average income is significantly lower at \$53,184. According to the report, the Hispanic/Latino population make up 18.9% of the population and their growth is expected to increase by

¹ SourceBook provides additional support and resource material designed to assist you in better understanding and utilizing information and planning resources provided by PERCEPT. Since its inception in 1987, has supplied thousands of churches and hundreds of regional and national denominational agencies with demographic resources to help them engage in mission within their particular context. Percept adds value to its demographic information by integrating data about the religious attitudes, preferences, and behavior of the American people. Percept has regularly been recognized as one of the best strategic information companies in the country.

16.7% between 2012 and 2017. This fact is worth mentioning because Plainfield is fast becoming a city filled with Hispanic/Latino people whose first language is not English. The population growth among this ethnic group poses many challenges for the community, which are not identified in this report.

There is one major flaw with this report. It does not consider the problems plaguing the rest of the city. Hence, the need to review the HOPES CAP report for the precise nature of these challenges. According to the HOPES CAP report, “Efforts to revive the City have been challenged by low performing schools, extreme socioeconomic inequity, widespread gang violence, political corruption and various other factors.”² After the riots, African Americans, became the dominant culture. However, the Hispanic population has outpaced the growth of African Americans and their numbers are steadily growing.

A closer look at the Plainfield community as reported by HOPES CAP, Inc., we see a different picture, a once a vibrant city is now a dark city filled with poverty and violence. The report revealed that the Hispanic/Latino population rose significantly, over the past ten years, while White/Non-Hispanic and the African American population declined. The overall character of the City is changing—not only is it becoming a city of another culture, but its subculture of African Americans are poor, with alcohol and drug problems, plagued by gang activity and violence. The report lists 14 key findings, which

² Hopes Community Action Partnership, Inc., is a 48-year old community action agency headquartered in Hoboken, New Jersey that serves the needs of the lowest income children, youth, families and seniors in the City of Plainfield as well as Jersey City, Hoboken, and neighboring Hudson County Communities.

emphasizes a high concentration of poverty and lack of economic opportunities. For the purpose of this project four of these results are:

1. A significant majority of people who have settled in Plainfield since 2000 are low-income, Hispanic/Latino residents who are foreign-born, do not have US Citizenship speak Spanish as their primary language and have limited English proficiency.
2. The increase in population in Plainfield over the past ten years is consistent with the number of increase in individuals in poverty.
3. Crime and gang violence are pervasive. Nearly one out of three violent crimes in Union County occurs in Plainfield.
4. At the current rate, nearly 1 out of every 3 children born in Plainfield who attend public schools will not graduate from high school.³

Against this backdrop of the City of Plainfield, is a gloomy picture. Every effort seems futile; nothing ever gets resolved, and this impression is in the hearts and minds of most people. Those involved in ministry efforts often become cynical yet are determined to make a difference. This dark and dreary picture presents many challenges to overcome. “Families are concerned for their children’s safety as violent crime and gang activity are prevalent, along with other negative influences of drugs, and other large-scale crimes.”⁴ This dark picture may imply defeat. Instead, it presents a space of opportunity for transformation, liberation, and revelation. Elizabeth Dias-Clarkesville writes, “Most spiritual seekers spend their lives pursuing enlightenment. But...Barbara Brown Taylor who ranks among America’s leading theologians is encouraging believers and nonbelievers not only to see the light but face the darkness too.”⁵ Taylor would challenge

³ HOPES CAP, 1-3.

⁴ Ibid., 33

⁵Elizabeth Dias-Clarkesville, “Let there be Night,” *Time Magazine*, April 28, 2014, 38-41.

us to “face the darkness” because God is in the dark places and would argue, to do otherwise, we may find ourselves “running away from God.” Dias-Clarkesville says, “A walk in the dark can lead to wisdom.”⁶ Wisdom is the personification of God.

We must not forget, in the beginning, the world was void of light, it was full of darkness, according to Genesis 1:2. Then in verse three, God changed the entire look of the whole world, with a few words, “Let there be light.” This simple statement communicates God’s creative power to defeat darkness in Plainfield and elsewhere in the world. We have the same creative power to speak “life” and not “death” to the challenges we face in Plainfield (Prov. 18:21). In the darkness, we can find truth through discernment. According to Diana Butler Bass, “discernment is a gift to the whole of the Christian community,” and it can lead us to “God’s inner wisdom for the community.”⁷ God’s inner wisdom is conveyed to the church as God sends the Son to reconcile the whole community. We have the power to do the same – reconcile the community.

The reports mentioned above unveiled and exposed the need to do missions by establishing programs of concerns in the area of family support through education, childcare, and counseling. Mount Zion is already engaged in outreach ministries through established partnerships. Despite our current efforts, there is more we can do as we consider “the priesthood of all believers,” and equip them to do the work of ministry. For what purpose must we do this? We have an imperative, one that commissioned all to “go” and “make disciples.” Why? God desires all humanity to experience God’s

⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁷ Bass, Diana Butler, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 91.

freedom; according to John 8:36, “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Freedom comes through fellowship with Jesus as he offered himself as a sacrifice to God, as expressed in Hebrews 7:27, “Unlike the other high priests ... this he did once for all when he offered himself.” Our challenge is to equip the laity of Mount Zion and help those in our community to find freedom in Christ Jesus.

Challenges to Overcome

The problem we face is much like the challenges of the early church with merging different religion and cultures. The challenge of syncretism, combining various religious beliefs, is still prevalent today among pastoral leaders and laity. The church must remain objective and open and find its way to face the tension that lies within the church and outside the church. The church where I serve has its tensions and in a community with tensions stemming from cultural differences. The city is an urban community with low income, drug users, and gang members which are inherently frightening. Against this backdrop is a large Latino population whose language we do not speak and of whose culture we know little. Although the Apostle Peter had his concerns with going to the Gentiles yet, he went. Similarly, we must view our concern as “the called” as no different. Although we stand on 2 Timothy 1:7 that says, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind,” the thought of declaring this our mission field is quite intimidating. Regardless of feelings of apprehension, we must recognize our mission is not about us, but about Jesus. We must ignore our personal preferences, and take off the traditional garb of clothing and attitude, for the purpose of following God’s missional purpose for all people.

Another challenge to consider is that the denomination maintains its historical African American heritage. Even the name suggest that it is not open to people of all kinds, although this is not the reality as stated in the explanation of the name:

The word **African** means that the church was organized by people of African descent and heritage. It does not mean that the church was founded in Africa, or that it was for persons of African descent only.

The church's roots are of the family of **Methodist** churches. Methodism provides an orderly system of rules and regulations and places emphasis on a plain and simple gospel.

Episcopal refers to the form of government under which the church operates. It means that the church is governed by bishops. The chief executive and administrative officers of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination are the Bishops of the church.⁸

Mt. Zion AME Church, like many traditional churches, is accustomed to a mission by sharing and giving; clothing the naked and feeding the homeless. Remaining are those who like doing things the way they have always done. For example, giving out Thanksgiving baskets and feeding the homeless. These acts of kindness are essential to the overall mission of the church; however, just as important is the need to evangelize. Therefore, when feeding the homeless and giving out Thanksgiving baskets, a critical and important aspect of the mission is to witness to the people as they come in. We must encourage those who come and embrace the words of Peter. "Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..." (Acts 3:6).

We certainly cannot continue business as usual with the hope that lost souls will find their way into a foreign place called the church with locked doors. The people in our

⁸ The Official Website of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, <https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-name/>, accessed 10-12-16.

communities have no place to go to escape a dysfunctional society with dysfunctional churches to avoid poverty, drugs, abuse, crime and other evils in society. A solution to failing traditional churches is at our fingertips, and it is called “breaking the missional code.” Code breaking as described by Stetzer and Putnam is “having the ability to read the culture and translate ministry into a biblically faithful and culturally appropriate expression of church.”⁹ In my denomination which is governed by the episcopacy, the pastor is assigned a church, with the understanding the assignment is of godly judgment. The pastor is left to determine God’s call to the designated church, and seek godly wisdom on how to lead the congregation. In other words, the pastor must break the missional code in each community where he/she is assigned, and must begin by understanding its cultural context.

This new context termed by Stetzer and Putnam as a “glocal community” comes from combining two words “global” and “local” resulting from a cultural shift as people migrate from other countries shaping a new reality in our local communities. This new reality provides the basis for churches in this country to declare it as a new mission field. They are telling us we need to go deeper into the life of the community, understanding its people and its culture if we are to reach the unchurched. The basis of their ethos is that it will make a difference in breaking the missional code and we will go places God wants us to go; carrying on the mission by applying what they call “missional thinking.” For us to go where God wants us to go, we must become missionaries.

The information presented by Stetzer and Putnam is not groundless. The material show references from churches who are doing missions in North America and with

⁹ Putnam and Stetzer, 21.

Scripture references to Jesus and his mission to send out laborers into the harvest. Also, the basis for the call to what seemingly is a new mission field is prayer. We are told to pray to the Lord who ultimately is responsible for the harvest. Intrinsic in this missional thought of Jesus is the answer that the resources needed to sow the seeds of love and compassion are available and as we go—we will reap the harvest. In the parable of the sower, Jesus proclaims that his disciples have the key to knowing the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those outside God's kingdom are blinded by the truth (Mark 4:11). As we respond to the "Great Commission" the mission is to go into the community, build relationships with the community, and show the love of Christ, so that others may find their way into his kingdom.

Missional thinking is not absent from the mind of the clergy, it is figuring out, rather how do we meet the challenges in our communities. How do we move forward? During my encounter with other clergy within my denomination, the concern centers around parishioners who are untrained and those who have grown accustomed to clergy doing the work of spreading the gospel. For me, this signaled, the need to transform members into disciples. Stetzer and Putnam offer a way for pastors and church leaders to establish a comprehensive process for creating "missionaries" within the community. The challenge for the pastoral leader is to create an environment conducive to spiritual growth and develop strategies for members.

With God and the Holy Spirit, through prayer and meditation, we will be led into this new mission field as they led Paul and his ministry team throughout Asia without fear and trepidation. Like Paul, we must find ways to associate and relate to the new

culture, but we must do so without compromise and allow the strength of the gospel to stand on its own.

Denominational Impacts

The AME Church's historical significance addressed issues that were unique to African Americans not only as it related to Christianity but secular engagements, such as education and social development. Our uniqueness remains, given the current climate of racial discrimination and other problems that plague African American communities.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church legacy dates back to 1787. Around the time of its formulation America was fighting for its freedom from Great Britain. This period in American history typify a time of crisis when one event of armed conflict followed another.¹⁰ Richard Allen, the Church's founder, date of birth places him entering childhood during the American Revolution. He taught himself to read and write, and conceivably gained the awareness of America's fight for freedom from Great Britain. During the same period, Allen was allowed to purchase his freedom. The significance for the AME Church is freedom of America also meant freedom for African Americans and Allen was among those who carried the torch. Its members still remember the reason Richard Allen and others left the Methodist church in pursuit of equality in worship.

According to the Official Website of the AME Church:

It is the first major religious denomination in the Western World that had its origin over sociological and theological beliefs and differences. It rejected the negative theological interpretations which rendered persons of African descent second class citizens. There was a theological declaration that God is God all the time and for everybody.¹¹

¹⁰ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 263.

¹¹ The Official Website of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, <https://www.ame-church.com/> Accessed 10-16-16.

Allen was among those who protested against their treatment as they knelt in prayer.

Richard Allen along with a band of other Black worshippers formed the original body of believers on April 12, 1787. They left St. George Methodist Episcopal Church located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in search of religious freedom.¹² Allen established a prayer group of forty-two members,¹³ and called themselves the Free African Society. The first church was erected on Sixth and Lombard Streets and dedicated on July 29, 1794, and given the name Bethel.¹⁴ The incorporation of the AME Church took place on April 19, 1816, at the General Convention in Philadelphia. At this convention, a resolution was passed to adopt the Book of Discipline of the Methodist Church.¹⁵ The original organizer thought it expedient to adopt the orderly practice of the Methodists and saw it beneficial for people of color. Richard Allen, “Believed Methodism’s emphasis upon piety, preaching, and social concern more suited blacks.”¹⁶ The Christian practices of the Methodist Church outlined in the Book of Discipline provided the road map for the AME Church to begin its missional journey.

The AME Church has its roots in the Wesleyan tradition. African Methodism borrowed its doctrines, beliefs, and practices because they best served the needs of the African American community. Establishing the AME Church occurred about the same time the 13th Amendment, Abolition of Slavery ratified, and people of color were allowed to go free. It created for itself and the community a way of life, creating a surrogate world

¹² George A. Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism: A Study of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: AME Press, 1985), 15.

¹³ Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 5-8.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Singleton, 21-22.

¹⁶ Ingram, *The S.A.T. Manual on African Methodism*, 49.

by which people of color could realize their full potential as human beings.¹⁷ Thus the church became the place where African American people could go and have all their needs met; spiritual, physical, emotional, and environmental.

The AME Church, first of all, in its motto, “God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit our Comforter, Humankind our Family,” expresses the truth about Jesus Christ, the foundation of the church. This expression is biblically sound as it relates to the church. God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of the church, and humanity has the responsibility for carrying out the ongoing mission of the church (I Cor. 11:3-4; Col. 3:18; Mt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22, 4:15). Since its beginning, the AME Church recognized the critical mission of the church. Its mission is to minister to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people by spreading Christ’s liberating gospel. Its mission statement is analogous to the statements read by Jesus in Luke’s gospel Chapter Four and when practiced, personifies the “Great Commission.” Bishop Gregory G. M. Ingram, the 118th elected and consecrated bishop of the AME Church states the following about the historical commitment of the AME Church:

From the beginning of the Free African Society and Bethel Church to the zenith in the AME Church, these areas for mission coincide with Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. In a commitment to this mission, the Church has historically existed to do three things:

1. Introduce Jesus to those who do not know him;
2. Deepen the faith and commitment of those who already know him; and
3. Demonstrate Christ’s way of love in service to the world.¹⁸

¹⁷ Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (USA: Fortress Press, 1985), xvi.

¹⁸ Ingram, *The S.A.T. Manual on African Methodism*, 52.

Richard Allen and others started the AME Church because they did not feel the love of God being carried out in the Methodist Church. George A. Singleton called Allen an Apostle, and believed through the AME Church people of color could realize God's intentions for humanity, social justice and religious freedom.¹⁹ The thinking of the AME Church during the 1700s and 1800s was not much different from Martin Luther King, Jr., as he believed in the beloved community where all people, blacks and whites, should be together hand in hand. In contrast, Allen and his followers did not believe this to be possible during the time in which they lived.

Given the recent police shootings of unarmed black males, it appears that racism is alive and well. The members of this historic institution remember the injustices of the past that separated its members from the rest of society. I believe in the importance of history, for it has been said, those who do not learn from history is doomed to repeat it. Remembering and learning from our past is one thing, holding on to the past is another. The God of our salvation expects us to join in the community with faith, hope, and love for all humankind.

The way we read and interpret the Bible according to McLaren allows Christians to legitimize and defend the injustices of slavery, chauvinism, prejudice against gay people and other social injustices.²⁰ He goes on to say people were harmed and God dishonored in the process. The way to honor God is to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we prepare sermons, gather for Bible study, answer questions, and discover the truth

¹⁹ Singleton, xvii-xx.

²⁰ Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 76.

together. Christianity should never become a dogmatic “constitution”²¹, by any particular denomination, including the AME Church, but the inspired-revealed word of God characterizing Jesus as the peacemaker, reconciler, liberator and one who forms Christian thoughts, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians who are interested in knowing the character of God will look through the Bible, look at Jesus, and see God’s character of grace and mercy, compassion and love. They will interpret passages that reinforce the real Jesus as the reconciler rather than subversive, Jesus who is peaceful and believes in the power of love.²² In our community, as I am sure other communities have done the same, we have framed walls around God, and we find ourselves only willing to work within the confines of those walls—literally and figuratively. Thus, the need for Christian education to be the priority for all members.

Opportunity for Christian Education of Laity

There is tremendous opportunity in the community of Plainfield for preaching and teaching to the poor, healing broken hearts, helping the oppressed, setting captives free, and giving sight to the blind. The Bible is full of “grace and truth” and is sufficient for helping people remain healthy and whole. The old Chinese proverb that says, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime,” carries for me the same thought about teaching God’s word; helping others uncover biblical truths and showing them how to apply these truths in their lives. The questions are: How do we spread the good news to the broader community? How do we engage the community?

²¹ McLaren, 78-79

²² Ibid., 126.

This project exposes the need to include an intentional component to the Christian education of church leaders, one designed to promote individual responsibility and accountability for spiritual formation. It helps when the individual understands the need for obedience to the command of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19 “go and make disciples.” Further, it helps when the person has a simple step-by-step process starting with routine Bible study and reflection, prayer, and meditation. No one can escape the need to take responsibility for their spiritual development. Regardless, which generation we are a part of; Baby Boomers, Generation X, or Millennials, spiritual formation requires a personal commitment and the willingness to go through a process of transformation. People become Christians as a result of a change of heart. In the course of their spiritual journey, they will become disciples of Jesus Christ prepared to evangelize the world. The problem is too many are not willing to submit to the teaching and instructions of the church.

The Department of Christian Education of the AME Church was created to develop and produce resource material for the benefit of its members. The material is designed to set standards and provide assistance to the local church in the teaching of Christian values, knowledge of Christianity, the church, and Jesus Christ. The primary thrust of the Christian Education effort is toward the involvement of all people in the development of other people as all strive to understand and appreciate the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as a guide to life.²³ It should lead others to become more like Christ. According to the Book of Discipline of the AME Church, new members may be assigned a class leader and receive training for 90 days. In addition to this initial 90 day

²³ Earl R. Jefferson, *Another Look at Christian Education: Preparation for the Task*, (Chester: Genesis I Printing Service, Inc., 2003), 11.

period, the member may also receive advanced training as established by the local church.²⁴ Even though the Book of Discipline explicitly states the training requirements, most members never receive training. In my view, there are primarily two reasons members never receive formal training. First, training is not compulsory or prescribed by the local church. Second, training is available, but the new member never attends the training.

Mount Zion is a traditional AME Church, and as such its structure includes the class leader system. The AME Church since its formulation as a religious institution employs the class leader system as a way of organizing into small groups. Similar to the facilitator of a small group, the class leader is responsible for discerning whether new members are growing spiritually. After the initial discipleship training, the class leader has the responsibility for supporting and guiding those joining the church. However, the class leader is often missing the skills and spiritual development for keeping new members connected.

Ministry is a shared responsibility, and those involved in ministry need training in the principles of Christian education.²⁵ The responsibility for keeping members involved is not just the problem of the laity. Pastors and clergy alike are equally responsible for ensuring that leaders in the congregation, receive the education and training to support them in their roles. Clergy, like the first Apostles is responsible for teaching and training his/her members how to become effective witnesses. They need an understanding of his/her mission to bring good news to the poor. They need the opportunity to become a

²⁴ *Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 62.

²⁵ Gregory G. M. Ingram, *Equipping the Saints for Service: A Training Manual for Effective Servant Leadership*. (USA: Gregory G. M. Ingram, 2006), 107.

disciple of Christ rather than merely followers of Christ. Every member needs to become like Christ's first disciples and spread the liberating gospel into their community. The gospel or good news is the truth of Jesus Christ and is a testament to what he has done in the world for humanity. Ongoing study and preparation in God's Word is a mark of a true disciple, and its "truth will make you free" (Jn 8:31; Gal. 5:1). Freedom will manifest itself in distinctive ways and create space in the heart for evangelism.

Finally, the Christian education of church leaders ought to include an intentional component designed to promote individual responsibility and accountability for spiritual formation. Having a step-by-step process starting with routine bible study and reflection, prayer, and meditation will benefit the individual and the church. These voluntary practices require a personal commitment and the willingness to go through a process of transformation. The challenge that remains is motivating unwilling participants to submit to the teaching and instructions of the church.

CHAPTER THREE

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MINISTRY

Biblical Framework

The biblical framework for initiating this professional project is in Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” This statement reveals the mission of the church that Jesus established. However, the church has not done a good job at making disciples. There are many Christians doing church, but only a few seem to have an understanding that the church’s responsibility is leaving the boundaries of the walls of the church and reach into the community. It is essential that workers in the church are diligent in their study to experience transformation which is pleasing to God (Rom. 12:2; 2 Tim. 2:15). An intentional spiritual formation process should guide us toward spending time studying the Bible and understanding its precepts. The word of God will nurture our spirits until we are ready and willing to nurture others through the process.

This area of research raised many questions beyond its original scope. At the top of the list is clergy whose skills are not extensive enough to cultivate an entire congregation. The clergy in my denomination is required first and foremost to have a bachelor’s degree. Second, the clergy is required to obtain a Master’s of Divinity degree before ordination and before receiving a pastoral appointment. The belief that only those who are seminary trained and ordained are ministers, Christensen’s offers as a “false

theory.”¹ In contrast, laity imagines that membership and Sunday school training is sufficient to support the work of ministry. Next on the list is the lack of qualified and willing participants to assist in the work. We have clergy and laity whose actions suggest they have all the answers, each believing they are qualified to handle the challenges in the church and those in the community. The past model for ministry worked well for yesterday’s church. Today’s model for ministry must engage all members and equip them for the work of ministry alongside ordained clergy.

Biblical Foundation

This area of research provides the biblical foundation for understanding the need for lay leaders to be equipped to do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). It also led to practical solutions for transformation identified in Romans 12:1-2 and for unity in the body of Christ. The church Jesus created and his disciples promoted, necessitates a personal commitment to gain an understanding of his/her role as followers of Christ. The salvific process is dynamic and should represent a constant change in our lives. We must engage in the salvific process of learning what it means to be a Christian. Christians become disciples with discipline and training following biblical precepts as the source to substantiate transformation. The primary focus of this professional project is to prepare individuals for the work of ministry, which I believe is a missing element in the spiritual growth and maturity of many congregations. A careful reading of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians reveals the need for pastors and teachers to train members for the work of ministry.

¹ Michael J. Christensen and Carl Savage. *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). 21.

The Work of the Ministry

An understanding of the work of ministry is in the Book of Ephesians with particular attention to the following verses 4:11-14:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

It reveals the overall purpose of the letter of Ephesians, which is to unify the Church of Jesus Christ. Unity in the church connects all the people of the world by one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father (Eph. 4:4-6). God's original congregation called Israel, currently known as Jewish people are unified in a single church with Gentiles (Anyone who is not Jewish.).² Also, the writer of Ephesians casts himself and all other believers in Jesus Christ in God's history of salvation (1:3-14). As we embrace the author's teachings in this fourth chapter, we notice the writer appears to establish a connection between doctrines of the church in the preceding three chapters, to practical application for the church in the remaining three chapters.

The selected text unveils the gifts in the church for God's missional work in the world. It conveys the purpose of these gifts: to prepare believers for God's missional work inside and beyond the walls of the church. An explanation of the word "gifts" may illuminate our understanding of its use in this context. First, we acknowledge that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas 1:17). There are a variety of spiritual gifts given by God to the body of Christ. Many of them are expressed further by Paul in his

² Ralph P. Martin, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 46.

letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4-10). However, the spiritual gifts acknowledged in our text are specific to their use in the body of Christ for equipping the saints in the church.

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost pronounced the return of Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit, and according to Ralph P. Martin "...is the one who gave both his Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit to furnish the church with all needful ministries."³

Lloyd-Jones' understanding of the apostles and prophets as those chosen to lay the foundation were witnesses and according to Martin, to the resurrection of Jesus and they could adequately express the mind of Christ (Eph. 2:20).⁴ Both Lloyd-Jones and Martin believed that evangelists were responsible for spreading the good news, including building upon the foundation laid by apostles and prophets (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5).

Pastors and teachers were pastoral leaders, responsible for building up the body of Christ through their preaching and teaching (Acts 20:17; I Tim. 4:14, 5:17).⁵

The only importance we can glean from this naming is the church chose them and Jesus gave each unique gifts, for the purpose of training every member for the work of ministry. Three reasons in our text describe their responsibilities; 1) for equipping the saints, 2) for the work of the ministry, 3) and for building up the body of Christ. The word "saints" is an inclusive language for both ordained and laity and each must be equipped to do the work of ministry. The purpose of this shared ministry of laity and clergy according to Lloyd-Jones, is "to make the church entire and complete in every

³ Martin, 50.

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 193-194.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

respect.”⁶ The ministry of every member is to serve the Lord in the church, by evangelizing the world through a shared ministry approach.

This shared ministry plan comes into sight when all the “saints” are equipped to do the work of ministry. The writer has an objective when he discusses why Jesus established these roles. The purpose is the preparation of the saints in the church says Jones, “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (v. 13).” So what is the implication for the church? It implies that new believers are immature in the faith as we are a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:16-17). Jesus described the new creation in his conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus said, “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit,” which establishes the essence of a new birth (Jn 3:6).

A new creation in Christ Jesus is a sign that we are no longer creatures of the world in the strictest sense of our physical bodies, but we are newly created spiritual beings. We are not among those who exist in a fallen state. God has separated us and has called us a chosen generation and a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). We uphold this new identity as we grow in the knowledge of God through salvation and God’s purpose in the world. In other words, full maturity does not come until we put on the whole armor of God, which includes the word of God (Eph. 6:10-18), and reflect the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 1:10, 2:16; Phil. 1:27). The work of the ministry require mature Christians who are thoroughly equipped to evangelize.

⁶ Lloyd-Jones, 196.

Building Up the Body of Christ

The work of the ministry is to build up the body of Christ. Effectively, it is to promote spiritual growth and development. The intention is that pastors and teachers are responsible for spiritual growth and development of every member. Most of us understand the meaning of growth and its importance to physical development. The life cycle of human development begins at conception, followed by the birth of a baby. We expect that physical development and growth will continue to full adulthood. We expect they will grow physically and mentally, if not we perceive there is a problem. Spiritual growth is similar and is as important. Growth is a process through different stages of human development from conception to adulthood. Biblically speaking one might say growth is the process through various stages of spiritual development until one reaches spiritual maturity or "perfection." When we are "born again" as a child of God, we are spiritually immature. As time passes, the young Christian should develop the qualities or abilities which the Bible describe as mature (4:17-32).

Spiritual development is the work of pastors and teachers who are the gifts to the body of Christ for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. Spiritual maturity comes from being properly trained and equipped for service in the church. First, we mature when there is a willingness to be taught the Word of God. Second, we mature through close fellowship with other Christians. Third, we mature when we use our God-given gifts and talents. Our growth is evidenced by our willingness to grow with regular attendance at worship, regular study of God's Word, having a meaningful prayer life, and ultimately becoming an effective Christian witness of the Christian faith. It is through the gifts of the assigned roles that the discernment is given to determine when and what

training is suitable for each member of the body of Christ and their readiness to carry out the duties of an evangelist.

In several of Paul's writings, he admonishes those in the church who are not mature enough to receive meat and whose conduct suggest they are still infants who need to be fed milk rather than solid food (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-3). The spiritual condition of Paul's hearers is the lack of maturity in the faith. They know Christ but have not grown to the level of maturity in their ability to teach others. An adequate expression for communicating the growth for spiritual maturity, are these words: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation (1 Pet. 2-2)." Spiritual milk is the metaphor for the pure word of God. It expresses the need to nourish the spirit with God's word as a newborn baby needs milk to nourish their growing body.

Like an infant who grows physically and mature mentally and socially into productive adults through proper nourishment and secular training, the new and immature Christian must do likewise. Christians are required to nourish their faith to experience spiritual growth through the study of God's word, communicating with God through prayer, and the willingness to evangelize. We transform our minds as we receive the nourishment of God's word, for the word of God is active and alive (Heb. 4:12)

Transforming the Mind

Robert Mulholland says, "The first work of transformation is the reversal of those deeply ingrained and powerfully controlling dynamics of our cultural shaping."⁷ The goal of transformation is for us to become like Christ. We are to be transformed into the same image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). Therefore, the transformation we seek

⁷ Mulholland, 32.

is one that is a journey of learning to surrender our will to the will of God. The definition of transform is, “To change in composition or structure, or change the outward form or appearance of or change in character or condition.”⁸ The latter part of the definition is appropriate for this discussion, “to change in character or condition,” which essentially articulates the meaning of the word conversion. According to Grenz,

Conversion is the event that marks the entry point into the ongoing activity of God in the community. It is a lifelong process called sanctification. Sanctification is the ongoing process of transformation into Christlikeness. Sanctification and conversion are the process by which the mind is renewed.⁹

More aptly stated it is the renewing of the soul. Conversion is an event that occurs in the life of a believer and unbeliever and should result in a life transformed to the will of God. In other words, it should translate into a step toward spiritual maturity. Without conversion, it seems that a person will conform to the standards of the world.

Paul has some practical solutions for followers of Christ concerning the human dilemma and God’s solution. He lays out a practical and systematic plan for Christians to follow. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul writes these words:

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul introduces his appeal with these words “by the mercies of God.” He is responding to the disunity that has occurred in the body of Christ. Consequently, unity becomes the central focus of the text. What has caused this disunity in the body of Christ? The fallen

⁸ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary copyright © 2015 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transform>, Accessed 10-4-16.

⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, (USA: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 564-566.

condition of humanity created disunity and opened the door for sin to enter into the world. Every created being since the disobedience of Adam and Eve is born into a life of sin. God sends his Son into the world to save the world (Jn 3:16). Salvation is God's response to humanity's sin problem. Lloyd-Jones believes that "the central object of salvation, in a sense, is to reunite, to bring together again, and restore the unity."¹⁰

Hence, the solution is the practical teachings that follows. Paul's intention is, to not only inform the church but to transform the church. He is convinced that real change happens from the inside out. He argues that if we want to think like God, we must renew our minds and present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. In what way is the mind transformed? It begins with yielding our bodies to God, by placing ourselves at God's disposal and dedicating our lives in devotion to the work of the ministry. According to Paul Achtemeier, Paul's appeal is for holy living through sacrifice for this is our proper response to God. Allowing God to use us in the mission of the church is a sacred act, and is the proper response to God's love toward us and our love towards God (John 14:15, 21).

Paul J. Achtemeier expresses the first step to a transformed mind. He rewrites verse two: "Do not let yourselves be shaped by what everyone else does, but rather let yourselves be transformed by a whole new way of thinking, so you can discern what conforms to God's will, namely what is good, and pleasing, and perfect."¹¹ We are to avoid letting the world influence and shape our lives. The second step is to renew our minds. Paul suggests that we are to allow ourselves to be under the complete authority

¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, 34.

¹¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: John Knox Press), 196.

and power of God. It means surrendering our will to the will of God, willingly allowing God to transform our minds. God will shape our lives by his gracious will. Evidence of God's grace and power is extended to Peter and John as they stood before the Sanhedrin giving testimony to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4:33). Also, God's grace and power were on Stephen as he served the Lord (Acts 6:8). God's grace and power are also upon us as we serve God and give testimony to others as we do the work of ministry.

God's grace and mercy, God's love, and compassion, are confirmed in the greatest gift that anyone can receive, the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. God's grace appears as the Word became flesh and abides with us (Jn 1:14). God's grace and power is on all who serve the Lord and will affect all aspects of the Christian's life. Achtemeier says, "The power of God's grace works through the Holy Spirit on behalf of Christians to transform their minds. Achtemeier goes on to say, "...the Christian world has been made new; and the task is now to let the structuring power of grace transform the world into the shape of grace."¹² Spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us for the glory of God, through which we are changed for the abundance of our lives, and for the sake of others (Gal. 4:19; Rom. 8:29, 12:1, 2). It is God and the grace of God through the power, presence, and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit that will transform us to the will of God. The challenge is to surrender our will to the will of God.

Finally, this professional project in response to this problem, is to improve who we are and whose we are through training and preparation in the things of God, so that instead of the world influencing the church, the church like an infection will transmit the

¹² Achtemeier, *Interpretations*, 195.

gospel of Jesus and change the world. Whether we believe that the Bible is trustworthy, errant, or fallible, it has everything we need to nourish our faith. It encompasses what we need to live the abundant life Jesus promised. The writer of 2 Timothy declares, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (3:16-17).” The Bible is the place to start if we are to understand who we are as Christians. It is the place to go for understanding our identity as God’s people. The scriptures answers the identity questions of who, what, and why we are.

Since God is the Bible’s main character, God’s story is told throughout scripture, from creating the universe and humankind, to interacting with an extended established family; Abraham and Sarah, to face-to-face connection with the call of the first disciples. If we are to understand our purpose for existing, the place to search is revealed from Genesis to Revelation. Also, it answers the questions of who is God, who is Jesus, what is the Holy Spirit, and who are we. Beth Tanner says, “We cannot speak of being created in God’s image without learning about the one in whose image we are created.”¹³ Thus, spiritual formation begins with God’s interaction with people, rather directly or indirectly.

The Bible teaches us that God is a spirit (Jn 4:24). Therefore, when God created humankind in God’s image, then what God created is a spiritual being. The problem we encounter is the focus on one aspect of God’s creation of man from the dust of the

¹³ Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Psalms for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 13.

ground, giving shape to our physical presence in the world. This reading alone gets in the way of our understanding of who and what we are. The entire Genesis 2:7 text reads, “Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” The second part of the text says that the Lord breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of the man. Hence the spiritual aspect of the body became a part of the physical. It is imperative that our dual nature, spiritual and physical beings are communicated effectively to the church.

The spiritual body, like the physical body, needs sustenance. The spiritual body, if not nourished properly, like our physical body, will encounter trouble along the way. The Bible is the source to fulfill our needs, as Grenz so aptly calls it the “spiritual sustenance” to “nourish our faith.”¹⁴ One might liken the Bible to a pantry or refrigerator where we store food. Better yet, it may be more like a garden or orchard where we grow fresh food, and where we can procure the best nutrients for the physical body. The spirit receives the best nutrients when we grapple with the word of God in our personal time and come into the church for nurturing. We receive the best nutrients in multiple ways; Sunday sermon, Church school, bible study, small group gatherings. These venues help us to accurately understand and apply what we read and learn.

The question for consideration is not what God can do for me, but what can I do for God. Our churches have produced a litany of scriptures that speak about what God is doing for us. God is saving, rescuing, healing, delivering, counseling, etc. You name it we have the scriptures to support what God is doing for us. Alternatively, new scriptures are necessary to help us identify personal responsibilities; scriptures that reflect the

¹⁴ Grenz, 507.

relationship model to understanding personal responsibilities, and lead us away from an old paradigm that supports a one-sided relationship. The biblical mandate to “go” and “make disciples” comes with the assurance that God is present with us as we go.

CHAPTER FOUR
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION AND DISCOVERY

Theology of Spiritual Formation

Since this project is about equipping the saints for the work of ministry and following a spiritual formation process, the research led me to notice the parallel relationship between spiritual formation and salvation. The difference noted between the two is the “intentional” nature of becoming Christ like in behavior. The word “intentional” means to do something deliberately or on purpose. A possible explanation and conclusion are, that like everything else God does, God on purpose and intentionally initiated the process of spiritual formation of the human spirit. Genesis is and has always been my point of reference for seeing and understanding the Trinitarian nature of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the history of salvation.

According to John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” which establishes Jesus’ presence at the beginning of creation with God. For eight years I led a group of 25-30 bible study students through the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). It took this amount of time, because we explored scripture verse by verse, asked questions of the text, and connected the New Testament scriptures to the Old Testament scriptures. This approach to Bible study facilitation brought new meaning and understanding that challenged previous stories and created new narratives. We are to be led by the Holy

Spirit, also present at creation, to interpret scripture through Jesus of the Bible. Doing so means that we must start with the entire narrative of Jesus.

In my view, to become Christ-like, spiritual formation must have a context broader than the New Testament view. According to McLaren, “We should try reading the Bible frontward for a while, to let it be a Jewish story that, through the eyes of Jesus, the Bible is open including all humanity.”¹ By reading frontward rather than backward presents a new and more palatable narrative of God’s story. By approaching Bible study to discover what God wants us to know through reflection, and to search for answers amid the established norm of interpretation, the Bible becomes the authority by which everything else happens. The church is responsible for introducing people to God through Jesus Christ, starting with the Old Testament. Otherwise, the church will continue to promote an estranged relationship that seems to be prevalent in the church. The human tendency toward the unfamiliar, is indifference. Many churchgoers are indifferent in their dealings with God until something bad happens.

The God, who is the creator of all things and all people desires to have a close relationship with us. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines relationships as “the way in which two or more people, groups, countries, etc., talk to, behave toward, and deal with each other.”² Thus, the actions of one individual affect the whole. Relationships are “interdependent with one another,” says Edward Friedman. He takes the “systems thinking” approach to support his reasoning. Here is the way he explains system thinking:

¹ McLaren, 45.

² Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary copyright © 2015 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relationship>, Accessed 9-24-16.

Each part of the systems (including the effect itself) is connected to, or can have its own effect upon, every other part. Each component, therefore, rather than having its own discrete identity or input, operates as part of a larger whole. The components do not function according to their “nature” but according to their position in the network.”³

Relationships connect us to a larger network impacting from the smallest of relationships of two people to families, communities, states, nations, to global. Relationships are complicated. However, we find meaning in our lives as we begin our relationship with God through salvation.⁴ In Acts 17:22-28 we find these words that express our need for God:

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’

This text implies that the birthplace of all relationships is God who initiates interactions with us. Relationships begin at a place in time marked by God’s creation of humanity as described in the Book of Genesis 1:26-27. God created the world so that we could share in the relationship the Son enjoys with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Humanity joined in an already established relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit. The problems in our communities and broader hinges on a single disobedient act.

The Bible as the authority, reveals God’s response to Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. God’s compassion is consistent as the protagonist of Genesis who patiently bears with a rebellious and foolish humanity again and again.⁵ In

³ Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: Guildford Press, 1985), 15.

⁴ Grenz, 173-181.

⁵ McLaren, 49.

other words, the stories of the Bible belong to God. A mercifully, compassionate God does not condemn the world forever, as this is confirmed in John 3:17. As Jesus explains the spiritual rebirth of Christians, he says, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” We have not prepared ourselves. We have been traveling in the wilderness, exercising very little faith in God who has promised never to leave or forsake us; God who has sustained us year after year as He did the children of Israel as they journeyed for 40 years in the wilderness. We have not allowed ourselves to engage in the sanctification process to become Christ like to be of service to God.

God’s Relationship with Humanity

There is no escaping the truth that occurs in most churches. Responsibility for passing on biblical knowledge lays squarely in the hands of pastors and ministers. However, those who join churches are equally responsible for placing themselves in the position to acquire biblical knowledge. Building a relationship with God demands that the Church directs its attention to teaching about our covenant relationship with God. Before we can engage in the process of spiritual renewal, we need to know something about the One who we believe can make a difference. Our covenant relationship with God establishes the premise that God desires to have a relationship with humanity and the community of faith. Although it is an important factor to understanding our relationship with God, most often there is insufficient teaching on the subject. The significance is that it can promote the spiritual growth of all believers. Establishing a relationship with God places the focus where it should reside – on God. It provides a proper foundation for clergy and members not to get stuck on themselves or others, but on God. Often people in

the church and society at large look to the church and the members to be examples of Christ. When we exhibit actions and behaviors not compatible with Christ, we construct narratives that lead people away from the church rather than to the church. Though we are not perfect, a deep abiding relationship with God will go a long way in making a difference in the way others see the church.

Stanley Grenz says the church, "... is chiefly manifested in a visible, local group of believers who covenant to be the local expression of the church."⁶ Thus, the church is the place where we meet God relationally as we enjoy fellowship with God and join in the community of God with people of faith. Grenz defines covenant as a "Formal agreement or treaty between two parties with each assuming some obligation."⁷ "It is a statement of profound unity and irrevocable belonging. It starts with the initiative of God, but evokes a full response," according to Collins and Stephens.⁸ The only requirement on the part of the believer is that he or she is to live his/her life in obedience to the agreement between the believer and God. Romans 1:5 tells us that through Jesus, "... we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name." For the sake of his name, we must follow Jesus' commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34-35). An understanding of a covenant relationship with God extends itself in the form of love towards God, self, and others.

The Bible in its many forms, interpretations, and translations upholds the existence of two covenants in the canonical books. The first covenant revealed at Mount

⁶ Grenz, 625.

⁷ Achtemeir, *Interpretation*, 190.

⁸ Phil Collins and Paul R. Stevens, *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), p. 93.

Sinai in Exodus 20:1-17 from the mouth of God, yet publicized by Moses to the children of Israel. These series of commands or “Ten Commandments” or “Decalogue” presents the foundation of a covenant relationship with God. Again in Deuteronomy 5:6-21, as part of his farewell message, Moses repeats these commandments to a new generation ready to enter the Promised Land. He reminds them of God’s saving grace and the need to obey these commandments and pass them on to their children (Deut. 32:45). The New Testament church is bound together by the second covenant, articulated by Jesus Christ (Mt 22:35-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28), and summarized in two commandments as the love of God, love of neighbor and self. He also gave us the “greatest commandment” as recorded in Matthew 22:37-40:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Notice the centrality of the new commandment is “love,” an indication of its importance in this new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Love according to Grenz is created in us by the Holy Spirit, which is an extension of God’s nature that allows us to do the work of ministry.⁹ God extended the New Covenant by God’s grace upheld by the death of Jesus at Calvary, his resurrection on Easter, and culminating on the Day of Pentecost. The furtherance of this greatest act of love is taking on the responsibility of the people who chooses to be faithful in their commitment to the relationship.¹⁰ A lasting and fruitful relationship is required for two parties to be completely engaged with the other.

⁹ Grenz, 127.

¹⁰ Achtemeier, *Interpretation*, 701.

Spiritual formation can help fulfill this commitment and guide the relationship God desires to have with us.

The Apostle's Creed espoused by the church and the confession of faith as prescribed in Romans 10: 9-10 is the "entry point" of the Christian's commitment to abide by the rules of the contract. The entry point is believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives, and with this confession of faith, we receive the benefits of living in obedience of love for God, self, and neighbors. It is a time where we surrender our will to the will of God. It is a space in time where a believer transfers his or her allegiance from the world into the kingdom of God, both now and later. It is a place where we can experience the fullness of the power of God. Our daily lives supported by our personal commitment and cooperation with the Holy Spirit will transform our old behaviors into Christ-likeness.

Salvation: The Way of Spiritual Formation

Salvation is a woefully misunderstood theology of the Church. It is not a one-time event where an individual acknowledges Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is a process through which lives change over time. It seems unnecessary to have a spiritual formation process when salvation is already a process through which lives evolve over time. "Salvation is a divine act, whereby the Spirit bring us into full conformity with the likeness of Christ."¹¹ Is there more we need to do, if God through the Spirit brings us into the likeness of Christ? Grenz gives us insight into salvation from two perspectives – God and humanity. God's divine plan of salvation for us is the work of the Spirit to conform us to the likeness of Christ. Perhaps we find ourselves in the church, rebellious, not

¹¹ Grenz, 564.

yielding to the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Paul warned against this type of response in I Thessalonians 5:19, he says, “Do not quench the Spirit.” This is the will of God through Jesus as he promised to send the Advocate, he said, in John 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

According to Grenz, “Humanity’s response is the experience of salvation through three stages: Conversion is the initial response; sanctification is an ongoing process of transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit, and glorification is the final work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit.”¹² This process begins with our confession of faith in Jesus Christ and our relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit acting in concert to advance the relationship. It denotes the beginning of God’s activity in the world to save humanity from its fallen state. Through Jesus Christ, God extends God’s amazing grace, God’s unshakeable love for humankind. Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection are God’s assurance that salvation is available to fallen humanity as recorded in John 3:16-18:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

This text presents salvation as the only way to escape the fallen state of humanity. It condemns those who do not accept God’s offer. Romans 2:12-16 stipulate Paul’s understanding of the standards for Jews and Gentiles. Jews may be exempt from the New Testament’s plan of salvation, on the other hand, they received judgment based on the

¹² Grenz, 564-565.

Old Testament law, whereas Gentile's condemnation concerns their personal moral conscience.¹³ Further references to the standards of condemnation for Jews will be against those who reject his word (John 12:48) and for Gentiles who reject Christ (Heb. 10:28-29). This text further presents the opportunity that "the word of God" is the Holy Spirit announcing the good news about Jesus. The word is spoken in the Spirit's power and by the Spirit's authority."¹⁴

Paul J. Achtemeir explains the events of the New Testament recording several examples of Jesus' actions, whereby people are rescued from demons, experienced physical healing "to a condition of restored wholeness and soundness."¹⁵ The freedom a Christian finds in Christ is spiritual liberation that can manifest itself physically, emotionally, and politically. We are set free from a life of sin through repentance and released from pain and guilt through forgiveness and pardon. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus proclaims of his ministry that he came to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free (Lk 4:18). In other words, salvation assures a believer's redeemed life is made whole again through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit at work inside of us.

According to Allister McGrath, salvation is shaped by Jesus Christ in two distinct manners. First, "The Christian life takes the form of the believer's sustained attempt to imitate Christ." Second, "The Christian life is a process of "being conformed to Christ."¹⁶

¹³ Grenz, 820.

¹⁴ Ibid., 514.

¹⁵ Paul J. Achtemeir, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985), 401.

¹⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 389.

Thus, it is the believer's responsibility to establish a relationship with God and follow Christ's example. Moreover, the action of the believer will manifest itself in a changed life over time shaped by the Holy Spirit. McGrath's ideas point to Paul's letter to the Romans. Christians should not allow the world to shape our lives, but "be transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2). Here we have practical advice on how to live our lives as Christians. It implies that Christians who are willing to be trained by the word of God will "be transformed." Also, it provides insights into holy living which will lead to living our lives well spiritually, physically, and emotionally. This practical advice, if taken, can lead the ordinary Christian into a process of spiritual formation and a transformed life.

Finally, examples of salvation is in the person and work of Jesus Christ and in the ongoing life of the church. How can there be salvation without church and sacrament? The sacraments are acts that involve an outward showing of remembering and affirming our identity with Christ as in the Lord's Supper and baptism. It is also a cleansing, signifying an outward confession of our faith through baptism. The church is there to facilitate the salvific process, developing the members and giving hope of eternal life that will climax in the eschaton. Grenz's view borrows from Paul, acknowledging that salvation is past, present, and future.

The Holy Spirit: The Instrument of Spiritual Formation

This area of research reveals the work and role of the Holy Spirit, which is essential for the spiritual formation and transformation of the Christian. Who and what is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit (*ruach*), Hebrew word meaning "spirit") is present and working in the creation of the world. The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Trinity and

was present with God when God created the world (Gen. 1:2). According to Grenz, “Theologically, the Holy Spirit is the facilitator of the covenant that forms the foundation of Christ’s community.”¹⁷ He further states that the Holy Spirit is “co-equal with the Father and Son in the divine work in history and the life of the believing community.”¹⁸ First, let us acknowledge what the Bible tells us, that God, is Spirit (Jn 4:24). As the “wind” of God it refreshed the spiritual needs of humans. Achtemeier explains the “breath” of God it gave life to the first humans, thus it creates (Gen. 2:7). As the “charism” of God it filled individuals and gave them the ability to perform tasks, which would otherwise be impossible.¹⁹ Achtemeier defines Holy Spirit in this way:

It is the mysterious power or presence of God in nature or with individuals and communities, inspiring or empowering them with qualities they would not otherwise possess. The term “spirit” translates Hebrew (*ruach*) and Greek (*pneuma*) words denoting “wind,” “breath,” and by extension, a life-giving element.²⁰

The work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for revelation of Scripture. The Spirit speaks to us as we read the Bible, through an act known as illumination. Grenz says, “Illumination, belongs to the mission of the Spirit. He makes the Bible “come alive,” as he causes the people of God to understand the significance of the biblical texts for life in the present.”²¹

The Father is one with Christ, according to their Trinitarian nature. Jesus, talking to his disciples said that whoever sees him sees the Father (Jn 12:45).

¹⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 626.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 469.

¹⁹ McGrath, 280-281.

²⁰ Achtemeier, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 401.

²¹ Grenz, 500.

I agree with Grenz's understanding that God saves us through the work of the Holy Spirit as Jesus is known as the bearer of the Holy Spirit which establishes a relationship between Christ and the believer.²² The Bible records that Jesus' conception was the action of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35). It descended on Jesus at his baptism (Jn 1:29-34) and bestowed on him without measure (Jn 3:34). Jesus experienced the power of the Spirit throughout his ministry. It gave him the power and authority to cast out demons (Mt 12:28) and led him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Mt 4:1). In another discussion with his disciples, Jesus wanted to know who the people and who his disciples said he was. Peter responded that he was the Christ, the Son of God (Mt 16:14-16). Jesus' response in Matthew 16:17, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." Thus, the possibility of the Holy Spirit, acting in concert with the Father and Son, revealing God in Christ.

The role of the Holy Spirit is vital to the Christian life. Jesus promised his disciples he would send the Holy Spirit to guide them to know the truth, referred to as the "Advocate" or "Comforter" (Jn 14:26; Acts 1:4-5). The Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples as they waited in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). The Book of Acts is known as the Acts of the Apostles and again identified as the acts of the Holy Spirit. The primary theme appears to be the focus of the Holy Spirit that empowered, guided, encouraged, and protected the first disciples as they evangelized throughout the Roman provinces. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to perform many signs and wonders (Acts 5:12). It continues to empower the church today acting as advocate, comforter, guide, and protector. The Holy Spirit is active in the life of

²² McGrath, 287.

Christians and the church, and by the ministry of the Spirit, God forms Christ's character in believers.

The Church: The Place for Transformation

The church or "ekklesia" is the place where Christians gather to do the work of ministry. The use of the Greek word "ekklesia" establishes the church as people who gather in covenant, in direct relationship with Jesus Christ. Grenz says, "The New Testament church is neither a building, nor is it an organization, but a group of people connected to each other through Jesus Christ, "people standing in covenant with God."²³ The church in covenant with God through Jesus Christ means that the church's mission shares in the mission of Jesus Christ. In carrying out the work he was sent to perform, Jesus operated in three offices as prophet, priest, and king, which are in the context of the church. As a prophet, Jesus is the messenger heralding the good news and the reign of God. As a priest, Jesus is the Savior, giving of himself to death on the cross that we might have an abundant life. In his kingly office, Jesus reigns forever and has lordship over the entire kingdom of God. The church's responsibility in its ongoing work is to expand the kingdom of God for the complete rule of God. The "Great Commission," is about advancing the kingdom of God made plain when Jesus tells the disciples to go into the entire world, to teach and baptize (Mt 28:19-20).

The church is the place to receive instructions on how to demonstrate Christ-like characteristics and continue the work of Christ. Henry McNeal Turner, a former bishop of the AME Church, defines the church in this way: "Primarily, it means 'the Lord's house' (*Kupiaxov*), but ordinarily implies an organized body of Christian believers,

²³ Grenz, 606.

observing the same rites and acknowledging the same ecclesiastical authority."²⁴ He also believed that it is the visible means by which the work of Christ is carried out through preaching and administering the sacraments. The church, however, extends beyond a building or denomination; it encompasses the entire kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is "the sovereignty, reign, or rule of God, according to Grenz."²⁵ The Bible informs us that God created the world and everything in the world. God's kingdom includes that area outside the walls of the physical space called the church. Jesus' ministry extended beyond the walls of Jerusalem. On several occasions, he spoke on the mountainside (Mt 5:1-2), and from the sea (Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11).

The purpose and mission of the church are to carry on the work of Christ in the community. The church is only a part of the over-all purpose of creation; however, it fits into the wider scheme of God's plan for creation. Grenz says, "Christ instituted the church in accordance with his mission to glorify God in the world."²⁶ To glorify God means to give importance to, from the Hebrew word *kabod*. Jesus' life was about drawing attention to God, giving importance to God and not himself (Jn 17:1-4). As the example, his followers too must glorify God, showing significance in the life of the church. God will receive the glory when the church carry the love of God to all people, as demonstrated on the cross.

Finally, the church is responsible for calling all people to God. God is love. Thus the church is an extension of that love, not just for those in the Christian community or

²⁴ Henry McNeal Turner, *The Genius and Theory of Methodist Polity* (USA: A. Lee Henderson Publisher, 1986), 1.

²⁵ Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 526.

²⁶ Grenz, 634.

household of faith, but for all of humanity, Christians and non-Christians alike.

Therefore, the actions and activities of the church should include an element of kingdom building and not church building. Kingdom building is more extensive and far-reaching than the typical role of the church. Kingdom building includes all people, taking the gospel of the good news to everyone. Jesus came to fulfill the hope that God through him would save the world. Before he could save the world, he had a mission to accomplish and announced his mission at the beginning of his ministry (Lk 4:18). He engaged in several acts of service; healing the sick, casting out demons, dealing with the sinful, and liberating the oppressed.

Mount Zion's mission field regardless of the challenges requires that we extend the love of God to the community to heal the broken hearted and to set the captives free of drugs, alcohol, and rid the city of its oppression of crime and violence.

In conclusion, the discipline and practices of spiritual formation adds value to the salvific process. To deepen our relationship with God requires understanding God. The way to know God or at least began to understand the mind of God requires knowing the Word of God. It reveals God's character, what God requires of us, and communicates God's love for us. Significant in any relationship is knowledge of the person you love. A daily dose of the Word of God, and regular fellowship with others of like mind are ways of staying connected to God, and the work of the Holy Spirit will guide and lead us to the truth of God. Along with reading and meditating on the Word of God routinely, a daily dose of prayer, and in the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:15, we should "pray without ceasing." This means we need to commune with God at all times and make a habit of talking to God throughout the day. Building a relationship with God means, we

can talk to God about completing tasks at work, meals for the family, relationship issues, or any possible concern that may arise throughout the day.

The spiritual journey is making God active in our daily lives, through the Word of God and prayer, for the writer of Hebrews 4:12 tells us that, “Indeed the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” God’s Word is powerful and can help us overcome the issues of life. The Word of God, along with the active presence of the Holy Spirit is sufficient for us, even in our weakness, God will give us the strength to overcome the demonic forces at work in the world. The writer of James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” The essence of this passage of scripture is that we should abide in the Word of the Lord. We should come into the presence of the Lord with praise and thanksgiving, ask the Lord for forgiveness, and seek the Lord for direction in the issues of our lives. The ongoing process of salvation and sanctification, guided by an intentional process of spiritual formation will lead to spiritual maturity. A spiritually mature person is one effectively equipped to do the work of ministry, one who effectively build up the body of Christ, and one whose mind is effectively transformed.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROJECT: EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

Getting Started

As an ordained Itinerant Elder in the AME Church, I chose to serve alongside my husband who is the Pastor of Mount Zion AME Church. We entered the Doctoral Program at Drew Seminary to understand how to develop an understanding of new and shifting paradigms in the Christian community while developing a mature sense of theology and doing ministry in an urban environment. We have been discussing ways of engaging the congregation in fresh ways with new ideas of openness and collaboration. The intention was to examine our current approach to ministry and make the necessary changes for conducting ministry in a postmodern society.

It was during the second semester at Drew in the class on spiritual formation, taught by Dr. Donna Ciangio that the final aspect of this professional project took shape, and the need to go deeper to nurture the spiritual growth of individuals. My attention was drawn first to the title of the course, *Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality* and secondly to words within the syllabus, “This course will offer strategies to enhance pastoral directions, skills, and ways to engage the church community as “life-long learning” disciples.”¹The phrase that got my attention was “spiritual formation” that led

¹ Donna Ciangio, *Spiritual Formation for Congregational Vitality*, January 2015 (Class Handout)

me to explore its meaning. Second, I knew from a previous class that one strategy was to employ a process and now I began to formulate a structured process of spiritual formation combined with the traditional practice of Bible study and prayer. Placing some of the responsibility on the individual to employ spiritual discipline was the solution to developing this project and the way in which, I will proceed.

The introduction of the small group concept, presented by Dr. Ciangio, reminded me that the church has a similar small group model in place, namely class leaders. I began to imagine and envision ways to implement this model across all church ministries; choirs, ushers, youth, missionaries, etc. Once reality struck, I tamed my enthusiasm and focused on a smaller group. It was not a simple task because the pastor and I are simultaneously implementing our doctoral projects. Thus, I narrowed my focus to a smaller, already established Bible study group, comprised of a cross-section of church members.

During the colloquium phase of the doctoral program, I acknowledged the precise place in the Bible I would use to start and steer this project, Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. The biblical basis for this project is Ephesians 4:12-13. It states "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13). According to the introductory statements preceding this text, the Apostle Paul provides a list of gifts placed in the body of Christ "to equip the saints." Compatible with this ministry context, the list includes pastors and teachers.

Introducing the Project

During an official board meeting where all ministry leaders must attend, the pastor announced that we were going to contact some of them to participate in our projects. The pastor made a similar announcement to the entire congregation. Previously, the pastor shared that he and I were attending Drew Seminary to pursue the Doctor of Ministry Degree to gain current information and understanding ways of conducting ministry in a postmodern context.

Although the participants, were members of an already established group, I contacted each personally, asking for their support to participate in this professional project. A formal letter of invitation was constructed and sent, requesting confirmation of their desire to take part in the project. The letter included the name of all participants who had agreed to be a part of the project, brief information about the project, requirements during the project, and logistics with scheduled dates and times for group meetings. In the meantime, I prepared a seven-page handout that gave details of the project. I identified three members of the group as the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC), comprised of two stewards and Christian Education Director of the church. They were responsible for reviewing the material in the handout. We agreed the content was useful for the project phase. However, the overall involvement in the project had more to do with participants following the material I assembled and provided in the form of a handout.

The Prospectus was implemented with one exception, which was a date change to start the project. I approached each participant separately, and a follow-up letter given to each to confirm and acknowledge their willingness to participate. After I had assembled the team, this project became a collaborative effort, requiring each participant to provide

any input, whether they deemed it positive or negative, they felt would improve or enhance the project, their ability to participate effectively, and its outcome. At the outset, this candidate explained the project in detail, including the initial survey and final evaluation of the project. In completing the survey, I asked for openness and honesty in responding to all questions. The LAC assisted with the distribution of material, collecting material, and feedback to maintain confidentiality, especially with the initial survey and final evaluation. During each session, questions and concerns were raised to assess the level of usefulness for participants as they applied learning outcomes during their daily routine. The LAC took notes during each session and distributed copies of typed notes at the beginning of each session. We met for six weeks, each session lasting about two hours each.

The group consisted of, four stewards, a Christian Education Director, one stewardess, one choir member, an usher, and one member who is not engaged in the work of the church. One steward was not asked to participate but requested to join the group. It was an all-female group, so I asked two young men if they would join and they agreed. By the time we started the implementation phase, their work schedules had changed, and they were not in a position to participate. One young man was a steward and the other, the director of the usher/hospitality ministry. The remaining members consisted of 10 females. Two did not complete the project, one missed two sessions, but returned for the last meeting.

A steward in the AME Church, while their duties are varied, are responsible for the spiritual and temporal concerns of the church. They must know and love the word of God. The Christian Education Director is responsible for supervising all religious and

educational interests of the local church. However, in our local church, the director is responsible for coordinating youth activities. The stewardesses have the responsibility of providing assistance to the stewards with baptisms and the Lord's Supper. The choir members support the church in worship.

I gave two members a copy of the Prospectus, one steward and the Christian Education Director. They distributed the information packet to each participant, which included information taken directly from the Prospectus. I provided the details describing the goals and objectives of the project. They were told the scope and nature of the project with explanations of their role and contribution to the project. I expressed my appreciation for their assistance in making the project a success. Each meeting ended with a light meal and fellowship. The group was required to take their packets home, read the resource material, and began reading the selected Psalms in preparation for the start of the project.

The Initial Survey

A member of the LAC distributed the initial survey. Once completed a member collected them, placed them in an envelope, and gave them to me at the end of the first session. After giving an overview of the project, the participant who is a member, but not engaged in the work, of the church, stated that she was not ready to participate in the project because she was not on the same spiritual level as other participants. I explained that everyone might not be on the same spiritual level, that we are all growing, and this is an opportunity to learn. The group encouraged her to stay, if only for a chance to learn and grow. I let her know that we wanted her to be a part of the group. She agreed to stay. She returned for the second session, but did not return for the remaining sessions. One

member attended three meetings, but had death in her family and did not complete the project. Another member attended three consecutive meetings and missed two because of illness. She returned for the final session.

The action phase of the project required that each committee member study and meditate on previously chosen Psalms, write two prayers of invocation, two intercessory prayers, and write and articulate their spiritual journey. The participants were apprehensive about writing about their personal journey. I emphasized the importance of writing about one's journey, explaining it would enhance their spiritual growth and transformation. They were not required to submit their written spiritual journey to promote honesty and openness with reflecting on more personal and perhaps painful parts of their journey. I modeled the process for completing the task, by sharing my personal journey and provided resource materials related to writing a personal narrative. Also, to ease their anxiety, each participant was given a book entitled, *The Journey Inward: A Guide to Prayer and Reflection* written by Jessica Kendall Ingram. Further, I provided an outline to help facilitate writing about their personal journey with questions and words and phrases serving as reminders and memory joggers as they revisited their life story. They expressed that these tools were helpful.

Project Implementation

Week One - The first session included an overview of the Book of Psalms and why we were using a selected group as part of the project. However, the participants had the opportunity to choose Psalms of their choice. I expressed that the Psalms were at the heart of Israelite worship and practice; and often acknowledged and praised God, and used them as prayers and songs. I explained that the Psalms offer a way to develop an

intimate relationship with God, and over time, like the Psalmists, participants will mature in their relationship with God. Further, I shared information I gleaned from Henri Nouwen and Beth Tanner as they reflected on the Psalms. Nouwen says, “In the daily discipline of prayer our focus is on God and the words of God.”² I agree with Nouwen that reading and reflecting on a Psalm is a good place to start. In the words of Beth Tanner,

“To pray the psalms is to learn who God has been in the lives of believers throughout the centuries. To continue in this tradition is as important to us as they were to believers of past generations. To pray the psalms also gives one the opportunity for the psalms to inform and transform one’s life”³

The Psalms give us words inspired by those who God chose, such as David, to place in the historical tradition of true worshippers and believers of the faith. To begin our six week journey, we examined thoroughly Psalm 1 and crafted the following prayer from the same.

Almighty and everlasting God, we’re thankful that you have blessed us. You have given us the spirit to follow righteousness. You have taught us not to listen to those with loose tongues. We delight in your word. Your word gives us peace. Your word heals us. Your word delivers us. And your word guides us. Thank you for the fruit of the Spirit that replenishes and restores your people, as we dispense your love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Allow the fruit of your Spirit to replenish and restore your people. God forgive us and forgive those who have sinned against You and your people. We ask that you change the minds of the ungodly. We know that you desire that none of your people perish or be lost. We ask that you bring them into the household of faith, so that they can experience the safety of your protection and the nourishment of your word. Change their hearts and minds to become carriers and doers of your word. We thank you, in Jesus name. Amen

² Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 30.

³ Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Psalms for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 3-4.

Working collaboratively with the committee, we began the first three sessions with a period of quiet time while listening to previously recorded scripture. We reviewed techniques or steps for spending quiet time before entering prayer. I gave them a definition of meditation as spending time in thought, reflecting on God and scripture. It requires finding the time and a quiet place for centering, focusing, and considering what is read or heard. Preparing for Meditation requires reading the Bible and listening for God to respond to a need in the life of God's people.

The participants were asked to write their prayers at home and bring them to the session choosing any of the Psalms provided or they could choose a favorite. They were required to write two invocations and two intercessory prayers. I selected these types of prayers because most church leaders do not like praying in public and when they do, they typically sound like personal prayers. I explained that by writing their prayers, and basing their prayers on scripture, they would become more confident with the idea of praying in public. I expounded further that prayer based on Scripture would increase their prayer language and draw them closer to God. It was necessary to explain the difference between public prayer and private prayer. During the session on prayer we discussed the meaning of prayer. The participants were asked to provide their own definition of prayer, but their definition expanded as they learned that prayer was a two-way conversation between the one praying and God. It was news to most since most believed that praying was about thanking and asking God for something.

This discovery reflected their attitude toward God at this time. It is typical of most Christians that I have observed, that prayer is one-way communication. It was during this period that I began to realize that teaching on prayer required establishing who, what, and

why of God. In other words, since no one has seen God face-to-face, it was necessary to express why we pray in the name of Jesus since he is God in the flesh. Establishing this context required examining Genesis 1:1-3 and John 1:1-3, unveiling Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit together at the beginning of creation (See Theological Section for details). The scripture basis for this session was “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (Jas 4:8a).” I wanted the participants to begin to think about God as wanting to have an intimate relationship with each of them.

Our discussion on prayer included why we should pray; because Jesus instructed us to pray (Mt 26:41), as a way of developing a relationship with God (Jn 15:7). We should always pray and at all times (Lk 18:1; Eph 6:18). We can pray anywhere and anytime, with eyes opened or closed, silent or out loud. We can pray on bended knees (1 Kings 8:54), bowing (Ex 4:31), prostrate before God (2 Chr. 20:18 and Mt 26:39), or standing (1 Kings 8:22). The most valuable part of this phase was the discussion around the elements of prayer. I explained that while faith and forgiveness are not elements of prayer, they are essential to acknowledge before prayer. Our faith and belief represent our attitude toward God. Therefore, we must believe that God will hear and respond. Another important aspect of prayer is forgiveness. It is important to forgive others if we expect God to forgive us of our sins (Mk 11:22-26; Heb. 11:6). A discussion about our attitude toward God led to the following questions:

1. How do you approach God with praise and thanksgiving or by asking and pleading? It was clear that most engaged in their request without much thought to anything else.
2. Why should God answer our prayers? The responses were because we are his children and he cares for us.

3. Do you think God wants something from you? The response was: Yes, he wants us to be faithful and to serve him.”

Week Two - We proceeded in the second session with the discussion on the elements of prayer. I grouped the first three features into one; they are adoration, praise, and worship. The God that we serve is deserving of honor and respect and we should humble ourselves in God’s presence. We should praise and worship God wholeheartedly in everything we do (Jn 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19-20). I grouped the second two features; confession and repentance. We are to acknowledge our sins as instructed by Jesus to confess and repent (Prov. 28:13; Mt 6:12; 1 Jn 1:8-10 Prov. 28:13). A third feature is thanksgiving. We have reasons to be thankful to God and we should acknowledge what God is doing, what God has done, and what God will do for us (Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17-18). The last two features were grouped together; petition and supplication. We should ask God for something on behalf of self and others (Phil. 4:6-7; Jn 15:7). All scriptures reflected in the handout were read during our sessions and were suggested to read again at home. Finally, we should close our prayers with Amen, so be it!

Week Three - Our third session began with participants reading their prayers and critiquing each other’s prayers to verify the elements in each prayer. They were eager to get started. There were at least two persons in the class I was knew how to pray, although they were not aware of the elements of prayer. However, their written prayers did not sound anything like the way they previously prayed. I urged them to rewrite their prayers the way they would have given them in the past. They presented them at our next session with much improvement. I cautioned them not to let writing their prayers get in the way of how they would pray naturally, and when praying in public to be conscious of the difference between public and private prayer.

Week Four - We concluded the prayers at the beginning of the fourth session before starting the topic on the spiritual journey. The discussion began with an explanation of what is meant by a personal journey. In simple terms it means to give a personal testimony of one's life experiences as it intersects with one's encounter with Jesus. For example, I shared my spiritual journey and my encounter with God through Jesus Christ, beginning with my childhood, and the spiritual transformation that took place over many years. A member of the LAC distributed a handout containing information to help them get started with writing down their personal story. The list included family life, their relationship with Christ, life events, and beliefs and values.

Week Five thru Six - The last half of the fifth session and the entire sixth session was focused on each participants relating their spiritual journey. It was expressed that their experience should include an account of events in one's personal life, integrating the point of intersection when Jesus became real in their lives. The handout distributed during week four contained words and phrases as memory joggers. It started with the family of origin, spouses, children, grandchildren. It also included statements that would lead them to talk about their relationship with Christ. They were asked to incorporate their information on life events; such as relationships with family members, any apparent conflicts, and major events good, bad, or indifferent. Finally, they were asked to include something about their beliefs, values, and family legacy. These memory joggers were information I learned in the class entitled *Prophetic Leadership in the Congregation and Community*, taught by Dr. William Presnell.

This phase of the project included more in-depth discussions regarding spiritual growth, spiritual formation, and the evolution of the spiritual journey. It was apparent

participants needed clarity around this concept of spiritual development and growth. It seems that the notion of joining the church and serving in various capacities within the church is the indication they are doing what God requires. Thus, I developed a chart with simple steps, acting as a barometer for self-reflection to support deeper understanding of a spiritual transformation process. A discussions with my pastor about this discovery, I learned that he had uncovered similar data. The pastor created a flow chart, *Personal Journey with Christ*, to reflect what I begin to articulate to the group, in the following manner, as steps in the process of discipleship and evidence of spiritual growth (See Appendix):

1. Accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
2. Join a local church (become a member)
3. Receive new members/discipleship training and regularly attend Bible study and church school
4. Spend personal time nurturing your faith with personal time of study and prayer
5. Engage in the work of the church and ministry activities
6. Construct and learn to articulate a personal narrative that intersects with the story of Jesus, the Christ.
7. Become an evangelist (“go”)

This does not mean that these steps will occur in such succinct order, but it does provide a pictorial framework for an individual to gauge their spiritual growth. The success of this project depended on the participants’ willingness to engage intentionally in the practice of daily Bible study, prayer, and meditation over the course of six weeks. Further, their spiritual growth was also dependent on the need and desire to first

understand the importance of constructing, writing down, and articulating a personal journey of spiritual formation.

Evaluating the Project

My first goal was to have all participants involved and promote open and honest feedback. The second goal was for each participant to contribute by presenting a total of four written prayers. The third goal was to have them write a personal narrative and present the same during the final session. All goals were accomplished, however, two participants were not able to complete the project due to work constraints. One member of the team attended two meetings and determined she could not complete any of the required assignments, even though I expressed to her that it was not necessary and she could remain with the group. Additionally, two participants were not able to complete fully, one because of health reasons and the second because of death in her family. On the other hand six people remained and fulfilled every aspect of the project. Thus I believe I met every aspect of the project as outlined in the Prospectus.

I designed the initial using Survey Monkey (See Appendix). The initial survey was given to participants to help the candidate identify whether their current practices and personal habits included personal time of prayer and Bible study and their level of participation in the life of the church. The team was assessed following a spiritual assessment survey. Unknown to the participants, the list of questions covered five distinct sections to identify their current spiritual life and activity: Prayer, preparation for prayer, Bible study, worship and praise, and discipleship and witnessing.

The majority of participants acknowledged their involvement in enhancing their spiritual life, engaged in Christian practices, and their participation in the work of the church. Participants' responses reflected traditional thoughts and actions associated with

prayer, bible study, praise, and worship. Some areas suggested non-traditional practices. (See Appendix for details).

To determine the effectiveness of the project, a seven-question questionnaire and a separate area for general comments was designed requiring each participant answer the questions in his/her words. A member of the LAC distributed the questionnaire on the last day of class. The participants had the opportunity to take it home and return it to the designated member by the end of the week. Before we concluded the session, participants stated they wanted more and needed more details. As expressed earlier, the time allotted for the project may prove to be insufficient. However, there were many positive outcomes. The following are specific responses from members of the committee:

1. I'm more aware. I never thought about structuring a prayer
2. I'm able to share this experience with my family
3. I am aware of how to pray in different settings
4. Instead of conversation, I'm able to offer advice to someone who may be struggling with praying in public
5. I am can pray for someone who may not be able to respond
6. This class has given me greater insight on how we should pray, how prayers should be different in different settings

The responses from participants indicate that this project addressed a personal need and increased their confidence as ministry leaders. Several stated that the goals were clear and clear instructions continued during each session.

I also completed a similar questionnaire. Learning from this experience is: While most members of the congregation will receive this project as critical to their spiritual formation, there will be others who will not want to participate for various reasons. Two

participants were not prepared to write prayers but were willing to pray during each session. One person felt she was insufficiently prepared spiritually to continue participation. My leadership style for this project was a cooperative effort, working together with the participants to understand their need and for their success. After the project got underway, it became a collaborative effort, which ensured its success. However, given the time and opportunity, I would like to have introduced the implementation plan and asked for feedback earlier in the process.

The Drew Faculty Colloquium process was informative and comprehensive, which made it easy for constructing a project and easy to implement. The on-site evaluation committee, mentor, and the project's Lay Advisory Committee was a source of comments, reactions, and feedback as to the overall effectiveness of the project. The committee and I have agreed that the candidate will provide additional training with the opportunity to include different types of prayers and use them in open forums as well as continue writing and articulating their spiritual journey and transformation.

Finally, once the committee is comfortable with their progress, we have agreed to devise an action plan to extend the process to other members of the congregation. Given the participants' lack of familiarity with using the Psalms as inspiration for writing prayers and giving prayers in public; I believe with further study and attention to the art of praying and opportunity to pray in public, most will do well. The participants, like most Christians, find it difficult to articulate and uncomfortable with sharing their spiritual journey. This aspect of the project will take additional work and time to encourage participants to flush out the level of detail to share or not to share.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Learning Outcomes

It is clear from this project that members in our congregations want help with the basics of becoming capable and confident witnesses for Christ. First and foremost, intentional preparation through personal and public prayer, learning different types of prayers, making use of scriptures for prayer are critical elements. Second, this project clearly demonstrated the need for Christians to articulate their personal journey through the pains and suffering of life as well as the joyful mountaintop experiences that are all part of the Christian spiritual journey. Once their spiritual journey is captured in thought and written, they will come to recognize that God was always there, guiding through the difficult circumstances and rejoicing with them in times of joy.

A tenet of spiritual formation is that whatever we do must be intentional. The word intentional means to do something deliberately or on purpose. Both the pastor and I have intentionally chosen our sermon texts, focused our Bible studies, and purposefully led or participated in meetings with this same intentionality. The purpose is to engender the type of spiritual development that builds up and unifies the church. However, armed with this new focus on intentionality, the need arises to share this emphasis on intentionality with members for their use, to assist them on their journey toward Christ-likeness. A second tenet is a process by which God forms Christ's character in believers

by the ministry of the Spirit. In my estimation, this process is where the current challenge resides. The challenge, as was discovered during this project, is that for some members to go deeper in their relationship with God requires equipping the saints with not only the knowledge of God as giver and provider but to increase their understanding of God as One who expects something in return.

At the beginning of this project, the prayers were one-directional, asking God for something. It was not new information but validated the prayers, I have experienced. It also confirmed my belief that most Christian's lack, I believe is the fundamental principle of Judeo-Christian faith is the covenant of the Old and New Testament. To fulfill the "Great Commission," Christian disciples must be fully prepared, beginning with understanding our covenant relationship with God. The significance is that it can promote the spiritual growth of all believers. Our responsibility as kingdom builders, rather than church builders includes that area outside the walls of the physical space called the church. Kingdom building includes everyone. It means taking the gospel of the good news to all people, accompanied by the Holy Spirit assisting in the process of unifying the world.

The biblical inquiry for this project revealed the overall purpose of the church, to unify; connecting all people to God, which includes Jewish people and Gentiles. Jesus came to unify the entire world, those who call themselves Christians and those who do not, which is the basis for the biblical foundation of his directive to "go" into all nations (inclusive of all people). As Christians and specifically Mount Zion AME Church, is required to include as its mission the effort to become effective witnesses at spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ into the community of Plainfield extending God's grace – God's

love and compassion. Mount Zion's mission field regardless of the challenges requires that we spread the love of God to the community to heal the broken hearted and to set the captives free of drugs, alcohol, and rid the city of its oppression of crime and violence.

The theological discovery led to the correlation between spiritual formation and the salvific process. The process of salvation include its companion's conversion, sanctification, glorification, and regeneration. Without a doubt, spiritual formation and its intentional component, adds value for going deeper in our relationship with God. Critical in this process is getting to know God through Jesus Christ, Emanuel, God with us.

Equipping the Saints - Future

The future success of this project will require more time for training along with additional resources on writing effective prayers to avoid trite expressions, ways of adding variety and making use of words that expand the vocabulary in prayer. The state of our country is precarious. The leaders behave like immature children, lack of jobs for college graduates and their ability to pay back student loans, racial discrimination, violence and gang activity not just in the streets, but in high places, etc.; all demand that we are confident of the power and authority we have in Jesus Christ. To do so requires that we understand the fullness of who Jesus is, as the one who according to John 1:1-4 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was at the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being" (Jn 1:1-4). The Word of God is like a seed planted in the earth to reproduce after its kind. To come into the likeness of Christ demands that we draw near to God with intention and purpose to become a reproduction of Christ who gave his life for us.

The challenges within our community of gangs, violence, drugs and alcohol abuse reveal the spiritual poverty of the community. Inclusive within our church are those who may also experience spiritual bankruptcy because they are not active in the work of ministry nor spending time nurturing their faith. Further, individuals in our churches lack vision for their lives. These challenges speak to the lack of hope in the hearts of the people and create a myriad of difficulties for evangelizing the community. I believe the missing element is the love of God, self, and others. God's love and the love of God and others, will change them and us to experience life differently. Also, the Bible in its fullness is the anecdote to life's problem, as long as those who interpret it, clearly communicate its liberating power. "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17)

Further, the work of ministry requires additional knowledge of God's covenant relationship with each of us. Christian education in the church must challenge our relationship with God. Are we estranged or indifferent toward God? Is God our provider only when we need something from God? Does God require something from us to receive the blessings of God? Can we go deeper in our relationship with God, if we are insufficiently grounded in the Word of God? These questions and perhaps others should challenge us to learn more about God. The obstacles to developing deep relations with God may find itself deeply rooted in the recesses of the hearts of people. The feeling of unworthiness suggests that we do not know God. Certainly, we are not worthy! However, when we come to know God this feeling of unworthiness dissipates as we come to know the God who loves us, forgives us, and desires an intimate relationship with all humanity. These deep-seated problems may stem from unresolved conflicts.

The future success of preparing members for the work of ministry will also depend on the ability to apply the prophetic imagination of clergy and “Narrative and Family Systems” principles as an approach to ministry.¹ This area of research requires additional attention to assist pastoral leaders in their ability to influence the community through prophetic imagination and leadership. Perhaps more exposure to theories on prophetic leadership and systems theories to help members with telling their stories. Some steps to follow may include leading members to acknowledge and confront the issues in their lives. Pretending that these issues do not exist is not acceptable. Second, we need to lead members to understand the emotional effects of unresolved issues and conflicts that separate them from the love of God. Third, we need to lead members to modify and construct suitable testimonies based on their experiences to become effective witnesses for Christ that are beneficial to self and others.

Characteristics in a spiritual formation process are intentionality and transformation. A spiritual formation process will move us toward going deeper in our relationship with God. It requires putting forth the effort to study and attend Bible study; meditate and reflect on what we read, as well as what we hear; and praying with purpose and understanding. Inevitably, a spiritual formation process will involve an articulation of personal narratives that can set us free from the past. Following an intentional process, our spiritual journey will reflect our transformation.

¹ William Presnell, *Prophetic Leadership in the Congregation and Community* (class handout) March 9, 2015

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January 19, 2016

TO: Sister Gloria Williams Sister Judith Hobson
 Sister Sylvia Bennett Sister Ernestine Hobley
 Sister Deloris Boston Sister Wanda Parks
 Brother Keith Coston Sister Mamie Perry
 Sister Lorraine Gaillard Brother Ryan Ricks
 Sister Lorraine Graham Sister Marie Pinckney

FROM: Rev. Mattie A. Carmon

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ!

UPDATE. As you know, Pastor Carmon and I are pursuing Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degrees at the Theological School of Drew University. Frankly we are doing this because we believe that any desire for greater Christian service, requires continuing education and greater training. While it has been very challenging, we have successfully completed 18-months of course work to-date. Our studies have given us new tools to help clarify God's divine future vision for Mt Zion. It has also enhanced our ministry skills to help us better serve the individual needs of all Mt Zion disciples.

INVITATION. This 2016 Spring Semester begins the second phase of our 3-year program, which is our Doctor of Ministry Project. During this phase, we are required to select our individual team of Mt Zion disciples who will play an active role in our respective clinical ministry projects. Thus, I am formally inviting each of you to join me in completing my approved DMin project.

PROJECT. Based on our studies, both Pastor Carmon and I have attempted to select professional ministry projects that we plan to continue after this initial clinical phase is completed. We also hope our projects will have an impact on the spiritual health and long-term growth of Mt. Zion. My specific project, approved by my DMin Advisor, is entitled: "*Equipping the Saints for Ministry.*" In essence this means that we will meet in 6-working sessions designed to deepen and nurture spiritual growth by employing Christian practices. Each participant will be guided to understand the meaning and process of spiritual formation, and the need for spiritual growth and discipline through the practice of personal Bible study, prayer, meditation, and the ability to relate his/her personal spiritual journey.

LOGISTICS and SCHEDULE. I propose that we meet Thursdays or Wednesdays at 12:00 p.m. on the following dates as noted:

Thursday:	January 28th, February 4th, 18th, and 25th
Wednesday:	February 10, and March 2nd

Each session will be 1-hour, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00p. m., a light meal will be provided). A formal "Site Visit" by my DMin Advisor will take place in April (date/time TBD).

ACTION. Please confirm with me your participation, and if these dates work for your schedule. Thanks in advance for your support, and God bless!

Rev. Mattie A. Carmon, Executive Minister
 Mt Zion AME Church
 Plainfield, New Jersey 07060
email: mattieac@yahoo.com *cell:* 908-400-4975

Doctor of Ministry Project Handbook

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- Discuss project, expectations, and intended outcomes.
- Personal growth: period of personal Bible using the Psalms
- Personal reflection spiritual journey.
- Write short meditations based on pre-assigned biblical texts.
- Write short prayers.
- Write and present a personal narrative of spiritual journey.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

- Weeks 1 thru 3** - January 31st, February 4th, and February 10th: Engage in personal Bible study, prayer and meditation taken from the Psalms.
- Weeks 4 thru 5** - February 18th and 25th: Write and discuss two types of prayers.
- Week 6** - March 2nd - Write and present a personal narrative.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- Lay Advisory Committee** – A group of lay persons who will work in collaboration with the candidate to develop, implement, participate, and evaluate the project.
- Personal Narrative** – A story told from a personal point of view. It may contain personal information, experience, and anecdotes.
- Spirituality** – It is a process of transformation to become more like Christ.
- Spiritual Formation** – An intentional Christian practice that has as its goal the development of spiritual maturity that leads to Christ-likeness. It is the process by which God forms Christ's character in believers by the ministry of the Spirit, in the context of community, and by biblical standards.
- Spiritual transformation** – It is the process by which Christ is formed in us for the glory of God, through which we are changed for the abundance of our lives, and for the sake of others. (Galatians 4:19; Romans 8:29; Romans 12:1, 2)

EVALUATION

- Administer initial assessment questionnaire to target goals for growth

- Administer a second spiritual assessment questionnaire upon completion of the project to review outcomes and discuss any changes, to determine if personal expectations were met
- Administer evaluation questionnaire of Doctor of Ministry candidate.
- Candidate will complete a self-evaluation survey to determine if targeted outcomes were met

PRAYER

- What is prayer?** Prayer is having a conversation with God, a two-way communication which involves more than telling God what we want, but waiting for God to respond. It is about communicating with God from our hearts.
- Why should we pray:**
 - Jesus instructed us to pray – Matthew 26:41
 - To develop a relationship with God - John 15:7
 - Prayer connects us to God

ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

- Faith** – Believing God will respond to our request is important. Our faith represents our attitude toward God. Although it is not necessarily an element of prayer, we must believe that God will hear and respond to our requests.
 - The disciples were instructed to pray in faith and believe (Mark 11:22-26)
 - Faith is necessary to please God (Hebrews 11:6)
- Forgiveness** – It is also important to forgive others if we expect God to forgive us and respond to our requests.
 - God forgives, therefore God requires us to forgive (Mark 11:25-26).
 - Jesus taught the disciples to forgive (Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4).
- Adoration/Praise/Worship** – God is deserving of honor and respect and we should humble ourselves in God’s presence.
 - We should praise him wholeheartedly – in everything we do.
 - We must come before the presence of God in the name of Jesus Christ, with singing and thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:19-20)
- Confession/Repentance** – We are to acknowledge our sins as instructed by Jesus to confess and repent.
 - God will give mercy on those who confess their sins (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:8-10)

- Jesus instructed the disciples to forgive those who have sinned against us. (Matthew 6:12)
- ❑ **Thanksgiving** – We have reason to be thankful to God. We should acknowledge what God is doing, what God has done, and what God will do.
 - Pray continuously with thanksgiving because it is the will of God. (Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)
- ❑ **Petition/supplication** – We must come to God in prayer asking for something on behalf of self (supplication) and others (petition)
 - Because we have made a decision to receive God's son, we can make our request and God will respond. (John 15: 7)
 - Let go of your concerns through prayer to God and God will satisfy your mind and heart. (Philippians 4:6-7)
- ❑ **Amen** – In agreement with the will of God (1 John 5:14-15)

INVOCATION

The purpose of an invocation is to set the tone for worship and to invoke the presence of God. They should be short and brief (not more than one or two minutes in length. Learn to write out your prayers and familiarize yourself with its content.

- ❑ Begin with an opening line expressing God's faithfulness.
- ❑ Include four or five sentences to call upon God to be with us in worship, change or transform our thinking and actions.
- ❑ Confess and repent of sins and ask for forgiveness on behalf of the people
- ❑ Include a statement expressing gratitude for blessing the church and the congregation.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

This type of prayer is about and for others and requires a willingness to spend time in prayer on behalf of others that extend beyond ourselves. The purpose is to petition God for significant changes in our communities and the world. Four important elements important for intercessory prayer:

- ❑ A deep abiding relationship with God
- ❑ Time devoted to praying for others
- ❑ Time devoted to meditating on scripture
- ❑ Time devoted to communicating with God

Note: Personal prayers require time for developing a relationship with God

MEDITATION

It is spending time in quiet thought reflecting on God and Scripture. It requires finding a time and a quiet place for centering, focusing, and considering what you have read or heard. Preparing for meditation requires reading and listening for God to respond to a need in the life of God's people. Steps for meditating:

- Do not be quick to start praying – Ecclesiastes 5:2
- Allow time for the Holy Spirit to guide you in prayer – Romans 8:26-27
- Requires a willingness to continue in prayer even when there is no evidence of change
- Slow down and prepare yourself
- Seek to understand the meaning of what you have read
- Read and meditate on what you have read
- Listen to Christian/Gospel music
- Start praising God!

MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

- Sit in a comfortable chair and relax
- Take in a deep breath and hold
- With each exhale
 - Release anxiety
 - Release worry
 - Release fear
 - Release doubt
 - Release forgiveness
 - Close your eyes and surrender to God

PERSONAL JOURNEY

The discussion begin with an explanation of what is meant by a personal journey. It means to give a personal testimony of one's life experiences as it intersects with one's encounter with Jesus. A personal narrative of our journey is our testimony and witness of God's presence in our lives. It connects others to God.

- Family:** Parents, grandparents, siblings, spouse, children and what was your relationship with each and the impacts in your life?
- Life events:** Describe the major events in your life. How were you and/or family impacted? Were there any major illnesses or major blessings?
- Relationship with Christ:** When and where were you introduced to Christ? When and where were you saved? Who is responsible family, friend, other?
- Beliefs and values:** What has shaped your personal beliefs and values? What is your or your family legacy?

Spiritual Health Assessment Survey
Rev. Mattie A. Carmon © 2016
Please respond to each statement that best represent your answer.

* 1. The following best describes how often I pray.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 2. I pray when things are going well and when things are not going well.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 3. I prepare for prayer by reading or listening to the bible on tape.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 4. I prepare for prayer by listening to Christian music.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 5. I read the bible or listen to the bible on tape.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 6. I spend time reading material that guide my personal bible study.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 7. I spend time meditating on scriptures.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 8. I attend a weekly bible study.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 9. I attend worship service.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 10. I spend time praising and thanking God.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 11. I pray for others.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 12. In my church others seek me out to pray for them.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 13. I enjoy reading the bible or listening to the bible on tape.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 14. I tell others about Christ.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 15. The bible is a source of comfort and peace when I face life challenges.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 16. I share my faith with others who are not Christians.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 17. I spend time nurturing my faith.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. I spend time meditating on scriptures.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. I seek out others who can assist me in becoming a faithful disciple.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. My daily activities reveal God is a priority in my life.

Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely/Never
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Survey Results in Percentages

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Rarely
1. Frequency of Prayer	80%	20%	0.00%	0%	0%
2. Pray when things going well or not	70%	30%	0.00%	0%	0%
3. Prepare for prayer by reading or listening to Bible on tape	10%	20%	40%	0%	30%
4. Prepare for prayer by listening to Christian music	0%	20%	50%	10%	20%
5. Read or listen to the Bible on tape	50%	30%	10%	0%	10%
6. Spend time reading material that guide my personal Bible study	30%	30%	20%	10%	10%
7. Spend time meditating on scriptures	30%	30%	30%	10%	0%
8. Attend weekly Bible study	50%	30%	0%	20%	0%
9. Attend worship service	70%	20%	10%	0%	0%
10. Spend time praising and worshipping God	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
11. Pray for others	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
12. Others in my church seek me out to pray for them	0%	30%	40%	10%	20%
13. Enjoy reading or listening to the Bible on tape	70%	10%	10%	0%	10%
14. Tell others about Christ	50%	40%	10%	0%	0%
15. Bible is a source of comfort and peace when I face life challenges	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
16. Share my faith with others who are not Christians	30%	50%	10%	0%	10%
17. Spend time nurturing my faith	30%	70%	0%	0%	0%
18. Involved in the ministry of the church	50%	25%	0%	25%	0%
19. Seek out others who can assist me in becoming a faithful disciple	11%	56%	22%	11%	0%
20. Daily activities reveal God is a priority in my life	56%	44%	0%	0%	0%

Most participants acknowledge their involvement in enhancing their spiritual life, engaged in Christian practices, and their participation in the work of the church in the following ways:

1. Prayer – 70% - 80% pray often for themselves and others (Reflects traditional thought)
2. Preparation for prayer - 40% - 50% read or listen to the bible before praying (Reflects moving beyond tradition)
3. Bible study – 30% - 70% attend bible study and/or engage in personal bible study (Reflects traditional thought)
4. Worship and Praise - 30% - 70% attend worship and/or engaged in personal worship (Reflects traditional thought)
5. Discipleship/Witnessing – 30% - 50% demonstrate their love for Christ and others beyond self (Reflects moving beyond tradition)

Doctor of Ministry Project

Congregational Growth and Community Development

Rev. Mattie A. Carmon

Advisor: Dr. Donna Ciango

Participants Final Evaluation

1. **Were your personal expectations met? Why or why not?**

2. **Were you able to understand the project and material presented?**

3. **Did you make every effort to follow the process? Why or why not?**

4. **Were you committed to the success of the project?**

5. **What did you appreciate most about the project?**

6. **Will you continue using this spiritual formation process?**

7. **Do you think that others will benefit from this process?**

General Comments:

PARTICIPANTS FINAL EVALUATION SUMMARY

- ❑ Personal Expectations Met
 - All participants responded with a definitive “YES”.
 - Reasons: Presentation was focused and beneficial. It was a learning experienced that helped with prayer life and raised confidence level
- ❑ Understood Project and Material
 - Most participants responded with a definitive “YES”.
 - Reasons: Presentation was clear with examples as a guide
 - Some participants understood some of what was presented, but NOT all
- ❑ Made Every Effort to Follow the Process
 - Most participants response suggest they were engaged throughout
 - Reasons: Process easy to follow, supporting materials helpful, group setting was helpful

DMIN Candidate Self-Evaluation

1. Were your personal expectations met? Why or why not?

Yes. Considering the participants unfamiliarity with using the Psalms as inspiration to writing prayers and giving prayers in public, I believe with further study and attention to the art of praying and opportunity to pray in public, most will do well.

2. Do you think the students were able to grasp the material as presented?

Yes. The majority of the participants did well and will do better in the future. Yet, some will choose not to put forth the effort to move beyond the status quo.

3. What did you appreciate most about this project?

The excitement and enthusiasm of this effort brought to the participants. They want more training and teaching and are anticipating extended training.

4. What are some improvements and/or suggestions that will help improve the process?

More time for training. Additional information on writing more effective prayers, to avoid trite expressions, ways of adding variety, and making use of words that expand their vocabulary in prayer. I will introduce material from other sources, for example "*Let the Whole Church Say Amen!*" by Laurence Hull Stookey.

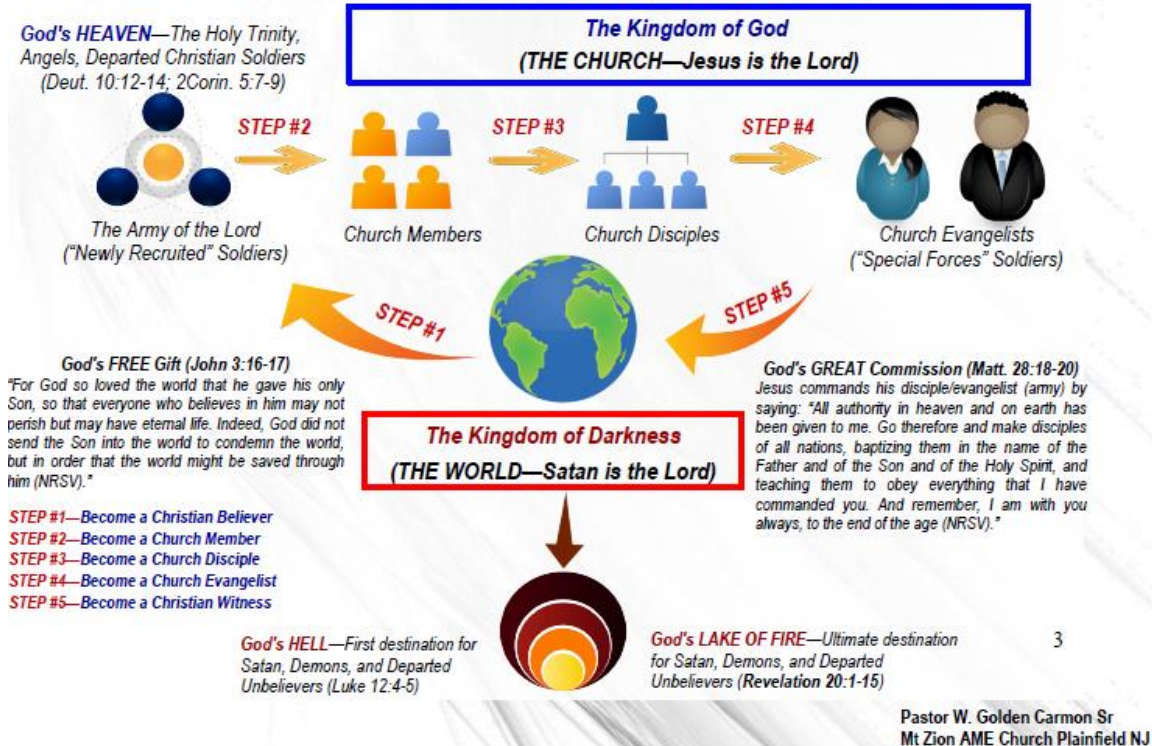
5. Will you extend this spiritual formation process to others?

Absolutely! However, not until the current team feel confident that we have a solid implementation plan covering a longer period of training time.

General Comments:

What I have been able to validate from this project is, that members in our congregations want help with the basics of moving from becoming a believer in Christ to becoming an effective and confident witness for Christ. First and foremost, intentional preparation through personal and public prayer, learning different types of prayers, making use of scriptures for prayer are the important elements. Secondly, the need to articulate your personal journey through the pains and suffering in life and to relate a personal journey realizing God was always there, guiding through these tough times.

Our Personal Journey with Christ



Our Personal Journey with Christ

What are the major steps on our Christian Journey?

- Step #1:** Become a *believer in Christ*, as God's Messiah...**WE ARE CALLED TO:**
- believe in Jesus-the Christ (**John 3:16-21; 20:30-31**)
 - be saved by Jesus-the Christ (**Romans 10:8-10**)
- Step #2:** Become a *church member* and active follower of Christ...**WE ARE CALLED TO:**
- follow Jesus in unity (**Ephesians 4:1-6**)
 - be God's co-workers (**1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:9**)
- Step #3:** Become a *church disciple* and servant of Christ...**WE ARE CALLED TO:**
- love one another and develop a prayer life (**John 15:1-14**)
 - study God's word and keep it (**John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 2:15**)
- Step #4:** Become a *church evangelist* and trained soldier for Christ...**WE ARE CALLED TO:**
- release God's deliverance power (**Mark 16:15-18; John 14:12**)
 - pull down Satan's strongholds (**Ephesians 6:10-18**)
- Step #5:** Become a *christian witness* and ambassador for Christ to the world...**WE ARE CALLED TO:**
- share God's love and save souls (**John 20:21-23; 2Corinthians 5:18-21**)
 - evangelize the world (i.e., to recruit new christian soldiers, **Acts 1:4-8**)

4

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