

Acting Out Our Justice Prayers
at
St. Luke Baptist Church, New York, NY

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My beloved son, Madison

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Climbing Companion:** A term of art used in the Message Translation for Matthew 5:1-2. It means to work in partnership with Jesus Christ.
- Code-breaking:** The idea of stretching oneself and thinking outside of church tradition to become effective witnesses for God through Jesus Christ.
- Disciples:** A member of St. Luke Baptist Church of New York, NY.
- Frangelism:** Disciples going outside of the church to reach friends, relatives, neighbors and associates for Christ.
- Sacred Space:** A protected area where those in attendance can feel welcomed, valued and let their guards down so that authentic conversations can be held with others after having established mutual respect and trust.

INTRODUCTION

Are these all [our] children?

And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.

1 Sam. 16:11

This thought-provoking question posed by the prophet Samuel to Jesse serves as a guiding light in framing the ministry context for the 2016 Community Justice Day at the St. Luke Baptist Church in Harlem, New York (St. Luke). Are these all the children? Upon more reflection, this seemingly familiar biblical question resulted in our journey to uncharted territory when dissected, discussed and deployed at St. Luke. For in reading the biblical text and gaining a much deeper understanding of its application to our modern day, the going and getting and the inability to “rest until [they] come” sparks a far more complex analysis than a cursory reflection of the text reveals. Many questions then begin to percolate internally. Where do we go? What type of people are we looking for? What areas are we examining internally and externally? Do we even want to change? Why? In what ways does the outside world coincide and collide with our safe, internal church community? How might we go and get when we are comfortable sitting, praying, watching and waiting for them to come into our community? In what ways might we dismantle the seemingly apparent “resting until they come” mindset? What is God asking of us individually and collectively as disciples of St. Luke? Although Harlem is changing; why can’t we fight to keep it the same for our communal black legacy? These are just a few of the underlying questions that came to light as it related to community justice and church growth. The journey of dismantling antiquated methodologies, unpacking “just because we’ve always done it this way” mindsets, and exploring newness is as complex now as it was in the

chosen text. Yet we ventured to be climbing companions and travel together on this journey of transformation.

In the biblical narrative, God was looking for a specific and new king. However, Jesse presented the prophet Samuel with most of his sons whom he thought were suitable for the position. Not satisfied, God, working through Samuel, carefully orchestrated the “there remains” moment where Jesse remembered the youngest one who was outside tending the sheep. His name was David. Next, there was a command by Samuel for Jesse to “send and bring him” from the outside to commune inside for an anointing awaited David. It was specifically designed by God for David to be this new king and no other person would suffice. Moreover, God was not ready to “sit down” until the sheep tender had fully come into the fold. Just as God spoke through Samuel, I believe God’s spirit spoke through me to some of the disciples of St. Luke. The specific message was clear with respect to four areas where community justice and church growth would kiss. It was my prayer that this union would hopefully ignite a new way of thinking about practically applying the Gospel of justice to the residents of Harlem and beyond so that real church growth and a new community dialogue might begin.

In June of 2014, I became a new disciple to St. Luke. As such, I can speak with firsthand knowledge of the awesome things the church was doing in terms of teaching, preaching, worshipping and prayer. In fact, I have witnessed and routinely participated in the fervent prayers for justice in and outside of Harlem on Wednesday mornings from 6:00 AM to 7:00AM during the God Answers Prayer (GAP) time. Yet, there was this one charge against us which was the problem. We needed to transform and strengthen our justice prayers during the GAP time. In doing so, we could publically live out community justice in a way that would reach the “David’s” of Harlem and “all the children” within our ministry setting. We ought not sit down

and rest until that day comes. As a result of an unsettling need to act and a sincere desire to dig within that we might reach out, the idea of a 2016 Community Justice Day gave birth. This specifically designed ministry event was a first for St. Luke. It was tailored made to plant the seeds for continued church growth and community within this ministry context. The 2016 Community Justice Day occurred on April 23, 2016 at the church. We covered four specific areas: stewardship over the environment, strengthening relationships between the community and law enforcement, world consciousness and coalition building by actively partnering in a day of communal gathering for the oppressed in and outside of St. Luke. The ministry event focused on the planning, implementation and follow-up assessment of the project itself. However, we prayerfully anticipate that it will serve as a motivating impetus for further dialogue about adult faith formation prayer groups to strengthen church growth and to help make new disciples. With that objective in mind, we held some discussions about adult faith formation as it related to community justice and church growth. This paper charts our transformational journey from a big idea about justice and growth to a smaller, practical, and doable project. Our methodology for church growth and community may be of use to future generations with similar ministry settings. Accordingly, Chapter One will discuss the highs and lows of our gatherings when we searched for our place of transformation as a lay advisory committee (LAC). Chapters Two, through Four will explore the strategic planning and soil preparation phases for the project. Chapter Five speaks to the spiritual formation and theological reflection aspect of community justice and God's thoughts for us as a church body. Chapter Six will detail the actual project itself, the vital flexibility component, and the evaluation process. It is my sincere objective to be transparent with our conclusory findings which we hope will be of assistance for the future of community justice and church growth worldwide.

CHAPTER 1

OUR GATHERING PHASE

Finding Our Place of Transformation

Perfect community is to be found at the intersection of the two segments of the cross - where those who are reconciled with God are reconciled together - where we love God with all we have and we love our neighbor as ourselves...it is the place of transformation.

Michael Christensen
with Carl E. Savage,
Equipping the Saints

As I began to reflect on the formation of this small group of people who would take this transformational journey with me, I wondered if such a concept as a perfect community could be found. I soon realized that we would each have to find our internal places of transformation that would allow us to be open to new ideas, new concepts, new people and new love. In 2014, I became a new neighbor to St. Luke church with this ecumenical idea percolating on the inside! Furthermore, the 2016 Community Justice Day notion was a totally new and intersecting project at the cross of reconciliation. What do we do with all of this newness at this church? St. Luke is a predominately African American Baptist Church located in Harlem, New York. Yet there I was, this Jersey person invited into their world from the outside who recognized black oppression but who also wanted to talk about partnering with different people so that growth might happen.

At the request of Rev. Dr. J.G. McCann, I came to St. Luke with all of this bubbling energy, new ecumenical concepts and statistical data to support my research about Harlem. I represented a modern day David who dared to suggest that they welcome others who may not look like, talk like and think like them into their community! Would this be an intersection at the cross of reconciliation or a collision in the making?! I wondered? Then again, maybe a divinely inspired collision to shake the atmosphere and cause a mystical breaking of the mundane. The

LAC soon found that praying about community justice and being willing to let go of our suffocating tradition which kept us in the boat, was a radical yet necessary move.

And as with any new venture, new David or a new idea, there will always be a negative naysayer or a skeptical Jesse floating around the atmosphere. True indeed, critical reflection was needed in order to have this project reconcile us to God, to one another and to the outside world. However, deliberately defiant folks that would seek to frustrate this move was not welcomed. Yet some things, while unwelcomed, do seem to creep in when the segments of the cross seek to connect and to transform community. However, “some things come about through fasting and praying” (Mark. 9:29 NKJV). With this belief in mind, Dr. McCann, who was my former professor now pastor, recommended that I pray and fast about who would comprise our LAC and remove doubters. I did just that. In so doing, I realized that some people might decide to stay in the safe boat and others might be bold enough to get out!

On September 25, 2015, a preliminary gathering was held with Dr. McCann to talk about the purpose of my LAC, the prospectus, the project, the level of commitment required and a system of accountability for one another.¹ Because I was a new disciple to the church, it was critical to have Dr. McCann on board very early in the process. I knew I would need his support in order for the LAC group to work with me.² True to his call of nurturing others, Dr. McCann was right there from the very start. Interestingly enough, the gathering took place immediately after new disciples were baptized into the newness of life. That was a powerfully orchestrated and God-ordained move to have a new neighbor present a radical idea. That same night new life

¹ Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *GO BIG with Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2007), 36.

² *Ibid.*, 111-114.

occurred. This was a moment where a safe space was created for newcomers.³ God answer prayers!

In order to see the project vision take shape, our place of transformation had to provide a safe space for diverse segments of the St. Luke population and for outsiders. The people who accepted the call to step out on faith had to be open to change. At the same time, a hallowed ground had to be available in order for authentic and diverse dialogue to occur. Therefore, the LAC was comprised of ten chosen disciples from the church and two outsiders. Accordingly, the LAC had four Millennials who were people born during the years of 1980 to 2004. This group accounts for approximately 75 million people in the United States. We had five Baby Boomers who were people born after WWII and ranged between the ages of 51 to 69. There are approximately 71 million Baby Boomers in the United States. And finally, our LAC was comprised of three Generation X'ers. They are people between the ages of 35 and 50 years old. There are approximately 40 million in the United States. It was important to engage various age groups for the composition of our LAC.

Once the small group was assembled and I explained the project, Dr. McCann asked them to think about it and to inform me if they would be committed to having some fun on this transformational journey, to building a place of authenticity which would result in trusting relationships and to the project itself.⁴ It was very important that the potential group be fully advised in advance of the time commitment and be allowed to make an informed decision about being open to taking what was sure to be a rocky and unsettling journey. However, I was firmly convinced that we would become a beloved community within our group and become code-breaking change agents for the church community and beyond.

³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴ Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *GO BIG with Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2007), 54.

This initial meeting was held with 16 people in September of 2015. My prospectus was approved by the Drew faculty in October. In November, this divinely-inspired group was birthed with 12 committed and loving people. On December 23, 2015, my prospectus was given to the newly created LAC which further explained the planning, implementation and follow-up phases for the project. We agreed to meet in person six times for up to two hours each time. During four of the meetings, the LAC spoke with invited community leaders, educators and law enforcement officers who engaged us on these specific focus areas: strengthening relationships between law enforcement and the community, unity in community, world consciousness and eco-justice. In addition to those meetings, the LAC conducted a few one hour telephone conferences with pastors from across the county and a seminary professor. As we were seeking to meet with Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr., of Chicago, Rev. Dr. DeForest Soaries and Dr. Kenneth Ngwa of New Jersey, logistics and flexibility called for us to have telephone conference calls with questions prepared and submitted to them in advance.

On January 16, 2016, the LAC had a conference call to talk about how we would conduct all of our meetings. We decided that this radical move from private prayer calls for justice to publicly acting out those specific justice prayers must continue even after the project was completed. In so doing, we owned our truth that some of us needed to sharpen our leadership skills by actually conducting some of these meetings. In discussing our internal need to be better equipped as code-breaking leaders, we realized other things about ourselves. Some of us needed to be stretched in terms of our knowledge about our environmental health issues. Additionally, a few of us needed to read a bit more about the demographics of our community. Furthermore, some of us needed to be able to think about foreign missions and how they mattered to St. Luke. We also faced other sobering realities with respect to how we saw the cultural climate of the new

Harlem community, our church and our understanding of justice. We accepted our challenge that as code-breaking leaders, we needed to be more evangelistic in order to reach this new and diverse community.

Christine M. Anderson states it more succinctly when she reasons that “God’s dream for the human race is community.”⁵ True enough, community is God’s dream. However, this dream may be deferred because all of the things that make community possible: humanity, servanthood, courtesy, love, and honesty which are all gifts of God were not fully embraced in the life of our church consistently.⁶ We tended to be more communal within our church borders. Hence our understanding of community was limited to those people who found their way inside of the church. Some folks just wandered about and stumbled upon us because of the diverse composition of the band displayed a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. Others were invited by a disciple and just stayed. We even adopted this new concept of “frangelism” espoused by Dr. McCann who fervently pushed it every Sunday from the pulpit. It meant that we would actively go out to reach friends, relatives, neighbors and associates for Christ. Admittedly, it sounded catchy but meaningful. In owning our truth, we did not act out this radical concept consistently. Come to think of it, we have not used the term “frangelism” in a long time. Therefore, rather than experiencing a little bit of heaven on earth where the intersections of the cross met reconciliation, we had come to a point where our cultures and lifestyles mitigated against deep and meaningful relationships with sheep tenders on the outside who didn’t even realize that there was a dire need to come inside.⁷ Again, in realizing our need to do better, we had impromptu gatherings after church services, or on the bus while traveling from a service. We also created

⁵ Michael J. Christensen with C.E. Savage citing Christine M. Anderson, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 49.

⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁷ Ibid.

sacred space conversations while walking to the local store in between the services. In effect, we had begun to capitalize on times where transformational dialogue occurred.

During these precious moments, the LAC had open conversations about how we came to St. Luke for church, sat for sound theological preaching, felt the spirit of the Lord move and either walked, caught the train or drove home until the next time. In our rush to get out, we passed by the homeless person begging on the street because we had an appointment with the couch at home. We also sidestepped the drug addicted prostitute on the corner in our need to go and get food for dinner. We then drove right past the diverse group of human beings standing outside drinking coffee who lived in the half-way house which is within walking distance from St. Luke because the football game started at a certain time. More telling, we failed to make eye contact with the Jamaican cab driver right next door to us out of embarrassment for not understanding their dialect. We even walked quickly or avoided a police officer altogether because of an old, unpaid parking ticket that may come up unexpectedly during an unrelated stop or out of fear because of how the news media portrayed police officers.

Through our transparency, we realized that our church wasn't as connected to one another and to our community as we once were. In fact, our once connectedness was diminished, or supplanted because the vicissitudes of life outweighed relationship maintenance amongst the disciples in the church. However, we cannot build relationships absent commitment, loyalty and love.⁸ During our sacred and transparent gatherings, we realized that living hell on earth was to see the need for help but fail to act out of fear of what may happen to us if we did as opposed to what may happen to them if we didn't.⁹ With this realization in mind, our LAC yearned for a

⁸ bell hooks and Dr. Cornel West, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent of Black Intellectual Life* (South End Press, 1999).

⁹ Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *I've Been to the Mountaintop Sermon* (Memphis, TN: Mason Temple, 1968).

theological understanding of the purpose of our church with respect to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick.

In our many gatherings, we painfully realized the sobering reality that some outsiders have found church irrelevant. Others on the inside have resorted to reading the Bible, believing in God and Jesus Christ and doing whatever else seemed right in their own eyes.¹⁰ Yet through these sacred gatherings, and informal conversations, we were determined to still have hope that the beloved community can be realized here and now which is Good News! However, the LAC also realized that the process of accepting the truth, constructive yet contextual, critical analysis and the effective implementation of customized strategies would not occur instantaneously. This process required us to be open to change and to be willing vessels who would allow a divine interruption to our daily routine of church as we knew it. For it is an “astounding [reality that God can use] us in spite of ourselves” in and outside of the church.¹¹ In recognizing our willingness to be open, we also found ourselves discussing our understanding of what it means to be a church.

In order to bring this ministry event to life, we needed to develop a working but evolving definition of church within our ministry context. We accepted a general understanding that as disciples of the church, we are called to be Christ-like to this world. Yet we needed to go deeper into our understanding of that definition. Upon more reflection, we talked about the position of Diana Butler Bass in terms of defining a church. We concluded that the church is a living,

¹⁰ Cathy Lynn Grossman, “*More Americans Customize Religion to Fit Their Personal Needs*” (USA Today Article, 2011).

¹¹ Michael J. Christensen with C.E. Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 70.

breathing organism that dwells within each individual believer of the Eternal yet patiently waiting One.¹² The church was more than a structural edifice, we discovered. We are the church!

By taking a more intense look at some churches, we soon found that some have not been code-breakers but dream-destroyers who have become drunk with the lure of thinking mega is better. In so doing, some leaders neglected deep meaningful relationships yearning to be realized so that church growth might occur. In fact, noted author Dan Kimble spoke to this revelation when he went from being a “mega to [a] micro” church.¹³ He suggested that “we won’t be judged by the size of our church but on the faithfulness we had serving on mission with whatever size church God gave us.”¹⁴ The reflections of both Bass and Kimble resonated with us in terms of rechanneling our thoughts about our church, our growth and our mission as code-breaking leaders. We seemingly weren’t doing so.

During our gatherings, I found that it was safer to talk about and even be critical of other churches but fail to fully examine our own. Moreover, there were a few times that we strayed off topic a little. In some instances it was beneficial because it allowed us to ease into a much needed critical conversation and deep reflection of our own church flaws. At other times the co-chairs of our LAC had to redirect our conversation back to our main purpose. At this particular moment, we agreed and developed working definitions for community and for what it means to be a church. While we came to an understanding that the church was not only a physical building, we still needed to find our way of being more Christ-like to outsiders. As LAC leaders who dared to step outside of the boat, we believed that our lives required us to serve as living epistles or examples of Christ to others . In effect, we are living breathing organisms who make

¹² Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), 58-59.

¹³ Dan Kimble, *Church on a Mission* (The 2014 Outreach 100 Article, 2014), page 22.

¹⁴ Ibid.

up the church. Although flawed, we genuinely believed that we are the beloved people of God who had an obligation to do what is required of us; to love others, to show mercy and to walk in humility with God (Micah 6:8).

We accepted our responsibility to grow disciples by reaching out and inviting others into St. Luke. We came to an understanding that our invitation was not for the sake of having new members for the mega new church but rather for being faithful for the sake of the Gospel. Therefore, our discussions zeroed in on our mission to be the church individually and collectively. We believed that this project provided an awesome start to transformation and a meaningful beginning as we searched for the beloved community. This process necessarily began with strengthening ourselves as leaders. Therefore, the LAC wanted to take ownership in the project for St. Luke and beyond. Moreover, our gatherings revealed an ever-present desire to think about what would happen to our church growth and our mission once the 2016 CJD was over. As some of us never conducted a meeting and rarely engaged others who were outside of our certain comfort level, we owned our need to be more equipped at organizational structure as code-breakers. And so our goal was to empower each LAC disciple to learn how to engage community leaders, frame questions, illicit feedback and adhere to an organized schedule. Therefore, each LAC disciple took the lead in organizing and conducting a meeting. We also decided that each meeting would begin with a prayer about justice, include a reading of scripture concerning community, provide an introduction of the invited speaker, have a listening component as the speaker discussed a specific focus area under my prospectus, allow for a question and answer component, and be conducted in a timely manner. We even had a time-keeper! We also agreed to have a follow-up conversation after we gave one another time to digest what was discussed during these meetings. The meetings were tailored to improving

police-community relations and to talking about the face of justice. They were designed to gain a deeper theological understanding what it means to be climbing companions with Christ as we seek community justice. We wanted our speakers to engage us about how we might examine our inside world to experience the power of God at work in the outside world as it related to foreign mission and justice (Matthew 5:8). Our objective was to be able to articulate the Christological meaning of being gathered and of being sent as a church community (Luke 4:18-19).

Accordingly, we developed a working definition of community and of church. However, we danced around our understanding of the word justice. Therefore, we needed to develop a general consensus of what justice smelt, tasted, felt and looked like individually and collectively. It was acceptable for us if there were varying degrees of justice in this initial stage. Indeed our gatherings revealed complex and unsettling viewpoints on justice as our group was diverse in age and experience. It was important to have this conversation because it further shaped our involvement with one another and with the invited speakers for the project.

For the Generation X'ers, justice related primarily to the injustice of black males at the hands of law enforcement. For the Baby Boomers, justice was about examining how far we've come as a people in terms of slavery to having our first African American president. For the Millennials, justice was about treating gay and lesbian people the same as others. For others, justice was about creating a cleaner and healthier environment. In terms of St. Luke, the opinions of all coincided with and complimented our doctrinal beliefs. After much discussion, we agreed that justice meant access to fundamental fairness for all and equality under the law. We also observed that the love of God through Jesus Christ would compel us to live out justice for those whom are unwelcomed or outsiders.

Finally, we realized that just as the project was taking shape, our views on community, church, and justice were evolving, stretching and being transformed. Moreover, we also realized that our team came together at a very poignant time in the life of the church. Our old church structure on Morningside Avenue was torn down in 2015 because of many structural issues. The building was old and in need of major repair. This tearing down of the sanctuary was a sensitive and fragile period in our history. It was time to rebuild in order to begin anew which was exciting! However, some people were afraid. Some disciples even relocated to other churches as the nakedness of being without a church building was too much to digest. Others stayed and complained every step of the way. With the destruction of the old temple, some antiquated viewpoints that went against mission mindedness were destroyed. It would take time to build afresh and to rebuild faith. And just as the new church edifice would take time to build, so too will this transformational journey take time to process, adopt and fully implement.

We found ourselves in the midst of rubble. It was like examining the old cement blocks and dirt just simply laying on the ground and wondering what would happen next. Thoughts about what would become of the church now that the former church was gone presented depressing thoughts for some people. In fact, I witnessed a few disciples in tears as they expressed fond memories of the old church. Some disciples appeared to gaze off as they shared the stony road travelled and the bitter, chastening rod of a segregated Harlem. Harlem is not like it was back then. Harlem is more diverse. They yearned for the beloved and insular church family which has now changed just like Harlem. It was at that time that I experienced what Dr. McCann poignantly called the “lights on” moment. I was now a part of a sacred group of individuals who were in an uneasy period of time having experienced destruction, pending construction and

anticipated new birth. As I write, I am humbled to have been a part of this transformation process.

We were indeed at the intersection of the segments of the cross and God was reconciling us together. Not only were we reconciled to this project; we possessed an authentic love of God which motivated us to act out our faith. In acting out our faith, we were firmly committed to stepping out of our mundane boats, stretching our inquisitive minds, and extending a heartfelt invitation to all these children to come into our community so that church growth might happen. With those revelations established, we began our journey towards the 2016 Community Justice Day.

CHAPTER 2

OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PHASE

Soil Preparation: Part One

Strengthening relationships between law enforcement community

We are not fighting police; we are fighting wrong. We are fighting people that would end someone's life for no justifiable reason. But we cannot fight that doing the same and failing to denounce those that commit murder. There are some that seek to divide us for their own benefit, but we must not fall into that trap. It is possible to grieve for police brutality victims and grieve for officers. And yes, it is possible to hold law enforcement officers accountable, while praising the good work that many of them do day in and day out.

Reverend Al Sharpton:
*National Need to Look
in the Mirror* in the
Huffington Post 7/18/16

The authentic sentiments expressed by Reverend Al Sharpton rang out and resonated within the LAC. In fact, we were angry with the police worldwide! We wanted to talk with Rev. Sharpton and demand immediate action! Therefore, we thought about inviting him to our meeting to discuss the recent murders of black males at the hands of white male officers in New York. As founder and president of the National Action Network (NAN) which is located in Harlem, we believed he would be the right person to bring into our strategic planning session. Moreover, we believed that his expressed position might lend itself to a robust discussion about the necessary means to be developed to strengthen relationships between police officers and residents of Harlem. Indeed, we were bursting with all kinds of energy concerning a possible meeting with Rev. Sharpton. The LAC considered having Dr. McCann reach out to Rev. Sharpton and invite him into our discussion on this particular focus area.

NAN was founded by Rev. Sharpton in 1991 and has local chapters throughout the United States. Their mission is simple yet profound. NAN serves to promote equal justice under the law for all peoples. The organization likens itself to the nonviolent means utilized by

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with respect to effective strategies to combat inequality and injustice. Yet Rev. Sharpton, like police officers of New York, has not always received favorable attention by some mainstream news media outlets. However, the misrepresentations of some news reporters did little to sway our respect for and opinion of Rev. Sharpton. We found him to be a national figure who continuously advocates for more effective policing within communities of color. We also believed that he was not afraid to hold law enforcement accountable when they failed to do the right thing in this regard. Let's get him in!

At some point reality set in and we had to reexamine the focus for our project. Again, the two LAC co-chairs were instrumental in this regard. One of them always had the objectives from my prospectus readily available to serve as a constant reminder of our mission for this project. Unbeknownst to me, Servant Leader D. Brown works at a university and her job is to help prepare doctoral candidates for their dissertations! Again, I had no clue about Servant Leader Brown's professional skill set when I was spirit led to invite her to be a part of our LAC.

After some discussion, we realized that in this soil preparation stage it was critical to narrow our focus and plant seeds specifically tailored to each of the four areas of our project. The four focus areas of our project were: strengthening relationships between law enforcement and the community, unity in community, world consciousness and eco-justice. In light of that understanding, we reasoned together and found that we needed more of a grass roots connection as it related to strengthening relationships between local law enforcement and our community. Thus, the idea of thinking big but going small became more relevant.¹⁵

Indeed, Rev. Sharpton, at Dr. McCann's request, did come to St. Luke to preach about what NAN was doing on justice matters. He also spoke about what must be done to improve

¹⁵ Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *GO BIG with Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2007).

community policing worldwide. However, in the end, we decided that it would be a more effective strategy to discuss this specific area with an actual police officer who works for community policing in our service territory. Accordingly, on Thursday, December 3, 2015 from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm, we met with Inspector Steven Griffith of the Community Affairs and Community Outreach Bureau for the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Long standing LAC disciple and faithful leader, Deacon W. Cofield, conducted this part of our meeting. He introduced our invited speaker, received the contact information of Inspector Griffith for our actual project date and fielded the LAC for the question and answer period of this meeting. Our other co-chair, Deacon C. Green, opened our meeting with a community driven prayer and Reverend E. Goins read Psalm 1 as our justice based scripture text. The meeting was then turned over into the capable hands of Deacon Cofield.

Establishing and maintaining a strong relationship between the NYPD and its residents is necessary for effective community policing to occur in Harlem for a number of reasons. First, it just makes for an overall healthier environment between our community and law enforcement that would be built upon mutual respect and trust. Second, it helps to show the community that law enforcement is not the enemy but rather a partner in protecting and serving the residents of Harlem. Third, the established relational link between the community and the police can serve as a meaningful alliance in crime reduction and safety for Harlem. Finally, it reduces the media frenzy and oftentimes false reporting that can paralyze communities when a situational crisis occurs. True enough, we were not fighting law enforcement. However, we found ourselves at a crossroad in terms of our relational dynamics with them.

Given the rise in police shootings in New York, we believed that our police/community relationship needed to be revisited and strengthened. We recognized that it was badly bruised

when the many instances of police brutality and some unjustified black male homicides occurred all too frequently at the hands of white male officers. We were sadly astonished that those same officers were exonerated by our criminal justice system. Accordingly, we began to view all law enforcement with a jaundice eye based on the actions of a few bad seeds. The fact that several news media outlets portrayed African Americans as having strained relationships with the NYPD also affirmed our suspicious disposition towards them. They were all suspect at this point. At that moment the fully decorated police inspector Steven Griffith walks in to help us dig up bad soil and transform our misconceptions of law enforcement.

From Deacon Cofield, we learned that Inspector Griffith serves as the commanding officer of the Community Affairs and Community Outreach Bureau of the NYPD (CAB). Our church was located within the district that Inspector Griffith covers. He has over 22 years of experience in law enforcement. We were told that he grew up in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. We were also advised that he has a keen sense of recognizing the perilous dangers of criminal activity. He also knows how to deescalate community tension by keeping a calm composure while interacting with residents in Harlem. Moreover, he has a demonstrated track record for listening to legitimate concerns and criticisms of the NYPD that have been expressed by several communities of color.

Inspector Griffith started at the ground level as an officer and was promoted time and time again by his superiors within the NYPD. Upon meeting him and listening to his transparent views about crime, community policing and mistakes made in efforts to do the right thing, we realized why he was dubbed as a “module supervisor” of the Street Crimes Unit. He was skilled in narcotic investigations throughout New York. He also knew how to train fellow officers on the importance of establishing partnerships to build relationships of mutual respect and trust. More

importantly, Inspector Griffith recognized and owned accountability. He understood our views that law enforcement could have done a better job in certain instances by connecting more with its residents, especially in crisis situations.

As we learned more about his work history, I saw something very interesting happening within the LAC. The more Deacon Cofield talked about Inspector Griffith's experience by partnering with pastors of the NYPD's Clergy Unit, the more I saw the arms unfolding of some disciples of the LAC. As Deacon Cofield continued, he spoke of Inspector Griffith's tireless efforts to work with community residents who supported the NYPD's LGBT Unit. In doing so, some of the millennials began to perk up and lean into our strategic discussion. The more Deacon Cofield spoke about the NYPD's Immigration Outreach Unit, the more I witnessed excitement in the eyes of our team. I observed the respect level rise for this black male officer. Moreover, the jaundice eye of scrutiny began to slowly dissipate. At that moment, we realized that it was possible to grieve for police brutality victims and grieve for officers. In our small group meeting on a cold December night, we understood that it was possible to hold law enforcement officers accountable, while praising the good work that many of them do day in and day out. In essence, the chill in our atmosphere was turning into a warm and welcoming environment where we reasoned together. It was a beautiful yet transforming moment for there we digested that community is an activity that delivers transformation in people, churches and communities.¹⁶

After hearing about the Inspector's experience, we wanted to talk to this boots on the ground boss. Even before he said a word, we were impressed with his humble demeanor. He

¹⁶ Ed Stetzer, and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 176.

showed respect for us and for the other invited speaker. You see we had scheduled two speakers that evening on different but related focus areas. A representative named James Burke from an environmental organization was there along with Inspector Griffith and another sergeant. We wanted the Inspector to speak first because of work demands. However, the representative from the other organization arrived first. We made a pact at the beginning of our journey that these meetings would start and end on time.

When Inspector Griffith arrived, we were well into our meeting. He politely sat with us, listened intently to the eco-justice presentation and patiently waited until Mr. Burke, a millennial, was done. The sergeant stood the entire time at attention and kept a watchful eye over our environment. He wasn't intimidating and often made eye contact with us. In fact, I initially spoke with him to connect us with the Inspector for this meeting. Inspector Griffith had no idea how his actions impacted the LAC. But then again, maybe he did! By sitting, waiting and listening to someone else speak, Inspector Griffith showed himself to be a climbing companion (partner) with our project and more importantly, with God (Matthew 5:1-2).

The very first gesture Inspector Griffith did was thank us for inviting him to meet in a small group session. Unbeknownst to us, he preferred meeting in small groups because it afforded the opportunity to really flesh out concerns and listen intently to those present. He began by talking with us about CAB and its focus. Our LAC learned that partnering was key to effective community activity. Through Inspector Griffith, we understood that through the effective policing tool of community partnerships, the NYPD helps to solve and sometimes prevent crisis situations in New York.¹⁷ In sync with Stetzer and Rainer of "Transformational Church," Inspector Griffith recognized and continued to highlight the partnership factor as being

¹⁷ www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/.../community_affairs/community_affairs.

crucial to transforming a community.¹⁸ He also assured us that he would take every question we had and would try his best to answer based on his law enforcement context as a black man.

Next, Inspector Griffin spoke to the ways we could bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. In doing so, we received a general overview of community policing. In this vein, he talked about some of the issues Rev. Sharpton raised with respect to combatting wrong irrespective of who committed the wrong. Inspector Griffith also shared in Rev. Sharpton's concerns about how communities of color, particularly black males, have been negatively portrayed by some of the news media outlets. Furthermore, he discussed some harmful misrepresentations accredited to all law enforcement on account of a few bad seeds in the good soil of community policing. At the same time, he, like Rev. Sharpton, spoke to the matter of accountability. Along those lines, he encouraged us to hold the NYPD accountable to the law, to the oath that they take regarding public safety and to effective community policing. Slowly embracing that Inspector Griffith was a community partner, we felt comfort in believing that a deep and meaningful relationship could grow within our ministry context from this meeting.¹⁹

In speaking about the much needed relationship between our community and the police, we were able to glean a small glimpse of the thought process of some law enforcement officers in putting on that uniform and carrying that gun on a particular day. Generally speaking, nobody believes that this could be their last day on earth as an officer or that somebody might be killed during a routine traffic stop gone awry. Moreover, once a black male officer gets off work and puts on a regular shirt over his uniform, they become subject to the same misconceptions that

¹⁸ Ed Stetzer, and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 176.

¹⁹ Michael J. Christensen with Carl E. Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 50.

other officers may have about black males. In other words, once the badge is off and the weapon is secured, the same realities that face some black males resonate with some black male officers. They are just like them and face some of the same uncertainties about policing, racial injustice and fear. Fear that they too may be victims of unjustified killings by a fellow officer who just doesn't understand the importance of policing in communities of color due to not being properly trained in cultural diversity. At the same time Inspector Griffith cautioned us not to paint all white male officers with the same broad brush because of a few who were wrong and committed unjustified homicides of black males. Those few bad seeds didn't speak for the whole NYPD, he said. We now understood.

Through Inspector Griffith's transparency, the LAC was able to glean an important fact which was no less than this: We were not there to fight them. Instead, we ought to try and work collectively at bridge building as best we could with all members of the NYPD. In reaching this "lights on" moment, we learned that law enforcement could not effectively police a community alone. Nor could we foster a safer church community all by ourselves. We are connected to one another for there were no Lone Rangers in bridge building. In fact, Dr. William D. Watley spoke to the harmony of working in concert with one another for growth²⁰. He suggested that being a Christian is not a Lone Ranger experience. It is about being in fellowship with a body of believers with whom our own spirits blend, who will help direct our growth.²¹

By listening to Inspector Griffith in our oasis of peace that night, we came to another very meaningful revelation. The LAC had to feel safe. Moreover, we needed to be able to openly discuss our trepidation about policing and listen to Inspector Griffith's concerns as well. We also realized that ineffective communication mitigated against deep and meaningful relationships

²⁰ Reverend Dr. William D. Watley is the senior pastor of St. Phillips AME Church in Atlanta, Ga.

²¹ Reverend Dr. William D. Watley, *God Wants You To Grow: How To Live Beyond Your Limitations*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 64.

which we deemed to be essential for bridge building and seed planting.²² We each had to listen so that we may understand each other as opposed to hearing just to see when it was our turn to speak next. There is a difference. When a person hears only to respond, I have often found that the response had little to do with what was said (Proverbs 18:13). Instead the response was centered upon what the person wanted to say all along. On the other hand, when one listens while trying to understand positions different from their own, the response is linked to a process of seeing the situation from a viewpoint other than your own (Proverbs 1:5). This looking at a situation from someone else's lenses was critical to healthy relationships. It builds a bridge to understanding. We had reached this pivotal moment in our meeting.

Our sacred gathering space was then transformed into an oasis of peace. In this space, we could agree to disagree yet still change the "us against them" narrative which paralyzed our communities and the NYPD. The mindset of the police being the enemy cripples the ability to work in harmony because a community is unable to view a police encounter from their perspective. Inspector Griffith helped us understand this very crucial fact. Prior to that, all we saw was the end result. Somebody black died. The person who was murdered looked like one of us and the NYPD was responsible. They were exonerated by the judicial system that we thought was colorblind and fair. Time and time again we were forced to accept acquittals and grand jury decisions to decline prosecutions against white male officers. All too often the seeming pleas for peace or outright demands for community calmness in the wake of a senseless death made the pain sting even more.

To make matters worse, each time a headline read; "we have the best judicial system in the world," the communal hurt and anger festered more towards the NYPD. We needed time to

²² Ibid.

mourn the loss of life, to plan funerals and to make some sense of injustice. We were a fearful and a grieving community. It was important to our healing process that Inspector Griffith understood these raw emotions and heartfelt pain. More comforting was the fact that he shared in our same agony. Indeed black lives were imperiled by the recent events concerning Eric Garner, and Akai Gurley and scores of others in New York alone. At the same time, we had come to a point where St. Luke wanted to sustain life by building and strengthening the bridge of understanding between us and them. In effect, we wanted the NYPD to travel with us on our sacred journey for community justice and reconciliation in Harlem. True enough, there were atrocious and unjustified homicides of black men worldwide at the hands of some white male police officers. Furthermore, there were vigilante actions taken by some black males which took the lives of innocent white male police officers. Those criminal acts on both parts demanded denunciation by all peoples of faith which included Inspector Griffith. He got it. He understood those sad realities. Inspector Griffith showed compassion for our genuine feelings which moved us to welcome him into our world. He even shared some of his own feelings with us which shall remain sacred. More importantly, he stood with us as a community of faith who were severely impacted by the inhumane actions of some law enforcement officers and of some black people. It was then that we were not ashamed to embrace the fact that all lives mattered!

That realization was transformational for us. Oftentimes when pain plagues a community and shakes it upside down, the thought process is to be singularly focused and to want justice right away. In seeking swift retribution, justice may not be fully realized. There lies a sense of urgency to hold someone accountable, to fire top officials, and to arrest and convict somebody. While these quick actions may be commendable and make for juicy headlines, it does very little to get at the root of the problem which was a lack of trust and respect of the NYPD. As we talked

more with Inspector Griffith, we learned that the small group meetings for team building through partnerships was the more excellent way to get at the root of the problem and to transform our community. In that same vein, he further explained the importance of community partners working with the police. He extended an invitation for the LAC to attend more events sponsored by the NYPD on community policing. He also made a commitment to come back and speak with the young adults of St. Luke about how to interact with the police when stopped. Finally, he made a commitment to be present for our project in April. At the conclusion of our meeting, Deacon G. Stone, our official church photographer and LAC member, took pictures of us with Inspector Griffith to capture this powerful moment.

There is an ancient practice in the church known as mystagogy. In Greek, the word itself means to reflect on mysteries. The practice is to pause after an experience of any kind; it needn't be overly religious. After the pause moment, there is a recollection of the experience, and a reflection about what touched the heart and what remains in one's memory about the experience. Mystagogy leads us to see the signs of God's presence, even when we cannot see God.²³ After our strategic planning session, we borrowed from this ancient practice and had our mystagogical moment to figure out how God was at work. We didn't discuss our thoughts that evening because it was late. Instead, we reflected individually and waited a few weeks later to collectively express our views. Upon reconvening, members of the LAC took turns listening to understand and respond to each other about our meeting with Inspector Griffith.

We talked about how this meeting altered our views of policing in Harlem. Prior to the meeting, we held onto some misgivings of the NYPD. We saw some of them as rude, non-caring

²³ Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Visions: Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation - The Definitive Guide* (New London, CT: 2007).

and as officers who ticketed people unnecessarily in order to meet a monthly traffic ticket quota which generated revenue. For some of us, there was a real disconnect between law enforcement and the community. Our meeting with the Inspector changed those misconceptions. We further discussed the means to be developed for deconstructing then reconstructing a solid relationship with the NYPD. One practice we would like to develop is to invite Inspector Griffith to worship with us. We would also like to have another forum where members of the NYPD can address community residents about crime prevention strategies to keep us safe. We also shared what must be done differently so that St. Luke might grow internally and externally. From an internal view, we need to be open to owning mistakes we have made as a community in terms of our interaction with law enforcement. Once we own those internal errors in judgment, we can move to spreading an objective view of law enforcement throughout St. Luke and then into our community. In doing so, we can help strengthen a bridge of understanding between us and them.

During our reflective gathering, our views varied based on the wealth of experience within the LAC alone. However, we not only need experience; we need enlightenment so that a Christ-centered relationship can be nurtured within our ministry context.²⁴ Indeed church growth does take time. Yet we must be ever-mindful that the greatest evangelical tool for building and strengthening our relationship with the NYPD is the creation of a spirit of acceptance, love, and respect generated through interpersonal relationships between us.²⁵ Code-breaking would require no less of us. From this faith sharing moment, we gleaned that effective implementation of a tailored made strategy to strengthen our relationship required more of us as code-breaking members of the LAC. Like Dr. Kevin Miller, we embraced the view that we build churches when

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁵ Carlyle F. Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994) 117.

we build communities.²⁶ We can build St. Luke when we build our connection to the NYPD brick by brick, little by little (Proverbs 13:11). We then came to the realization that our local church does not exist in a vacuum. In coming to this revelation, we borrowed from Dr. King, who once said that; “in a real sense all life is inter-related. All churches are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. St. Luke can never be what she ought to be until the NYPD is what it ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

These meaningful viewpoints resonated with us in terms of being more mission-intentional for church growth within our ministry context for a few reasons. First, a code-breaking church is called to reach out to the NYPD and bring them into St. Luke.²⁷ By making an intentional effort to reach out to Inspector Griffith and bring him into our Christ-centered planning session, we were growing the church and one another. In having an identifiable and achievable goal, we are linking up with the vision of the God to go and make disciples while at the same time building community with the NYPD (Matthew 28:19). Finally, in measuring the prayerful success of our 2016 Community Justice Day, we can share some of our sacred journey with a neighboring church that may be doing something similar. Like Dr. King so eloquently believed, we are all caught up in an inter-related structure of reality.

²⁶ Lecture notes based on reflections of Rev. Dr. Kevin Miller’s class in D.Min. at Drew University in November 2014.

²⁷ Carlyle F. Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994) 117.

OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PHASE

Soil Preparation: Part Two Unity in Community

A shared meal is the activity most closely tied to the reality of God's kingdom, just as it is the most basic expression of hospitality.

Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*

Dr. King's sentiments of humanity being inter-related and theologian Christine Pohl's thoughts concerning the spiritual discipline of table fellowship are intricately linked. They speak in harmony because Dr. King gives the theory yet Pohl provides the living application. When placed in conversation with each other, table fellowship which is the most basic expression of hospitality and our interrelatedness appear simplistic on its face. After all, we are talking about sharing a meal together and connecting on some issues. Yet authentic meal sharing reveals more of a spiritual connectivity over the food than just simply coming together to eat. Moreover, genuine table fellowship demonstrates a deep foretaste as to what the kingdom of God shall look, feel and taste like once we get there. For it is there that we are able to be partakers of the rich diversity in the body of Christ.²⁸

With Christ at the center of the table of fellowship, we are able to exhale, release fears, let our guards down, and destroy denominational bondage. Because Jesus served as the sacrificial lamb for us, we ought to have peace in the body of Christ (John 20:19-21). With this peace, we are now able to sit down at our table of fellowship and share diverse stories about

²⁸ Dan Kimble, *Church on a Mission* (The 2014 Outreach 100 Article, 2014), 22.

kingdom work as a missional mandate.²⁹ By accepting Christ’s reconciling presence at our love feast, we also embrace the notion that we are sent to all kinds of [people irrespective of their denominational affiliation] with a message that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.³⁰ By accepting this awesome yet purposeful call of God through Jesus Christ, our LAC must also recognize that now was the time to be in unity of fellowship with another believer who was different. To be able to glean from someone who was not of the Baptist denomination was a major step in our transformational journey. Because we embraced the challenge to grow, we likewise accepted the reality that “code-breaking leaders will be called to engage a denominational church culture which is different from one’s own preferred culture.”³¹

Upon more discussion and reflection, we let the views of Dr. King and of Christine Pohl merge with God’s missional mandate for us. In doing so, we were able to dance together in thought, word and deed over a traditional soul food dinner on January 12, 2016. On that evening, we stretched out on faith as code-breakers and invited Reverend Donnell Harper to dinner. He is the senior pastor of New Covenant Temple in Harlem which is a nondenominational church. In addition to serving at New Covenant Temple Holiness Church, Pastor Harper is an evangelistic community leader and founding member of the West Harlem Empowerment Coalition (WHEC). That organization is a grass roots coalition of clergy, community activists, elected politicians, and residents of Harlem. In 2012, WHEC was formed to specifically address issues concerning youth in Harlem. However, its mission was expanded to include establishing community partnerships with law enforcement and other organizations to assist local residents with quality

²⁹ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers 2006) 30-39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30-39.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

of life issues and employment. Based on Pastor Harper's wealth of experience, we thought he could be a valuable resource for our 2016 CJD. He turned out to offer us so much more!

This dinner meeting was organized by two of our LAC disciples, Deacon C. Baynes and Servant Leader Brown, our co-chair. Through Dr. McCann, I made the initial contact with Pastor Harper who was very excited about meeting with us to share New Covenant Temple's journey in hosting several community initiatives in Harlem. I spoke with him over the telephone initially. Pastor Harper said; "Rev. Kim, I really like what you guys are planning but you had me sold when you mentioned dinner at Amy Ruth's Restaurant! I'm there." His heartfelt sentiments made me laugh which lightened my mounting anxiety. It's not easy being new to a church, working with a diverse group of people and having to reach out to others for a doctoral project. Yet in all of this God was doing a new thing and bringing good people before our presence through this project (Isaiah 43:19)! Because Pastor Harper was very gracious, it calmed my initial trepidation about reaching out to him, succinctly explaining my project and asking him to meet with us outside of a church setting. Pastor Harper was very hospitable over the telephone. His positive energy was shown as soon as we met him!

As this was our second strategic planning session with a community leader, we already had our established meeting format set in place. In true fashion, Deacon Baynes opened our dinner meeting with a justice prayer and scripture reading. Servant Leader Brown introduced Pastor Harper to the LAC. As is often the case, we propose plans and God does as God pleases. Not only did Deacon Baynes pray at the beginning of our meeting, Pastor Harper did as well. It was a seamless, unplanned continuation of her communal prayer as we were joined together in unity. At that moment, our dinner meeting was transformed into a spiritual discipline where Pohl's table of fellowship gathering gave way to authentic faith sharing. We then held hands as

Pastor Harper prayed for community justice to take root in Harlem and for the favor of God to breathe on our project. His prayers opened the door for a heartfelt dialogue concerning *how* to promote unity in community. At that moment, Dr. King was probably smiling with God.

This table of fellowship gathering was powerful because we met with someone from a nondenominational church. Again, in owning our truth, we knew that we needed to grow as God desired. Moreover, we caught hold of a shared belief that the New Testament church is not about denominations. Knowing this and setting aside our Baptist tradition so that genuine growth might occur was on two different ends of the spectrum. Yet we ventured into the deep and placed the Gospel of Matthew into our revelation. Right there a biblical motif of eating, taking, giving thanks and breaking was established. More specifically, the Matthean writer records; while they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said; take, eat, this is my body (Matthew 26:26). As code-breakers, we became a part of this wonderful display of a New Testament kind of unity. It was right there, at the table of fellowship, where God's Spirit was ebbing and flowing in thoughts, actions and in eating! It didn't matter that we were from different denominations. We embraced this diversity motif. God can't help but to dwell in diversity (Psalm 133)!

As Pastor Harper began to talk with us about achieving unity in our community, I had all kinds of thoughts racing in my mind concerning creativity in growing discipleship through this project. However, part of this transformational journey was to move in step with the team while recognizing that we each bring unique positions to our table of fellowship. In recognizing the diversity of gifts within the LAC, I also began to embrace the fact that the growth element was leaning in my direction too. In other words, I necessarily needed to slow my mind down a bit in this process to gently introduce research methods discovered and concepts learned in class while

listening to understand the thoughts and views of others. I had to find creative ways to mesh theory into practice slowly. Pastor Harper was instrumental to my process because he is a contemporary, evangelistic preacher who ebbs and flows within our community as well. Moreover, his views were analogous to Albert L. Winseman concerning our role in achieving church growth. Like Winseman, Pastor Harper spoke to thinking outside of the box of church tradition for our project. Furthermore, he encouraged us to lay aside church dogma to be able to reach the community right where they are as opposed to where we think they should be.

Along those lines, Pastor Harper suggested that we have a rock climbing activity station set in place on the actual day of the project. He also suggested having a DJ play the kind of music that the Harlem community enjoys because it works! These were very interesting concepts to consider given that we are a somewhat traditional Baptist church. Furthermore, Pastor Harper's variety of ways to unite community and draw them into a richer conversation about Christianity was stretching us. Moreover, I observed the faces of the Baby Boomers and Generation X'ers at the table of fellowship as Pastor Harper continued to share his contemporary thoughts for a St. Luke ministry driven event concerning unity and justice. Some of the LAC disciples appeared somewhat apprehensive but agreed to be open to the possibility of newness. As such, the LAC was willing to at least listen to these going against the grain ideas which was a much needed start to a much needed change. One millennial and a few others on the LAC were excited about the possibility of having a DJ! So there was trepidation and excitement all moving about our table while we feasted on barbecued ribs, fish, collard greens, macaroni and cheese and corn bread! God was there too. It was a beautiful thing to witness as we became change agents!

Pastor Harper wouldn't let go of his reaching the community by meeting the people right where they are. He advised us that the DJ piece proved to be a very effective tool for the unity in

community events of New Covenant Temple. For him, meeting the people where they are necessarily involved using nontraditional means as a way of drawing them into a deeper conversation about the love of God. The rock climbing station and the DJ playing music opened that door for unity in community. Their events were held on city streets within the church service territory. The residents received advanced notice from the NYPD that the block party event would be happening on a specified date during a specified time period and that a DJ would be present.

Pastor Harper recommended a good friend of his who is a DJ and the pastor of the Greater Tabernacle Baptist Church in Harlem. His name is Reverend Jeffrey M. Crenshaw. Pastor Crenshaw partnered with Pastor Harper for New Covenant Temple's community outreach initiatives in the past as the DJ. He also loaned his audio visual equipment to Pastor Harper for these events. According to Pastor Harper, it would be beneficial for St. Luke to link up with Pastor Crenshaw for our project because he embraces these type of ministry driven events and has a genuine love for our Harlem community. He would be a valuable resource. Pastor Harper offered to make the connection with Pastor Crenshaw for us.

Interestingly enough, Dr. McCann also knows Pastor Crenshaw who has preached at St. Luke on several occasions. He is very energetic and draws young people in as he blends hip hop music with the Gospel but doesn't compromise scripture. His evangelistic and contemporary preaching style works within our Harlem community context. Moreover, I've witnessed the millennials at St. Luke relate very well to Pastor Crenshaw's preaching style. When he comes to St. Luke, the millennials lean into the Gospel as opposed to remaining on the cellular telephones during service. He had something to say about the love of Jesus Christ in his own way. Moreover, Pastor Crenshaw preaches the Gospel in such a way that he throws the ball to the

young adults who catch it and God is glorified. Pastor Harper was suggesting we have a relatable community justice day that unites people to St. Luke and to one another as opposed to a hosting frenetic activity absent transformation.³² He didn't stop there!

Pastor Harper suggested that we research all available community organizations and social services agencies in New York who will provide services at no cost and free giveaways to those in attendance. Based upon his experience, folks will come out to events if there is something tangible that they will get out of it. He told us it is a proven fact that most people like free stuff. In assisting us with free literature, Pastor Harper provided a link to an organization that provides free books upon request. He also suggested that we connect with other churches who are more than willing to loan us audio visual equipment as a way of helping out for that day. Speaking a similar language of Inspector Griffith, Pastor Harper recommended that St. Luke partner with the local police of the 26th precinct for a number of reasons. The local NYPD could provide security detail and obtain permits if we elected to host the event outside. By partnering with the NYPD, we are also strengthening our relationship and we get to see them engage the community on a friendlier setting. Pastor Harper even shared a story concerning how the local NYPD partnered with his church and played basketball with the young people as a way of connecting with them. Pastor Harper also urged us to consider hosting our project at the Grant Housing Complex which is within walking distance from St. Luke. In doing so, the residents of Grant Housing Complex could connect our names and faces together for future collaborations and connections. Those same connections could then serve as a bridge to discipleship building because the church is so close to where the community resides. We could extend an invitation to

³² “God calls us to make a transformational impact on the world not provide a carnival of frenetic activity for ourselves.” Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 3.

them to come and worship with us at St. Luke. At our table of fellowship gathering, he gave us rich food for further discussion.

Pastor Harper's recommendations were in sync with Winseman who said; "we have no higher calling as leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ" than to find creative ways to encourage new disciples while continuing to grow and stretch ourselves to be the church without walls."³³ Yet while we wholeheartedly believed this biblically based principle, we also recognized a few truths that needed to be owned, dismantled and reconstructed in order for St. Luke to build new disciples and unite our community. Being that we felt at ease, the LAC shared some of our truths with Pastor Harper. Indeed, we bear signs of a spiritually healthy congregation in that a great majority of the disciples are accomplished and satisfied with their professional lives for the most part. However, as a church body, we discussed the ways we might improve our invitation to and service of the community in order to grow our church. In doing so, I gently addressed Winseman's views concerning a spiritually healthy congregation. He said that life satisfaction, inviting, serving and giving are four relevant factors of spiritually healthy church.³⁴

In speaking to the Winseman factors, we talked about how the invitation and serving factors were in need of intentionality by St. Luke. Pastor Harper understood our views and offered one powerful recommendation to address this particular Winseman factor. Pastor Harper suggested that we have a prayer booth set up on the actual day of the project. Once the people are drawn to us by the activities, free giveaways and the music; they may have heartfelt needs that require prayer. We then talked about how this project ought to be able to meet some of those heartfelt community needs. It was at that time that we realized we can grow St. Luke when our

³³ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop 'Doing Church' and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2009) 159.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

hearts become tender towards the lost and the broken who are searching for the love of God right in our midst. Once they come to our booth for prayer, Pastor Harper suggested that we invite them to our church service. Prayer moves the muscles of our omnipotent God. Moreover, when we connect with a stranger in prayer, we make a new friend in the body of Christ.

Here too, Pastor Harper was in lock step with Winseman who articulated that “study after study for the past 30 years has shown the way people become involved in congregations...is through a personal invitation of a friend.”³⁵ There’s something mystical that happens when we pray for strangers who come into our churches or congregational events. We make friends. True indeed, congregations matter.³⁶ At the same time we are called to a unique social community whose lives together serve as signs, witnesses, and as a foretaste of what God is doing and for all creation which includes the outsiders who just might walk up to a community prayer booth seeking help.³⁷ Pastor Harper’s suggestions were transformational tools for us to consider. We didn’t know if they would all be implemented at our very first 2016 Community Justice Day project. However, we recognized that prayer gives all people access to God (2 Chronicles 7:14).³⁸

The table of fellowship gathering concluded at 8:30 pm and Pastor Harper led us in prayer at the end. He also made a commitment to attend and participate in our project in April. Our other co-chair, Deacon Green gave us a sending benediction. Prior to our departure, one of the Millennials, Brother Nickson, prepared our draft logo for the 2016 Community Justice Day and sent it to us electronically. Brother Nickson is a web designer and an adjunct professor in the

³⁵ Ibid., 40.

³⁶ Alan J. Roxenburg and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: A Leadership Network Publication - Jossey-Bass, 2006) 9.

³⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁸ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 132.

area of forensic technology. Moreover, he attends a Pentecostal church in New Jersey. As such, he is not a disciple of our church. However, I told him about the project. He was so excited and wanted to lend his support by drafting our logo for free. His design for the draft logo was consistent with our St. Luke primary color which is purple. All of the LAC members received a copy of the draft and were very pleased with it. Similar to what we did after the meeting with Inspector Griffith, we had our mystical moment a week later. However, this time we had to make adjustments due to snowfall predictions. Therefore, our meeting was held via conference call from 8:00 pm – 9:00 pm on January 19, 2016. LAC member and Servant Leader, J. Laguer took the lead and conducted this meeting.

Servant Leader Laguer began our conference call meeting with a community inspired prayer and a reading of the Gospel of Luke 4:18-19. He then reminded us of the part to my prospectus that dealt with the unity in the community subsection. In doing so, he brought to our remembrance that focus should be on acting out our prayers for justice and on discussion of issues that are common to St. Luke and to one local church as it related to justice. He reminded us that for this particular focus area, we agreed to invite members from a local church to attend our project to further strengthen our communal bond concerning justice matters. I was very impressed with the manner in which he conducted the meeting and with his need to keep us focused. He is a retired law enforcement officer and I think that training came into play as he conducted this meeting. Afterwards, he opened the meeting up for comments about the table of fellowship gathering with Pastor Harper.

The team appreciated all of the recommendations discussed and offered by Pastor Harper but we were overwhelmed by them. The community driven projects conducted by New Covenant Temple were well engrained and far more established than our project. We were in our infancy

stage and they were full steam ahead! In working with local law enforcement, their events were hosted on one block which was set aside for a specific period of time. Furthermore, members of law enforcement were on board to be active participants on the day of the block party. Moreover, the permits were already received by the NYPD. The vendors were registered and had the free giveaways set in place for the community residents. The prayer booth had been ordered and the DJ was arranged months in advance. Their project was also co-sponsored by WHEC. Therefore, the community residents anticipated it, vendors expected it and the NYPD fully supported it as this was an annual event. Our project was not at that stage!

We knew God would be with us for our project. Yet we had to come to an understanding that growth occurs little by little. Moreover, we had to examine what would work within our ministry context given that this was a totally new ministry driven event. We also had to continually review the prospectus to make sure that we were actually doing all that we committed ourselves to do for this project. In the end, we decided that for this very first community justice day, we would host it inside at St. Luke. We would also made a commitment of going out and bringing in at least five people to attend and participate in the project. The factors we took into consideration in reaching our decision included establishing community partnerships, timing, finances, existing ministry events, and full church support. Our position was that to host an event of this magnitude outside, required a two year planning window and a larger budget. Therefore, to host this event outside and do some of the things Pastor Harper recommended, required us to have planned this in September of 2014. We were already into January of 2016 for our project that was set to occur in April of 2016. Once we made those decisions as a team, our level of anxiety decreased significantly. We knew the project was doable. However, it had to be within our ministry context. Therefore, the suggestions of Pastor

Harper that we knew would work for St. Luke included partnering with the local NYPD, inviting an organization that does environmental work in Harlem to participate and ask them to bring some useful giveaways that were relative to our community, inviting someone to speak about the spiritual results when the church community embraces difference, and having someone speak about world consciousness issues.

St. Luke is a very busy and mission-minded church with ministry events already etched in stone on the church calendar some two years in advance. That is not to say that windows aren't open for newness. However, in this strategic planning phase we also realized that new projects have to be placed alongside of, and in some cases, underneath long established ministry events that work for St. Luke. In addition to that revelation, there is a core group of disciples who could best be described as "worker bees." I would suspect that every church has a group of a few individuals who function in this capacity. Fortunately for our project, we had a few of them on the LAC. On the other hand, we did not. In terms of maneuvering to avoid the minefields which can cause unnecessary agitation to a new project, it is best to find out who the core group is at church in order to get things done. For example, our LAC had decided on a date, time, and now a location for the event. However, I needed to know the worker-bees responsible for putting dates on our church calendar. I also needed to find the person who was responsible for scheduling future meetings, and reimbursements for copying costs. In addition, I needed to be directed to the worker bee who is in charge of obtaining approvals for the administrative staff to work the audio visual equipment on the actual day of the project. Finally, I needed to know how this event would be advertised at St. Luke. Through some of the longstanding disciples on the LAC, *all* of my inquiries were answered!

As such, we continued with our strategic planning sessions for this particular focus area of unity in community. In so doing, on November 25, 2015, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting with the Assistant Commissioner for External Relations, Stacy Lynch, Esq., and Natalie Leary who serves as the executive director of community partnerships for the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). I had initially requested a meeting with Bill Chong, who was appointed in 2014 as the Commissioner for DYCD by Mayor Bill de Blasio. However, Commissioner Chong was not available that day due to prior commitments. Therefore, I met with and Assistant Commissioner Lynch and Director Leary.

There is so much administrative red tape that must be done in order to request and be granted a meeting with a commissioner, or member of the senior staff. As a policy, all requests are made electronically and someone reviews the request, forwards it to the specific department for a response and you wait. It could take up to six weeks or longer to get a response. Moreover, in a large city like New York, each department receives numerous requests daily. Furthermore, not every meeting request is granted due to the sheer volume of the requests. However, when God approves a mission, doors somehow become opened for ministry to occur. Such was the case with this project and meeting request. I visited the department website, submitted my request and within three weeks, a meeting was arranged at the DYCD. I wanted to know about the available resources that could be provided for our community justice day. This meeting with representatives of the DYCD proved to be very beneficial for our project and for St. Luke! It was indeed a blessing.

DYCD serves as an arm of state government that assist residents in providing funds and resources for youth and young adults to thrive in healthy environments. DYCD also provides programs for youth people in the areas of after school programs, immigration services, summer

employment, fatherhood programs and literacy initiatives. In addition, DYCD also has the distinction of being the community agency for New York. And as such, this designation permits DYCD to allocate federal grant monies to various impoverished communities in New York under the Federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).³⁹” While our project didn’t focus on the youth, I wanted to meet with them to gain more information about the CSBG funding support. Perhaps the DYCD could provide funding for our project as it would be a direct benefit to some poverty-stricken areas in Harlem.

At our meeting, I reviewed my prospectus with both Assistant Commissioner Lynch and Director Leary who were energized by it! Assistant Commissioner Lynch stated that this could be a tremendous benefit to the community and offered some recommendations to help us! She thought it would be great to have the event at one of the local housing projects as a way of connecting with the residents. Assistant Commissioner Lynch also offered valuable information regarding the Community Affairs Unit (CAU) which is spearheaded by Marco A. Carrion. Based on our meeting, I learned that the CAU serves as a bridge between Mayor de Blasio and the residents of New York. Assistant Commissioner Lynch thought it could be beneficial to our project if we invited a representative of the CAU to attend. She thought it might also be helpful to meet with someone from the CAU to establish a connection for future community initiatives.⁴⁰” I took all of her suggestions back to the LAC for further discussion.

In addition to our small gathering, Director Leary gave me informational packets for our youth concerning summer internships and employment. I provided this information to our youth

³⁹ www.nyc.gov/dycd.

⁴⁰ “The primary mission of CAU is to establish deep partnerships with communities in order to actively engage and mobilize New Yorkers in City government” (www.nyc.gov/cau).

minsters of St. Luke. At the conclusion of my meeting, Assistant Commissioner Lynch agreed to provide community informational packets to us about the DYCD resources for our event.

To date, the LAC has met with Inspector Steven Griffith, Pastor Donnell Harper, Assistant Commissioner Stacey Lynch and Director Natalie Leary in small group encounters for our project. We've also had our small faith sharing encounters with one another as we move[d] from sitting in rows to sitting in circles and from sitting in circles to going into the world.⁴¹ But our work was not finished. Our strategic planning sessions thus far centered on building a bridge of mutual understanding and respect between the NYPD and Harlem residents. We also focused on linking up with another church with similar ministry driven initiatives to foster unity in community. We still had two other focus areas to our project. More specifically, this project also spoke to world consciousness matters and environmental concerns. Therefore, we had more soil to dig up and prepare for the wonderful ministry opportunities that awaited us.⁴²

⁴¹ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 189.

⁴² "Prepare the soil so that God can do amazing things in your midst. People are counting on it." Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop 'Doing Church' and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2009) 159.

CHAPTER 3 OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PHASE CONTINUES

More Digging: Part One

World Consciousness

The whole world is our hospital in need of help and healing from all Christians.

T.S. Elliot

The sentiments expressed by T.S. Elliot echoed loudly as we moved into this next strategic planning phase of our 2016 Community Justice Day project. More specifically, we recognized some of the immediate needs of Harlem residents in terms of community policing, relationship building and unity. Yet we seemingly found ourselves thinking much broader than those identified issues in Harlem for this project. We were becoming more mission minded. We started to wonder what we would do once the project was completed. We knew that God was calling us to go deeper in terms of evangelism, justice and world consciousness. Therefore, we wanted to be intentional about having this project speak to a need that affects a foreign community. Moreover, we sought to reconnect with a mission group that we had some prior relationship with to aide us in our desire to do more. Our thought process was to rekindle that part of our church bonding so that a foreign mission initiative could continue after the project was over in April of 2016. In this regard, our mission was clear. We sought to gain more information and collaborate with a key leader who could show us how we might help those in need of healing in this world.

True enough, St. Luke donates to organizations and churches as a part of being a missionary Baptist church. In fact, a few years ago we provided donations of clothing and toiletries to an outside organization for young women in Ghana, Africa. Moreover, we have gone to Israel and China on foreign mission trips to minister to a world in need of help. However, we

were a part of a process already set in motion and established years ago. We needed to stretch out as leaders by actually doing the work, setting up the meetings, planning and organizing how we could cultivate a global ministry as Christians. Therefore, we sought to collaborate and prayerfully maintain a mission-minded relationship with someone else so that a global ministry could be birthed.

Through our journey this past year, we realized that we could grow in leadership by exercising more authority and making the initial contact with key individuals to talk about world consciousness matters. More than educating ourselves, we sought to highlight an identifiable need by inviting someone from the outside into our world and asking them to participate in our project. In so doing, we would be able to engage those in attendance on what it means to be concerned for and help others outside of the United States. We reasoned that this world consciousness component was crucial to and ought to be a part of our understanding of community. It was not enough that the project spoke to some needs within our borders. As leaders, we had a sincere desire to organize and meet with others to talk about specific needs outside of our community.

In that vein, the word unbuntu or humanness became realized. It is a word associated with South Africa. It connotes a universal bond of sharing that binds people together with chords of love. The concept of unbuntu is akin to Dr. King's interrelated structure of reality notion mentioned earlier. By placing the South African unbuntu principle in conversation with Dr. King's view of interconnectedness, we were slowly coming to terms with how issues of others outside of the United States affects believers in New York City. Moreover, we had an obligation as Disciples of Christ to speak to those needs by sharing our resources to live out love for humanity. Furthermore, we were steadily embracing how to breathe the breath of life into the

scripture by doing the right thing and taking an active stand for justice through helping the oppressed (Isaiah 1:17). Moreover, as missional leaders we recognized that there was a dire need for St. Luke to reach out in concern for and service to the world.⁴³ Thus, our objective was to let a specific community know that St. Luke stands in solidarity with and cares about what matters to them. Therefore, we took the lead and reached out to Christian leaders for discussions concerning world consciousness. And as a result, we conducted conference call sessions with Reverend Dr. Kenneth Ngwa of Drew Theological School, Reverend Dr. DeForest Soaries, former Secretary of State in NJ and senior pastor of The First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens, and Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, former pastor to President Barak Obama and pastor emeritus of Trinity United Church of Christ. In addition to the three conference calls, a few of us had an early dinner with DeLorenzo Sampson. She serves as the co-founder of the African Initiative Mission (“AIM”). Mrs. Sampson is also a disciple of Thessalonian Baptist Church which is located in Bronx, NY. Finally, we had a meeting with Reverend Dr. Dale Irvin, the president and dean of New York Theological School.

As our committee was large, I understood that there would be times when we would not have a full complement of all twelve members at every meeting. However, the majority of the team attended every small group meeting. As small groups tend to change lives for the better, I appreciated those who were present for these meetings.⁴⁴ Accordingly, on January 6, 2016, seven members of our LAC conducted a conference call on world consciousness matters with a Presbyterian elder who was also my professor at Drew Theological School. His name is

⁴³ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop 'Doing Church' and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2009) 40-41.

⁴⁴ Bill Easum and John Atkinson, *GO BIG with Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2007) 3.

Reverend Dr. Kenneth Ngwa (Dr. Ngwa). In planning for these meetings, it now became customary for us to research information concerning the invited speaker prior to a meeting. In so doing, we gained a greater understanding of the speaker. Furthermore, we were better equipped at engaging the speakers and asking questions specifically tailored to a particular topic. Therefore, we read some valuable background information about Dr. Ngwa before our scheduled meeting. I also provided brief reports to the LAC after our meetings to keep everyone up to date.

With respect to Dr. Ngwa, we learned that he is a tenured Associate Professor of the Hebrew Bible. We also found that his world experiences helped transform our thought process.

He was [recently] honored... at the University's commencement ceremony with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award.

An ordained elder of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, his native country, Professor Ngwa holds the PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary. He left New Jersey in 2005 to teach first at Pacific Lutheran University and then at Wabash College before arriving at Drew in 2007. Dr. Ngwa's teaching and research interests focus on the Hebrew Bible and African literature, including Israelite and African wisdom literature, oral traditions, history of interpretation/receptions, and narrative ethics. His first book, based on his PTS dissertation, was *The Hermeneutics of the Happy Ending in Job 42:7-17* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). In addition to teaching and research responsibilities, Dr. Ngwa also directs the Theological School's Center for Christianity in Global Contexts (CCGC). Dr. Ngwa reflects on the role of the Center in developing a global context for theological education at Drew.

Drew Theological School
www.drew.edu

As a part of this planning phase, our team had to discuss the type of questions that would be asked of each speaker. In some instances, it was more efficient to submit the questions to the speakers beforehand as the timeframe of our meetings was sensitive. By doing it this way, our issues were fully addressed and we had some additional time for other questions based on the flow of our discussions. Interestingly, the responses of each speaker differed based upon their ministry context and life experiences. Before our meeting began with Dr. Ngwa, Deacon L.

Sadler led us in prayer and provided a scripture reading. I took the lead for this meeting and asked Dr. Ngwa to provide feedback to our previously submitted questions. He gave substantive content information on world consciousness matters and justice issues by providing life-changing feedback on areas that stretched our understanding of who we are and what we ought to be doing in this project.

As discussed in prior chapters, the word justice meant vastly different things to people depending on their experiences in life and with God. For Dr. Ngwa, his understanding of justice was broken down into two categories; a local and a global perspective. The separate distinctions of his understanding of justice opened our eyes to viewing this concept as extending outside of the United States. Justice was a universal term that we needed to embrace. To organize a community in such a way that it might serve to protect the most vulnerable people would constitute local justice for Dr. Ngwa. As he sees it, global justice happens when we find ways to live, move and have our being in God by structuring our lives in such a way that we help to reduce or eliminate the threat of violence to others outside of the United States. Local and global justice spring forth when liberation and freedom operate hand in hand for Dr. Ngwa.

True enough, we accepted Dr. Ngwa's understanding of justice on both levels. Yet we were wondering how we might adopt this understanding of justice to St. Luke and to this project. After some mystalogical reflections, we found that, to some extent, we were already acting out local justice but didn't think of it that way. For us, we were simply having church with an international flair on Wednesdays. Much to our amazement, we were being mission-minded by doing local justice. We were applying Dr. Ngwa's understanding of local justice to St. Luke by way of our Worship on Wednesday (WOW) service. New York City serves as a tourist attraction. Because St. Luke is located in Harlem and has one of the most diverse group of

musicians who play in a beautiful symphony of brotherhood every Wednesday, a great many tourists are drawn to our mid-week service when they visit Harlem. The music draws them inside our church. During the WOW service, Dr. McCann acknowledges the visitors from various countries by asking our guests to stand when he calls out the name of their specific country. When they stand to be recognized, the entire church welcomes them by applauding while the band plays. Usually, the sermons are focused on unity, love and the welcoming presence of God as this is a multicultural service. The WOW service lasts for less than one hour. Once done, the WOW Team provides food for our guests upon leaving the church. It serves as a wonderful display of local justice by welcoming strangers, worshipping together, and feeding them with one brown bag lunch and a bottle of water. At times, a few of our guests have asked for more than one bag of food to which we obliged.

Upon reflection, the WOW service also speaks to global justice in that we let others know that we see them and that St. Luke is a safe space to worship God even if they don't speak English. We do so by a gentle touch of love, by greeting them as Christians and by escorting them to a seat in the sanctuary as we collectively worship a universal God. There is a ministry of God's presence when we physically go up to them with a warm smile, handshake or embrace. Some seem amazed by this genuine love shown towards them by us. Psalm 133 says that "it is beautiful when we dwell together in unity" of spirit which transcends the English language. While Psalm 133 speaks to a profound biblical truth about God's nature, I have witnessed some other truths about our *human-ness* and growth resistance to WOW which is unsettling.

In being more transparent with the prayerful expectation that you may learn from our journey, I have found that some of us were afraid of different people and the newness of WOW. When operating in this type of fear, we can become blinded to the diversity language of Psalm

133. Indeed, God's heart beats in love and diversity which is at the core of our WOW service. However, the fear of embracing foreign visitors who attend WOW can cripple our church growth and stunt our development as forward thinking people. If this is the case, that close-mindedness needs to be dismantled. For if our WOW service is become a model to follow in the melting pot which is Harlem, we need to recognize, own, and do something about these fears. Admittedly, we had a lot of internal deconstruction to do which does not happen instantaneously. Growth takes time. However, it begins with the recognition of fears and how they can become stumbling blocks to individual and collective growth.

I came to terms with the fact that not every member of St. Luke would be a part of the WOW Team. Admittedly, some people should not. Change ought not be forced. It can be legislated but when dealing with matters of the heart, it takes time. To force members into embracing the WOW service when some are firmly rooted in resistance could result in more headaches and frustrate the good that we would do. Indeed, a little troubling of the waters is required for a revolutionary change. Yet everything cannot be born out of chaos. Sometimes, willing vessels makes growth more palatable, less stressful and very healthy. This recognition served as a growth moment for me. I also embraced the reality that we have unique gifts which may not be for the WOW service. Moreover, some of us are not wired for participating in a more contemporary worship service that included other human beings who were not like us. I may not like it, but that is our reality.

Furthermore, some of the members of St. Luke wouldn't be attending the service due to their work responsibilities. A few folks have told me that they don't attend the WOW service because it conflicts with school plans and others activities as it is held during the noonday. Some have admitted to me in confidence that they are not comfortable with this type of nontraditional

worship service. St. Luke is a predominantly African American church seeking to welcome a majority of non-African American and foreign neighbors to have an encounter with God through the Word and witness. This is a bold and radical move of God for St. Luke. Not everyone was on board at its inception. In fact, some members are still on the outside looking in while others remain paralyzed by fear. Others don't care to embrace our WOW service and some just can't make it at all.

I'm not going to define this fear as racism or being prejudice on the parts of a small few because that's not what I witnessed. They are truly afraid of change and of others. Speaking from firsthand knowledge and as a participant at WOW, I believe that some people have a suspicious nature in general. This suspicious nature may be unfounded or justified. However, if we're not careful, this suspicion that can lead to negativity and to a failure of stretching out as a witness of the newness of Christ in the universe. I've seen this critical and suspicious nature in effect with a few of our church members. Some of them have told me that our foreign visitors only attended the WOW service for the music not the sermon. I began to wonder if some of these members crowned themselves as the "god-police" who were vested with unfounded authority to determine the motives of people when they attend church?! If we claim to be a prophetic church, those who come must feel that [we are] living out Good News proclamations.⁴⁵ I believe that a Kairos moment can happen in music as well as in preachment. I also think that God can speak a message in a song or in warm smile! Therefore, we ought to embrace and not question why our visitors enter the house of God. If music draws people to God, I say let the music play!

As a person who was raised in the Roman Catholic denomination, the beautiful music often aided my understanding of the homily (sermon). So it was with me, so it can be with our

⁴⁵ Carlyle F. Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994) 117.

foreign guests. Music has a way of uniting people of faith. Additionally, I have an ecumenical core and diversity vibe that attracts others to me at WOW. It could be because of my experiences in life as my parents were Eucharistic ministers at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Jersey City which was diverse. Perhaps it was because I served as a lector at St. Patrick's and read the gospel to a blended group of parishioners for over 15 years every Sunday. My brothers were also altar boys with other children who were of different nationalities at church. Maybe I am drawn to diversity because I attended a Catholic elementary school, a Catholic high school and a Catholic law school, where there were very few people of color yet Sister Agnes welcomed me. It could be because I was a political science major who was often the only African American person in class. Despite this fact, there was always some student who took the time to make me feel like I belonged. It wasn't easy being the only person of color at times but there was always a person who exemplified God's light and showed me kindness. I was the recipient of God's grace and they were the providers of same.

During those times of being alone while still in the presence of others who were different, I didn't get what God was doing in me and often wondered why I was placed in uncomfortable situations. I now realize that those experiences were preparing me for a greater mission God would have down the road. It took me a little time to realize that I'm built for diversity which moves the muscles of God. As such, I am drawn to people of different cultures. I embrace this unique gift. However, I now accept the reality that not everyone has that gift but are still valuable to kingdom building. I also understand that some people have experienced racism, sexism, economic deprivation and hatred so much so that they have lumped all people who aren't like them as the others. They don't mistreat them. Instead, they don't embrace them. They are

unapologetically African American and don't see the need to launch their nets out in the deep to catch whatever type of fish that may come up.

It is unfortunate because the God we serve is calling us to show others that we love God with all we have and that we love them as ourselves.⁴⁶ I'm not sure that some of us see ourselves in our foreign visitors. But I do know that in each significant moment in which we experience the love of God at our WOW service, we are brought closer to the perfect community which is found at the intersection of the two segments of the cross - where those who are reconciled with God are reconciled together.⁴⁷ Each time a visitor attends WOW and witnesses the love of Jesus Christ through small gestures of humanity, servant hood, courtesy, love, [and] honesty [which are all] gifts of God, I am forever reminded that God dwells in and smile when we are the light. While not fully embraced by the entire St. Luke community of faith, I am so thankful for the majority of believers who are committed to faith, praying and worshipping together and making a difference in the community which speaks to mission.⁴⁸ Admittedly, the WOW service is a feel good Kairos moment where the Spirit of God dwells in diversity. Yet it seemed that there was much more we ought to do in terms of world consciousness that spoke to directly helping others in dire need of things we sometimes take for granted (i.e. pens, paper, books and water).

Dr. Ngwa spoke to our growing concerns by breaking down the term "world consciousness" as it related to the local church. According to him, a person of faith ought to live out ubuntu, again meaning "I am because we are." In essence, we are connected to each other as people of God. This connection moves beyond space and time. Embracing this connectivity as a

⁴⁶ Michael J. Christensen with Carl E. Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Dan Kimble, *Church on a Mission* (The 2014 Outreach 100 Article, 2014).

church helps transform us as followers of Jesus.⁴⁹ Taking hold of our connectedness ought to cause us to carefully examine how we treat one another and how we live out the Gospel according to Dr. Ngwa. If unbuntu truly resonates, we cannot close our eyes to the weak, the poor and the oppressed. For just as God sees our lack of concern for them, God also sees and is attracted to [their] weakness.⁵⁰ If God is attracted to their weakness, we, as followers of Jesus Christ, simply cannot ignore their plight. Therefore, as people of faith, world consciousness has to mean more than what we have been doing at our local church. Our WOW service is good but we knew that it was not enough.

Dr. Ngwa further stirred our spirits by talking about the second part of his understanding of world consciousness as a professor. For him, institutions must engage students in global learning by looking beyond its borders in order to thrive as an academic community. In looking outside of our comfortable academic institutions, we would come to terms with the genuine plight of immigrants who risk their lives to make it across our border to gain abundant life in America he reasoned. If we stepped outside of our study books, we would yearn to visit those places where the oppressed live without clean water to bathe he reasoned. In connecting with an open heart, going with ready feet and serving with willing hands, we would give life to the textbooks that we study concerning world consciousness.⁵¹ Dr. Ngwa encouraged us by speaking about the urgent need of the academic world to stretch itself beyond the four corners of these

⁴⁹ Ed Stetzer, and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵¹ Mark 12:29-31; Matthew 28:9-20; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Ed Stetzer, and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 187.

institutions so that we might go, see, witness and be authentic risk takers in thought, word and deed. In essence, he was challenging us to get out of our safety net of comfort that is St. Luke if we truly want to speak to and do something about world consciousness. He further challenged us to connect our GAP prayer calls to action by doing something.

Along those lines, I lifted up the message translation of the Gospel of Matthew 5:8 for our hearing. Upon so doing, I asked Dr. Ngwa about his thoughts concerning being “blessed when we get our inside world—our mind and heart—put right.” I further asked his thoughts about the ways in which we might see God in the outside world (Matthew 5:8). Our LAC submitted this question to Dr. Ngwa prior to our call; “How might we examine our “inside world” to see the power of God in the outside world as it relates to foreign mission?” Upon reflection, Dr. Ngwa equated the words of this particular Matthean text to the word hospitality. For him, it is not commercialized hospitality but rather it is a recognition that we cannot fully function without the other person, which constitutes unbuntu. Dr. Ngwa spoke to the realization of partnerships with a foreign community which is in accord with the views of Inspector Griffin of the NYPD when he spoke of bridging the gap between law enforcement and community. For Dr. Ngwa, our inside and outside worlds connect under a Matthew 5:8 frame work when we embrace the notion that we are recipients as well as providers of God’s grace. We understood the grace of God as a committee and as individual members. More specifically, we had no idea how the Spirit of God would breathe on this project, grant us access to so many learned professionals, and clergy. They all took the time to sit and talk with us about community justice, and faith, which is not hoarded but shared⁵². Indeed, Dr. McCann is well respected and very influential in

⁵² Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Vision Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation*. (New London, CT, 23rd Publication 2007), 159.

both the academic arena and clergy world. Yet our initial talks with the people associated with this project didn't come from Dr. McCann making calls for this project. As a team, we reached out to all of these people individually. We also spoke to them about this project and its overall objectives as outlined in my prospectus. They were very excited and energized about the potentiality of a great and much needed project like this in Harlem and beyond. More telling, they really wanted to be a part of the community justice day itself! Therefore, we truly believed it was God's grace that permitted the dedicated and faithful people to rearrange their busy schedules to meet with us, share their faith stories with us, and provide substantive views and specific challenges concerning justice at home and abroad. We attributed the success of these meetings to God's grace.

We also examined the meaning of being a recipient of God's grace individually. Upon doing so, there were so many instances that we were able to recall which spoke to God's redeeming grace extended to us as Christians. One member of the LAC was hired for a job that should have gone to someone else with greater credentials. God's grace made it possible! Another member received a favorable doctor's report upon a follow-up doctor's visit through the grace of God. There was another person who received assistance for a family member who desperately needed housing accommodations by God's grace. Another member of the team was able to obtain additional scholarship assistance for a child to attend college out of state because of God's grace. The stories could have gone on and on for hours. Upon reflection, we attributed all of these many blessings to the grace of God. Dr. Ngwa helped us understand that as recipients we owed a Christian duty to be the providers of this same grace to others. This conference call served as our moral compass because it ignited us to put our justice prayers into action as we

were recipients and providers of God's grace. Accordingly, we felt compelled to show grace through action to others outside of the United States.

In that vein, the Gospel of Luke spoke to us. I read a specific passage of scripture to Dr. Ngwa for reflection.

“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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Luke 4:18-19

Being that Dr. Ngwa was from Africa, we thought he could offer firsthand knowledge and recommendations as to how we might bring Good News to our neighbors in Africa. Therefore, we talked about the ways we might proclaim release to those in captivity through our project. We also sought his insight on how St. Luke Baptist Church could respond to an identified need in a foreign country. We wanted to help but really didn't know how to help. Dr. Ngwa suggested that we reach out to other denominations in Harlem that are doing foreign mission work. He also suggested that we visit the website for the World Council of Churches for local leaders who could provide additional suggestions to us. I've since registered us and we now receive bi-weekly newsletters from the World Council on justice matters and environmental concerns. Dr. Ngwa also recommended that we look within our local church for foreign mission resources by talking with other disciples who are not from the United States but go to St. Luke. He mentioned that we might consider providing assistance to the sub-Saharan continent for young girls to help shape that future generation. He informed us that in this particular area there is a great percentage of millennials who are in need of health care, educational tools and general information on overall wellness.

We concluded our conference call by listening to Dr. Ngwa provide an account of a foreign mission experience and its impact on his spirit as a professor. In response, he spoke passionately about his trip to Ghana in January of 2015. Dr. Ngwa talked about holistic living. He believes that churches whose focus is on mind, body and spirit are the thriving ones. He specifically asked us; “Is there a balm in Gilead?” He then asked; “Is there a balm in our community?” Dr. Ngwa challenged us to critically think about the reasons why were so many of God’s people are sick socially, economically, and spiritually. He recommended that we act out our justice prayers and do something. When we told him about the 2016 Community Justice Day project. He commended and reasoned that this project serves as an excellent way to start doing something. Dr. Ngwa further encouraged us to stay the course with this revolutionary project for our community and beyond. We were so encouraged by Dr. Ngwa’s thought provoking questions, guidance and recommendations. The call with him also ignited us to move forward and perhaps plan another foreign mission trip to Ghana. The conference call meeting ended at 2:00 pm with Deaconess H. Cofield closing us out in prayer. The thought of St. Luke returning to Ghana was a long-term goal. For now, however, our planning phase continued as we had another conference call with Reverend Dr. DeForest Soaries on January 19, 2016.

When the LAC met with Reverend Dr. Soaries, we knew that his feedback concerning world consciousness would be more focused on the role of the church as he serves as the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey. In that capacity, his “pastoral ministry focuses on spiritual growth, educational excellence, economic empowerment and faith-based community development.” With that understanding in mind, we submitted in advance the same questions to him as we did for Dr. Ngwa. However, our expectation was that the responses from Dr. Soaries would be more concentrated on strategies

for church growth by internally examining our resources. Deacon Sadler opened our meeting by reading about the compassion of Jesus Christ as found in the Gospel of Matthew 9:35-38. I then lead us in a community driven prayer which worked in concert with the selected biblical text.

By way of background, we learned that Dr. Soaries is a much sought after teacher, preacher and guest lecturer in the areas of finance and church growth.

Dr. Soaries, Jr. is the author of “dfree™ Breaking Free from Financial Slavery,” which was published in February and was also the focus of the third installment of CNN’s Black in America documentary “Almighty Debt,” which aired Oct. 21, 2010. From Jan. 12, 1999 to Jan. 15, 2002, Dr. Soaries served as New Jersey’s 30th Secretary of State making him the first African-American male to serve as a constitutional officer of the state. Dr. Soaries is also the former chairman of the United States Election Assistance Commission. This commission was established by Congress to implement the “Help America Vote Act” of 2002. Dr. Soaries was appointed by The President of the United States on Dec. 15, 2003 after being confirmed by the United States Senate. He is also special advisor to His Majesty the Okyenhene (King) of the Akyem Abuaka Traditional Kingdom in Ghana, Osageyfu Amoatia Ofori Panin II.

Dr. Soaries earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Fordham University, a Master of Divinity Degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from United Theological Seminary. He has also received six honorary Doctorate degrees from institutions of higher learning. He was recently recognized by the both houses of the New Jersey Legislature for his religious and community leadership. His work has been featured in several publications including the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Ebony Magazine, and Black Enterprise. Born in New York and raised in New Jersey, Dr. Soaries resides in Monmouth Junction, New Jersey with his family.

FBC- Lincoln Gardens
FBCsomerset.com

As Dr. Soaries was just returning from a hectic schedule but was firmly committed to having this meeting with us, I chose not to utilize the full hour. In moments like this, the prepared questions served as a valuable tool. I zeroed in on those specific questions and we conducted a shorter meeting with him. Moreover, we were having some technical difficulties with the dial-in access code and the call was dropped a few times. Once we got it all together, the meeting proved to be beneficial. Dr. Soaries pushed against defining this particular focus area as

world consciousness. Instead he opted to call it “global ministry” for the local church. His rationale was that members of the church who are not from the United States would not have a frame of reference in talking about the southern parts of this country. He believed that we must move away from celebrating the “black church” as the traditional group of black folk that are solely from southern part of the United States who migrated up north. He challenged us to become more global minded in our thinking for this project. His position was that congregations are vastly changing to include people from the African Diaspora which represents the fastest growing church in the United States. To reach others more effectively, he would look within the church itself and utilize those resources. Along that line of thinking, Rev. Dr. Soaries suggested that we celebrate the Independence Day for the countries of the various members of St. Luke who aren’t from the United States. He, like Dr. Ngwa, suggested that we reach from within to identify a need outside of the United States and meet that need by way of a local church member. In so doing, Dr. Soaries believed that St. Luke we would be meeting an evangelistic need as well as building our church infrastructure. Dr. Soaries briefly talked about how his church ministered to the victims of Haiti and Hurricane Katrina. They did so by connecting with church members from those areas and personally travelling to Haiti to take goods and financial support directly to those identified groups of people of the local church member. He concluded his thoughts about global ministry by referencing a part of Galatian 6:10 which read to “do good to all men especially those within the household of faith.” Our conference call concluded at 2:34 pm with Rev. E. Goins praying for justice.

We always looked for a takeaway from these meetings and reflected on how the recommendations might be beneficial not only to the 2016 Community Justice Day but to our church as a whole. With respect to our meeting with Dr. Soaries, we were able to recollect a

ministry event where we celebrated the variety of foods from the countries of the disciples of St. Luke. We did so by hosting a food tasting event where we would go to each table and sample the dishes that each disciple prepared. It was our way of celebrating those members who were not from the United States as well having some delicious food, great fun and awesome fellowship. However, the Independence Day suggestion offered by Dr. Soaries is more transforming because radical change is the heart of the Christian message. It demonstrates the power of the gospel to change St. Luke and our community.⁵³ By highlighting and celebrating the Independence Day of others who worship with us, we would be acting out radical hospitality. In addition, we would be embracing difference as well as educating ourselves about what it took to gain freedom which we sometimes take for granted in the United States. It further shows our members that we stand in solidarity with and recognize all that they have experienced in the name of liberation. It further cements a bond of connection and grows our church.

We also took to heart his suggestion to search within our ministry context to find out how we might meet a need in a foreign county. Along those lines, we reached out to DeLorenzo Sampson of Thessalonía Baptist Church for an early dinner on February 6, 2016. St. Luke has an established history with Mrs. Sampson as she is the mother-in-law to our pastor, Dr. McCann. Her late husband, Reverend Dr. Shellie Sampson, was a graduate of Drew Seminary, a mentor to Dr. McCann and the senior pastor of Thessalonía Baptist Church. Dr. Sampson was a humble servant who always took the time to help seminarians. In fact, The Drew Seminary has an academic scholarship jointly named in his and Dr. McCann's honor. I am also connected to the Sampson family as I attended Drew Seminary with Mrs. Sampson's son, Reverend Malobe Sampson. He is now the pastor at Thessalonía. In addition, Mrs. Sampson is the co-founder and

⁵³ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 1.

Director of African Initiative Mission (“AIM”). We learned more about her work in AIM prior to our dinner meeting at Tsion’s Ethiopian Restaurant in Harlem.

AIM commenced operations in Ghana, West Africa in January 2003, under the leadership of Pastor Malobe Sampson. In their short tenure, AIM has provided critical health, education and community sustainability support services to marginalized Ghanaians living in underdeveloped villages and towns. In the beginning of the operation AIM simply wanted to help people who were suffering and dying. They understood that Christ’s Love was demonstrated, more often than verbalized. Therefore, AIM set out to provide practical help for communities suffering in extreme poverty [irrespective of their faith or tradition.] AIM simply wanted to love them through action. As a true love laborer, Mrs. Sampson makes a yearly mission trip to Ghana to meet the identified needs of the young women living over there. She, along with members of AIM, serve by being on the ground, face to face with hurting communities, putting the resources directly into needed areas.

African Initiative Ministry
www.aimmission.org

We were initially meeting at Tsion’s for tea and dessert. However, once we got there, we were so impressed with display of food that we decided to have an early dinner instead. This was an intimate setting with 4 members of our LAC present. This smaller gathering worked very well as Mrs. Sampson’s husband recently passed away and we were mindful of the need to be warm but not too pushy. Keeping the group small and letting her talk with us as she was moved was much better than a larger group of 12 inquisitive people. Moreover, Mrs. Sampson knew the 3 members of the LAC for well over 10 years. I was the new kid on the block so to speak. As was our custom, Deacon Sadler led us in a community prayer and Deacon Baynes read a passage of scripture about justice. Our LAC co-chair, Servant Leader Brown, organized the time, place and setting for this meeting. For three of us, this marked our first time eating at an Ethiopian restaurant which boasted a very diverse set of customers that particular day.

As the majority were familiar with one another, I sat back and listened to them talk about worshipping together, a prior trip to Ghana and life. Mrs. Sampson laughed and discussed how

the yearly mission trip changed the lives of the young people who went with her. She also talked about how grateful the people were to receive items that are customary to us (book bags, pens, pencils, and toiletries). We were so moved by her sincerity about the plight of young people in Ghana. From her, we learned that the people are extremely poor and lack adequate health care coverage. In addition, she gave us specific types of aide that are sorely needed in Ghana (health insurance, food, undergarments, tee shirts, flip flops). She also recommended that if we were to provide specific tangible items, we would need to give them to AIM at least two months in advance of their expected arrival date. AIM usually goes to Ghana in August and ships the goods there in advance. Mrs. Sampson also noted that Ghana has greatly developed over the past 20 years and that some hotel fees are just as expensive as those in New York City. She also informed us that sometimes she purchases the items directly in Ghana as opposed to shipping them in advance. In doing so, the people are able to make a direct profit and live a little better. Ms. Sampson challenged us to go with her on AIM's next mission trip to Ghana in 2017 and to bring our young people. She told us that if they went to Ghana with AIM, it would change their lives forever. Mrs. Sampson believed that they would gain a much deeper appreciation for humanity. It would also help them understand world consciousness through interaction with other young people in Ghana who have nothing. She shared a story with us of how one teenager from the United States gave all of his clothes to another young person in Ghana and returned home with nothing but the clothes on his back. However, he became a more mature Christian because of his heartfelt need to do something and help another young person who had nothing. He did it right on the spot without prompting from an adult. This young person was transformed by what he witnessed and so moved to act. He showed compassion for another human being. Finally, Mrs. Sampson agreed to go with us on our environmental tour in March and to send her

daughter-in-law to do a presentation concerning AIM for our community justice day. Our dinner meeting ended with Deacon Baynes praying for justice. Those of us who went to dinner with Mrs. Sampson would share our experiences with the team in another week or so. We still had two more meetings to conduct as it related to world consciousness. Our next one was with Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Alvesta Wright on February 23, 2016.

Admittedly, there was some nervousness on our parts at the thought of having a meeting with Dr. Wright. He is the pastor emeritus of Chicago's historic Trinity United Church of Christ. He also served as the pastor and spiritual advisor to President Barak Obama from 1998 to 2008. In addition to that, we learned that he was a cardiopulmonary technician at the National Naval Medical Center where he cared for President Lyndon B. Johnson. He earned both his masters and bachelor's degrees from Howard University. He also earned another master's degree from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Finally, Dr. Wright earned his doctor of ministry degree from the United Theological College. There was so much more to him than serving in the religious arena. Dr. Wright has authored four books and was regarded as a premier preacher in 1993 by Ebony magazine.⁵⁴

With all his education and experience the thing that allayed our anxiousness in meeting Dr. Wright was his humility and sincere desire to help us. After our meetings, the LAC sent thank you letters to the invited guests for meeting with us. In the case of Dr. Wright, he sent a thank you message to me for meeting with him in the first instance. I was a student in a class taught by Dr. Wright in 2008. I wasn't sure if he would have remembered me being that it was several years ago at Drew Seminary. However, when I reached out to him about our project, he was very accommodating and remembered. Again, we sent him the same questions as we

⁵⁴ <https://trinitychicago.org>; www.biography.com/.../jeremiah-a-wright

submitted to Dr. Ngwa and to Dr. Soaries in advance of our meeting. After Dr. McCann greeted Dr. Wright and thanked him for agreeing to meet with us, Servant Leader Kelly took the lead by reading the Beatitudes and praying. We wanted to make sure that we stayed on track with respect to the one hour allotted time Dr. Wright gave us. Therefore, Rev. Goins served as a timekeeper.

Our meeting began with Dr. Wright sharing his understanding of what it meant to be climbing companions with Jesus Christ as we seek to tear down injustice (Matthew 5:1-2). He didn't mince words and gave us his views without hesitation. Dr. Wright told us that if we want to be climbing companions of Christ we must go where Christ would go and do the things Christ would do! He spoke about how the Jesus Christ of the bible would go into the ghettos, the barrios, the HIV clinics, and stand on the street corners where the prostitutes were. He reasoned that some churches are too busy worrying about bake sales for a pastor's anniversary and ignoring the fact that a woman felt compelled to sell her body or dance in the strip club in order to feed her child. For him, Jesus Christ would be concerned about the injustice shown to that woman as opposed to simply celebrating a pastoral anniversary. Dr. Wright reasoned that Jesus Christ would stop his busy schedule to go out and care for those on the outskirts of society. Jesus Christ would go out, get them and bring them into the fold. He would not sit down to eat until they were fed (1 Samuel 16:11). Ministry is meeting the needs of the people as per Dr. Wright.

We were compelled to act when he spoke of the immediate need for us to see God move through legislation for the oppressed. According to Dr. Wright, we ought not sit and wait for laws to be passed to protect the most vulnerable in our community. According to him, our justice mindset must ignite us so much so that we would draft laws to feed the poor, protect the widowed and show compassion for oppressed because that's what Jesus would do. In addition, he spoke to liberation of the mind by urging us to set aside church tradition where folks feel like

they cannot touch the preacher. Dr. Wright challenged us to walk where God walks as we searched for community justice through this project. This call catapulted us into thinking beyond our mundane church activities. It also allowed us to critically think about if we have made an impact on those people in our community where St. Luke is located. The prostitutes, transvestites, homeless people, drug addicted persons and foreigners are right in our backyard waiting for us to show the love of Jesus Christ and to meet their needs. Our talk with Dr. Wright made us take a hard look inwardly to determine if we were climbing companions of the Gospel (Matthew 5:1-2). Dr. Wright also made us understand that “those people” are “our people” as disciples of Christ. They are a part of our community. And with that revelation, the meeting with Dr. Wright ended. Rev. Goins closed this meeting in a prayer that spoke to God maintaining justice for the poor (Psalm 140:12).

Reverend Dr. Dale T. Irvin complemented the views of Dr. Wright and added another dimension as an Anglo-American male who spoke to white privilege. On February 25, 2016, we met with Dr. Irvin, the president of New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). Dr. Irvin has a very impressive background yet calmness and humility springs forth upon meeting him. He was very approachable which set the right atmosphere for a conversation with a learned companion as opposed to a president.

Dr. Irvin obtained his BA from Thomas Edison State College. His masters in divinity came from Princeton Theological Seminary. He also received a PhD from Union Theological Seminary. He serves as president and professor of world Christianity at NYTS. He is an ordained minister for the American Baptist Churches, USA and worships at the historic Riverside Church in New York City. He has authored several books and wrote many chapters on Christianity, mission and evangelism.

New York Theological Seminary
www.nyts.edu

Like Dr. Wright, the views of Dr. Irvin were straightforward and spoke to racism and white privilege. Just as our conversation with Dr. Wright ignited us, the meeting with Dr. Irvin was powerful for many reasons. We began by reflecting on the outcome of the O.J. Simpson trial many years ago. The opinions differed based on race. More specifically, a great majority of African Americans felt vindicated when O.J. Simpson was found not guilty for the double homicides of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. Yet the media depicted the majority of Anglo-Americans as being angry that the judicial system set a guilty man free. Dr. Irvin spoke to white privilege and openly admitted that in this day and age, he understands why some folks are glad that they are Anglo-Americans. To have him admit that there is such a thing as white privilege and that racism is real actually made us more comfortable sharing our views with him about police brutality at the hands of white officers against black males. Dr. Irvin opened the door to a conversation on how we might speak to those demons to become light in seemingly dark communities. He also spoke to the change in Harlem and how we have to come to terms with the demographic changes that includes what he called “white people.”

The First View 2012 was a very useful resource for this part of our meeting. Based upon the study area definition for our church, Anglo-Americans are projected to be the fastest growing racial ethnic group close to the church who make up 25% of the population. The data also shows that they are expected to grow by 9.7% between 2012 and 2017. Moreover, the generational group that is most apparent is the millennial group who are between the ages of 11 and 30 and make up 38% of the population. However, the survivors, who range between the ages of 31 to 51, are not that far behind. They contribute to 31% of the population. Furthermore, the family structure is extremely non-traditional having 58% of the population listed as single, never married. The educational levels are somewhat high with 25% of the population having post

graduate degrees. Additionally, the lifestyles within our area are ethnic/urban diversity with 39% of the population being listed as African American.⁵⁵ Finally, with respect to faith preferences, the data reveals that the church is nestled within a somewhat traditional Christian community where the potential for giving is extremely low based upon the average household income of \$55,310 per year.⁵⁶

This revelation of this data resulted in more discussions with Dr. Irvin about how we could grow St. Luke which would include the very people we see abusing black males, namely white people. In listening to our discussions with Dr. Irvin, I was reminded that diversity is a foretaste of heaven. It is God's dream here and now.⁵⁷ However, if we were to accept the projected outcome of First View 2012, it would call for St. Luke to begin to think about ways in which the church could reach out to Anglo-Americans who are expected to grow by 9.7% by 2017. Therein lies tension because 39% of the community is African American who prefer traditional black church services. Yet the data reveals that African Americans are not projected to be the fastest growing population. Dr. Irvin offered some recommendations that were akin to the sentiments expressed by Dr. Ngwa, Dr. Soaries, Mrs. Sampson and Dr. Wright. In short, he called us to action. Dr. Irvin said we speak to the demons of racism by calling it out, working within the system, and by advocating with white people who want to partner with us to destroy the demon that is discrimination. He challenged us to be radical about the love of God and incorporate white people into the life of the church. Like Bass, Dr. Irvin realized that when radical hospitality rises up in a spiritual community and forms people of faith, church growth is

⁵⁵ 2012 Precept Group, Inc., www.preceptgroup.com; "First-View 2012" at p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), 156.

at hand.⁵⁸ Admittedly, this is no easy task for it requires us to own our truth that we may not be as welcoming to Anglo Americans as we ought as Christians. Accordingly, Dr. Irvin helped us realize that church growth involves pain, hospitality, tradition, wisdom, and Christianity.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), 42.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 284.

CHAPTER 4 OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PHASE CONTINUES

More Digging: Part Two

Eco-Justice

We need always to keep in mind that, for believers in Jesus Christ, the Word of God who became man for our sake, “the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.” The ecological crisis thus summons us to a profound spiritual conversion: Christians are called to “an ecological conversion whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.” For “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”

Pope Francis’ letter to
Cardinals Koch and
Turkson.⁶⁰

The sentiments of Pope Francis can be placed in conversation with the views of Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit who serves as the General Secretary to the World Council of Churches. Dr. Tveit once said that “God does not abandon creation and that we ourselves can become beacons of that hope by sowing the seeds of a future filled with justice and peace – also with the Earth.” when examining our ministry context, we have abandoned creation due to our lack of understanding about the connection between God, humanity and planet earth. Indeed, we pick up garbage along the intersections of East 130th Street and Park Avenue where St. Luke is located. True enough, we encourage others to recycle and to become more conscious of trash all around our church boarders. However, we are not connecting our mission as Christians to environmental stewardship and to God. Moreover, some of our views about environmental justice were limited because of our lack of knowledge about the ecological crisis within our very own backyard. Therefore, we couldn’t fully understand the importance of being protectors of God’s handiwork

⁶⁰ The beloved and contemporary Holy Father, Pope Francis, serves as the Bishop of Rome and leader of the Vatican City. He is our 266th and current Pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

which also included the earth. We needed to become better educated about the ecological challenges of Harlem. Thus, we felt compelled to witness environmental growth so that an ecological conversion might occur. Accordingly, travelling outside of St. Luke to witness the worldly realities in Harlem was sure to help us gain a greater understanding of nature being intimately associated with God. Because the ecological crisis is dear to God's heart, it cannot be "an optional aspect of our Christian experience." As disciples of Christ, environmental stewardship is an integral part of that experience.

Just as spiritual conversion is a process which doesn't happen overnight, an ecological conversion would take time. I view it as a journey which requires communion with scripture, research of our environmental context, and discussions about "an encounter with Christ as it relates to the world around us." More importantly, an ecological conversion must be experienced. As an advisory committee, we studied relevant scripture which spoke to our connectivity to God and to the environment (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 24:1).⁶¹ We also sought help from an organization in Manhattan that centered on environmental justice matters. In our quest, we met James Burke on December 3, 2015. He is the director of membership for We Act for Environmental Justice.⁶²

I spoke with James on the telephone prior to our meeting. When I explained the objectives of our 2016 Community Justice Day Project, he was very excited and wanted to meet us. Due to my inquisitive nature, I researched the officers of We Act. I wanted to see who they were and find out about them. In doing so, I knew that James Burke was a young white male

⁶¹ Genesis 1:26 reads: Then God said, "...let them have dominion over all the earth..." Psalm 24:1 reads: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

⁶² We Act is a Northern Manhattan community-based organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and/or low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices (weact.org.).

who would be meeting our LAC which was comprised of black millennials and baby boomers who were seeking information about our environment and justice. I didn't inform the group of the nationality of James. I only advised them of his position and provided some general information about We Act. When he arrived, there was a slight apprehension in the atmosphere upon seeing him. I'm not sure but perhaps some of the team simply assumed that we would be meeting with a black person as we were seeking information about eco-justice in our community. Yet, we had to be reminded of the demographic findings in First-View and of our new multi-generational and multicultural community.⁶³ Harlem was changing. Again, the data revealed that Anglo-Americans are projected to be the fastest growing racial ethnic group close to the church and make up 25% of the population. The data also showed that they are expected to grow by 9.7% between 2012 and 2017. Moreover, the generational group that is most prevalent in our area is millennials between the ages of 11 and 30 years old. They comprise 38% of the new Harlem community. Given that data, it was not surprising that James worked for We Act and came to St. Luke to talk about eco-justice and environmental issues in Harlem. It was now his community too! Furthermore, we had to embrace the reality of a new Harlem which included James and others who were not black. We also had to stretch out of our familiar world and lean into what James had to say not only about Harlem but about himself.

His transformation story moved James into action at We Act. After being introduced by our other co-chair, Deacon C. Green, James shared his journey on becoming more eco-conscious and politically aware of the issues that impacted the world. He spoke of being from another state and of moving to New York. Next, James talked about being energized by then presidential candidate, Barak Obama, in 2008. I remember James speaking of how President Obama ignited a social and political consciousness which motivated him to do something. This notion of doing

⁶³ 2012 Precept Group, Inc., www.preceptgroup.com; "First-View 2012."

something was the same sentiment that Dr. Ngwa impressed upon us when we met with him on January 6, 2016. James did something. If I remember correctly, James voted in a presidential election for the first time when President Obama ran for office. Given the progressive and oftentimes radical agenda of President Obama and his multicultural appeal with many millennials, it was not surprising that James embraced Harlem.

Once James shared some of his personal growth journey, he then discussed some of the great work of We Act. Upon listening, we realized that We Act responded to the ecological crisis that Pope Francis mentioned in his letter to the cardinals. James told us that climate change, social inequality, Hurricane Sandy, and building a democracy for clean energy were all important matters that We Act adopted with respect to environmental advocacy. Moreover, we learned that these issues are all a part of the ecological crisis in New York.

James raised another important factor during our meeting. He spoke about how these ecological issues disproportionality impacts low-income communities in Harlem. These issues become matters of justice James reasoned. More specifically, he mentioned that residents of New York pay the second highest for energy prices in the country under the data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. In paying the second highest amount for energy prices, the poor and disenfranchised are more likely to have their lights turned off due to nonpayment. Furthermore, they are more likely to have limited access to other costly necessities because of the increased energy prices and limited resources (i.e. healthcare, food). To help remedy this matter, We Act worked in partnership with other environmental groups. Collectively they work to improve cleaner, safer and more affordable renewable energy resources (i.e. wind, solar, geothermal, etc.). James also told us that We Act is a member of the Energy Efficiency for All Coalition. As

a member, We Act stands in partnership with the state and community leaders to develop renewable energy and efficiency improvements for Harlem residents and beyond.⁶⁴

Next, James spoke about the campaigns that are currently underway at We Act.⁶⁵ There were other initiatives James spoke of which seemed to have more of an immediate impact on our community. It can be summed up in one word; employment! More specifically, James spoke about the Green Jobs Initiative of We Act. Borrowing from Inspector Griffith and Pastor Harper's partnership recommendations, James mentioned that We Act works in conjunction with the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSECJ). In doing so, We Act and DSECJ help Harlem residents by training them in the hazardous waste field. Once the participants of this apprenticeship program have finished, they receive a certificate which is a major factor in securing employment in that field. The good news is that this program is offered to Harlem residents for free!

Another project initiative that We Act sponsors is the Environmental Health and Justice Leadership Training (EHJLT). This 8-week program centers on environmental justice and advocacy. Participants in the EHJLT receive a certificate of completion in local, national, global environmental matters.⁶⁶ These initiatives have a direct benefit to the residents of Harlem in securing employment. Yet their involvement goes much deeper than obtaining gainful employment. In addition to working, the residents are exercising stewardship over the earth by helping We Act promote a cleaner environment in Harlem. And as such, they are becoming protectors of God's handiwork in Harlem.

⁶⁴ weact.org/climate.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Climate Justice, Healthy Indoor Environments, Clean Air and Sustainable Land Use are the current campaign initiatives at We Act.

⁶⁶ weact.org.

After James explained these initiatives, he gave us a map of Harlem. He explained another environmental project related to climate control as depicted on the map. More specifically, We Act has been at work on a project called “The Northern Manhattan Climate Action Plan.”⁶⁷ James told us that this project was the result of a 6-month strategic session study where We Act collaborated with other environmental groups and community leaders who researched the impact of climate control in sections of New York that were largely populated by African American and Latino residents. We learned that those specific neighborhoods included “Inwood, Washington Heights, West Harlem, Central Harlem, and East Harlem” which is where a lot of our St. Luke members reside. Moreover, the map demonstrated that “over 20% of the area’s residents live in poverty, a rate substantially greater than the rest of Manhattan’s 14% average.”⁶⁸ In addition to this information, we learned that:

Inequality across NYC is severe and increasing. 20% of all household earners control over 54% of the City’s wealth. Since 1990, the median income of the top 1% of earners grew from \$452,415 to \$716,625, while the bottom 10% of earners saw their income increase only modestly, from \$8,468 to \$9,455. This gaping wealth disparity also translates into an advantage in political power and access to resources for the wealthy. For this reason, some NYC residents are dramatically better prepared to absorb the shocks associated with climate change than others.

www.weact.org

James spoke to other disastrous effects of climate change as it creates a domino effect on residents of those specific communities due to their low income levels. To put another way, environmental injustice had a direct impact on economic injustice. He concluded this part of his presentation by taking questions and urging us to become active participants in the great works of We Act. Some of us took James up on his invitation and are now partners with We Act. In

⁶⁷ Weact.org. “Over the past several years, climate change has begun to exact a disproportionate toll on the poor and working class people of New York City. During Hurricane Sandy, marginalized communities lost homes, jobs, financial security and more at a higher rate than others. Yet, to this day, the political and economic dynamics that precipitated the worst of Sandy’s fallout have hardly changed.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

becoming community partners, we receive the WE Act monthly newsletters and attend meetings on environmental justice issues in New York. James also challenged us to speak to our elected officials about the need to invest money, time and advocacy in environmental matters and social justice issues as they interface with each other. James ended our meeting by inviting us to reach out to Charles Calloway, his other colleague at We Act. Mr. Calloway is the Community Organizing and Outreach Coordinator for We Act. James thought it would be beneficial for us to witness some of the environmental issues he talked about by having Charles arrange for us to go on an environmental tour of Harlem. This meeting concluded with Servant Leader K. Kelly praying about how blessed are those who keep justice; who practice righteousness always (Psalm 106:3)!

On March 22, 2016, the ecological crisis summoned us to be a part of an environmental tour with Charles as our tour guide. Before the tour began, Charles provided a telling overview of the ecological crisis in Harlem. Charles gave us his reasons why so many children in Harlem are sick. He talked about the release of harmful gas emissions from buses and cabs that people use to travel with children. He spoke of increased rodent infestation in many neighborhoods occupied by African Americans and Latinos. He then talked about lead based paint used in school buildings and in low-income housing residences in Harlem. Innocent children were increasingly becoming sick due to the poor air quality, rodent infestation and inadequate housing resources. They live there. They ingest the fumes daily. They attend those specific schools. We also learned that this was not the case with children who lived in more affluent areas of New York and attended better schools. Upon listening to Charles, it became clear that there was a dire need for ecological advocacy in Harlem.

As Christians, we, like Pope Francis, felt compelled to act for the life of the spirit cannot be disassociated from the body, nature or worldly realities. To be in communion with and do something about this worldly reality, we needed to go on this tour to see what has been done to heal the sick children in our community. It was at that moment that we were reminded of our conversation with Dr. Ngwa in January 2016. At that time, Dr. Ngwa spoke passionately about his trip to Ghana in January 2015. He believed that churches who focus on the mind, body and spirit are thriving communities. Dr. Ngwa talked to us about the presence of a balm in Gilead in our community. In doing so, he gently pushed us to think about the reasons why so many of God's people are sick in our community. His thought provoking dialogue goes hand in hand with the reasons why there are so many sick children in Harlem under Mr. Calloway's analysis. James provided the statistical data and mapping to show the correlation between environmental injustice, economic disparity and physical health and well-being.

When the views of these three-powerful people are placed alongside of one other, our souls were stirred. It marked the beginning of this ecological conversion that Pope Francis mentioned. However, becoming more educated about the ecological crisis was not enough to understand and embrace this type of conversion. To breathe life into an ecological conversion, we felt the need to witness the authentic problems in our community and the progress made by We Act. The committee realized that praying was not enough. We needed to put our public prayers into action as there was an urgent need to tackle the ecological crisis in Harlem.⁶⁹ With that realization, our tour began by visiting the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot on Lenox Avenue in Harlem which re-opened on January 4, 2015.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *seasonofcreation.org*.

⁷⁰ Clara McBride Hale was affectionally known as Mother Hale. She resided in New York, NY until the time of her death on 12/18/92. Mother Hale was a mother to many drug addicted children. She even opened the Hale House Center for these precious but unwanted children in Harlem.

It was initially built as a trolley in 1890 and then reconstructed in 1939 as a bus depot. In 1990, the depot was renovated and named the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot in 1993.⁷¹ As we drove to the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot, we learned that the depot before us was the result of collaboration between We Act, the community, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and government officials. However, this newfound community partnership didn't start out that way. We were told that We Act was in litigation with the MTA because the depot was erected in Northern Manhattan which resulted in an increase of pollution in the environment. In fact, a campaign slogan was prevalent at that time. It was called the "dirty diesel campaign." Folks began to say; "If you live uptown, breathe at your own risk."⁷² Charles told us that the lawsuit was settled when the MTA agreed to work with We Act and others to tear down, and reconstruct this \$262 million-dollar depot to make it more environmentally sound.⁷³ This process took 8 years to complete. It required drafting and redrafting of environmental impact plans. It was also the result of creating a community task force to be a part of the process.⁷⁴ Charles told us that for environmental justice to happen effectively, it is so important for the community to be a part of the process for change as opposed to reacting to change.

In looking at this beautiful depot, we were amazed at the colorful art work which the community took a part in creating. Moreover, we learned that this new depot has 120 buses but can hold up to 150. We also learned that the newly constructed depot placed a strong emphasis on remedial measures for the environment. In addition to that, we learned more from the MTA.

The final result includes LEED certification; a green roof that uses plants to cool the facility, absorbs CO₂ from the air, and reduces storm-water runoff; thermal insulation to save energy and reduce emissions; a solar wall that serves as a passive heating device; rainwater collection for water treatment to wash buses;

⁷¹ www.mta.info.

⁷² www.weact.org

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ www.weact.org.

cost-effective and energy efficient Heat Recovery Units on the roof for a heat exchanger and; a high efficiency white roof that will prevent heat gain in warmer weather, but will not reflect light onto nearby buildings or cause glare.

www.mta.info.

After we left the Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot, we were very grateful to We Act, the MTA and the community for taking such major efforts to ensure that our community was a more health environment. As we were driving away, we also realized that environmental stewardship is a Christian responsibility as well as a moral one.⁷⁵ Yet our ecological conversion didn't stop there. Charles took us to West 145th Street because there was a major problem with rodent infestation and trash all over the neighborhood. True enough, organizations like We Act are there to advocate for our community. However, we also realized that each resident of the community must exercise moral responsibility to look after and care for the community. In other words, pick up the trash!

As I write, I'm reflecting on some actions of the people in this area of Harlem which made me angry and sad at the same time. While on tour, I saw people just throw the trash right out of their hands onto the ground when a garbage can was nearby. It appeared to be customary because more than one person did the same thing with their trash within that short period. I was a little disheartened about the conscious lack of concern for the environment by the very people living or working in it. Yet there is Good News! Charles explained the beautification process of this area to us. It required partnership and ownership. We Act worked in conjunction with the Department of Sanitation to place new environmentally sound garbage cans all along West 145th Street. The new and improved trash cans were much better at preventing rodents from escaping. These trash cans trapped them inside. By simply replacing the old trash cans with the new ones, the rodent infestation problem was greatly reduced. Next, the community began to take

⁷⁵ info@freenfaith.org

ownership in their neighbored by placing little flower beds around the small artificial trees throughout the entire block. It made the area look much better and more environmentally sound with the plants. With much prayer, perhaps some will put their trash in the new garbage cans as well. I remain hopeful.

After we left this area, we travelled to the West Harlem Piers Park of which Riverbank State Park belonged.⁷⁶ We went there because this beautiful area sits on top of a raw sewerage plant. We were told that the original plan was to construct the plant near Chelsea Piers but the residents banded together and stopped those plans. The next plan was to push the plant to West 59th Street. However, due to the influence of then business mogul, Donald J. Trump, those plans were thwarted. While the engineers received approval to construct this plant in Northern Manhattan, it came with some concessions. Again, We Act, Percy Sutton and several other community advocates screamed very loud and worked together with elected officials for the creation of the West Harlem Piers Park. This area provides opportunities for recreational activities and communion with nature. After much planning and community participation, the Riverbank State Park opened in 1992. It boasts an ice skating rink, a swimming pool and many outdoor activities for the community. I even took my son and a few of his friends there to celebrate his birthday last year. It is a wonderful, state of the art facility that was birthed through environmental advocacy and justice initiatives. Our tour continued.

Next, we went to West 138th Street and 12th Avenue to an area referred to as “Jenny’s Garden.” It was named after environmental activist, Jenny Benitez.⁷⁷ Charles referred to this area

⁷⁶ “In 1998, WE ACT partnered with NYC Community Board 9 to organize the Harlem-on-the-River Project. Our goal was to engage community leaders and residents in developing a community-driven plan that would both increase access to the Harlem waterfront and raise interest in one of Northern Manhattan’s neglected neighborhoods (www.weact.org).”

⁷⁷ Ms. Benitez is the North Park Outreach Coordinator for the Riverside Park Conservancy (ediblemanhattan.com).

as a small urban farm which was nestled underneath the Westside Highway. This area was very easy to miss and you had to intentionally seek out Jenny's Garden to find it. This area was once a place for drugged addicted people to reside and in some instances, die. However, once the NYPD and the community cleaned up this area, Jenny saw it as open which was ripe for planting seeds to harvest. This area was once called the Riverside Valley Community Garden. Due to the major efforts of Ms. Benitez, this area is now referred to as Jenny's Garden. She prepares the soil so that God can do amazing things in the midst and the residents are counting on it.⁷⁸ Jenny spends half of her time between here and the Dominican Republic by planting the seeds and then returning during harvest time. She provides fresh fruits and vegetables to 70-80 people for free. They come back year after year during harvest time to receive these nutritious foods. This one small act of environmental advocacy by one person transformed a depressed area in Harlem to a thriving community that truly feeds the hungry as scripture requires (Matthew 25:35).⁷⁹

Our tour ended on a note of continued environmental advocacy as it had begun. Charles took us to the Marine Transfer Station on West 135th Street. It appeared to be a dumping ground and it was closed. However, he shared the environmental advocacy story with us. After listening, we appreciated the fact that this facility remains closed. Had the plans been approved, this station would have contributed to even greater air pollution from diesel combustion which would have had a disastrous impact on the residents of Harlem who live nearby. Due to the advocacy efforts of We Act, other environmental partners, and the community, the mayor decided against reopening the Station. However, it is a situation that requires continued monitoring and environmental advocacy.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How To Stop 'Doing Church' and Start Being the Church Again*. (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2009) 159.

⁷⁹ I was hungry and you gave me something to eat (Matthew 25:35).

⁸⁰ weact.org/press_advisories/2004.

As we rode back to St. Luke, we talked about all that we experienced in the name of eco-justice and advocacy. Most of us didn't know about Jenny's Garden, Moreover, some had heard about the creation of the new bus depot but didn't know the environmental advocacy efforts that were taken to build it. As we talked on our way back, I believe the ecological conversion was in process. We realized that the other areas of our 2016 Community Justice Day were very important (i.e. law enforcement relations, unity and world consciousness). However, we also saw the need to marry environmental stewardship with those other areas of this project. Furthermore, our interactions with James Burke and Charles Calloway moved us to become more involved with environmental matters. We were able to see the direct correlation between economic injustice and environmental disparities in the community. Again, we realized that an ecological conversion, like a spiritual one, is a continued growth process. Yet our eyes were open as were our hearts and minds to the environmental justice issues in Harlem. And as a result, some of us became partners with We Act by attending more of their community meetings. Others registered to receive newsletters from the World Council of Churches and GreenFaith. Others became a part of the community board meetings for specific areas which marked a new beginning in our ecological conversion.

CHAPTER 5 OUR THEOLOGICAL COMPONENT

How is God speaking?
Faith is shared not hoarded.⁸¹

Nowhere else do the sentiments of Bill Huebsch’s words ring more true than now. Faith is shared not hoarded.⁸² While true, we also came to a biblical truth. We need to place the Word of God at the center of this project. More specifically, scripture holds that “in everything you do, put God first, and [God] will direct you and crown your efforts with success” (Proverbs 3:6). We acknowledged that it is so easy to get caught up in the planning of a successful event and bypass the theological component of it all. God wants to speak to us. However, once we become fixated on schedules, meetings, reports and strategic implementation score cards, we could miss the divine opportunity of reflecting and then talking about God’s purpose for us in ministry and for our community. To prevent this from happening, we felt the need to stop and share our faith journey thus far. Therefore, we had a theological moment in time *before* the 2016 Community Justice Day to reflect, meditate, and talk with each other and to God about justice, ministry, community and love. If we gave it a moment, we knew that God would speak to us. And we, like Samuel, needed to listen (1 Samuel 3:10).⁸³

Indeed, the LAC had been at work strategically planning for this project which we knew would be successful. However, a successful event does not necessarily translate into lives being changed and transformational newness springing forth because of it. Recognizing this important fact, we intentionally carved out some necessary time to reach back to selected scripture and feel

⁸¹ Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Vision Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation*. (New London, CT, 23rd Publication 2007), 49.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ “The Lord came and stood there, calling as at other times, “Samuel, Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10).

God speak to us. We needed God to guide our understanding once new people came to the church for the project and for salvation. In this reaching back moment, I was reminded that a transformed community must welcome new people into the fellowship of conversation.⁸⁴ And while we ought to seek new people into the fold, I also felt a tugging need to sit with the existing fold and engage them a little more. I wanted them to talk to me about how they viewed God's call for them, for our community, for strangers and for the project. In that tugging moment, I understood the importance of asking profoundly different questions and listening to their stories of the old Harlem and the connectedness of the community.⁸⁵ This reflective moment was a necessary part of our faith journey for justice. Moreover, it required us to discuss our designated biblical texts and to rest in them *before* the 2016 Community Justice Day occurred.

In talking with the foundational disciples of the LAC, I noticed that they told stories of the good old days at church and in Harlem. During those times, everybody knew one another on a more intimate level. People weren't afraid to ask for and receive help from each other. These older members placed God at the center of the conversation to shape their focus on love, fellowship and change.⁸⁶ On the other hand, I found that the younger disciples wanted to love God more but their environment shaped them in such a way that they didn't fully recognize God's presence in their circumstances. They didn't fully connect the church to their individuated happenings. Questions resonated. What did the church have to do with their lights being turned off? How might the church stop a child from running away again? Is St. Luke responsible for putting food on their tables? How could they give tithes and offerings when rent is due and tuition is late? These profound inquiries permeated the minds of the younger LAC disciples. In

⁸⁴ Alan J. Roxenburg and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: A Leadership Network Publication - Jossey-Bass, 2006) 180.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

their minds, the church had nothing to do with their daily issues. Accordingly, some of them possessed an unwillingness to learn the internal language of St. Luke for these things took precedence.⁸⁷ Work responsibilities, school, shelter, marriages, divorces, single-parent households, scratching and surviving, and simply living pay check to pay check outweighed communion with God, one another, the church and the community. Yet God will perfect those things concerning them (Psalm 138:8). It's just that they didn't realize it.

Our pause break for theological reflection helped us understand the many ways in which God was speaking to all disciples in our LAC. Moreover, we are all learners on this journey together.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the justice scriptures drew us closer together as a team. More importantly, the pause moment gave us time to simply breathe. What I have discovered in this faith walk is that sometimes you need a moment to just stop and just relax in God and with one another. We were about to do something big that had never been done before at St. Luke. We were on the verge of hosting this major event in the life of the church and all kinds of trepidation set in at the same time. Some of the speakers couldn't make it because we had to change the date for the event. Moreover, a few needed to have their presentation times switched due to other events happening in their lives. Furthermore, some of the disciples of the LAC had family issues and serious health challenges occurring while planning this ministry event. However, we didn't know about these things because we were so busy being busy with the planning of this project. I knew I needed a moment because of my personality type as the leader. I recognized that I'm very detailed oriented and have issues with shifting. When unanticipated changes occur for established plans, I tend to get overwhelmed. St. Luke is a very busy church and many times my

⁸⁷ Alan J. Roxenburg and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: A Leadership Network Publication - Jossey-Bass, 2006) 23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

dates for meetings got changed because of pressing ministry events in the life of the church. One time a date got changed which was a small thing in retrospect. However, at the time the date got changed, I was exhausted, felt defeated and wanted to give up. There was just so many other things going on in my life and this one date change seemed cataclysmic. It was at that moment that I reached out to Deacon L. Sadler, shared my frustrations and she told me to get the team together for prayer. I needed to feel strengthened by them. We prayed that night together for an hour and my anxiety was greatly reduced. I soon realized that all was not lost because of this small thing. I learned valuable lessons in adjusting to change and sharing my feelings with our LAC. We needed to be in community with one another as well. In taking a moment, we also exhaled and talked with one another about life, health and strength, about fear of failure, and about the fear of success. We encouraged one another in God. We also realized what God had to say to us about community.

In our time of theological reflection, we also embraced the meaning of Reverend Dr. King's message concerning the interrelated structure of reality. He said that "what impacts one of us directly impacts all of us indirectly." Therefore, if the millennials couldn't grasp that God had something to do with their everyday circumstances, that lack of understanding had something to do with the baby boomers embrace of a providential God who supplied their every need. However, the more seasoned leaders are impacted need for spiritual faith formation of the millennials. Likewise, if the older leaders recognized the internal language of God and St. Luke but are stuck in the glory days, their "stuck-ness" for lack of a better word stifles the younger generation who want and need a deeper relationship with God, one another, them and the community.

Like Bill Huebsch said, “faith is shared not hoarded.”⁸⁹ And while it is shared, a deeper understanding of the love of God made manifest through Jesus Christ is also revealed in community and in us. By taking the time for theological reflection, we saw, felt, tasted and embraced God’s unfailing love when we shared our faith stories, studied scripture and prayed for one another. We placed ourselves in the biblical text during that moment. In doing so, we paused and recalled other times where a gentle touch encouraged somebody during their moment of frustration due to a change of a meeting date. We remembered times of tears when we witnessed the destruction of the old St. Luke and the new construction currently underway. For some, their faith faltered when the temple was destroyed. For others, their faith remained steadfast as God was doing a new thing by erecting anew temple. We also silently wept when we thought about those disciples who have died and won’t see the new St. Luke in 2017. We shared our joyous laughter as thought about the continuous interruptions of our beloved timekeeper when we were on a conference call with Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Wright for this project.

We then talked about what happens when fear outweighs faith. For some, the fear of loss and loneliness is devastating. For others, fear catapults them to lean on God in faith even more. It was in the sharing of our faith that our hearts seemed most open to God’s Spirit.⁹⁰ We helped one another. While it seemed like these moments didn’t have anything to do with the project, it had everything to do with it. Because private revelation is rare as God oftentimes speaks collectively, we experienced a great need to have an adult faith formation gathering for support and for theological reflection.⁹¹ By stretching our level of thinking beyond the program itself, we

⁸⁹ Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Vision Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation*. (New London, CT, 23rd Publication 2007), 49.

⁹⁰ Bill Huebsch, *Dreams and Vision Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation*. (New London, CT, 23rd Publication 2007), 79.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

embraced a new reality. In accepting God's invitation to cultivate a biblical imagination, we saw the possibilities of what the Spirit wanted to do in and among us. This recognition better equipped to embrace one another, those in attendance on the day of the project and others whom we are called to lead.⁹² Our necessary time for theological reflection aided our understanding that we serve a God of relationships. This same God was beckoning us to be instruments of justice, humility, peace and love. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter shall be devoted to the substantive content covered in the time spent on the biblical and theological rationale for justice.

Prior to our session, I met with Dr. McCann to discuss the designated scriptures and the objectives to be accomplished. He recommended that an outline be prepared in advance, distributed to the LAC and that they be incorporated into the study session. For Dr. McCann, the disciples take ownership in a thing when they see themselves as an integral part of it. Being that we were dealing with justice, evangelism, community and faith, he also recommended that I research some outside sources. Along those lines, Reverend Dr. Dale Irvin, the president of New York Theological Seminary (NYTS), met with us a few months back about evangelism and justice in Harlem. He later invited me to connect with Dr. Peter Heltzel, a professor at NYTS and director of the Micah Institute.⁹³ Once I met with Dr. Heltzel, I was provided with a wealth of resources from the Micah Institute which aided our study session and theological reflection. I researched all kinds of information from the Institute that dealt with justice, community and God. The noted outline was jointly prepared by Dr. McCann and I. Once completed, I sent the noted outline to the LAC and we began our biblical/theological reflection session.

⁹² Alan J. Roxenburg and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: A Leadership Network Publication - Jossey-Bass, 2006) 17.

⁹³ "The Institute educates and equips faith leaders to fight poverty and justice" (Micahinstitute.org.).

St. Luke Baptist Church – New York, NY
Rev. Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr., Pastor
Rev. Kimberly K. Holmes, Associate Minister
The Biblical and Theological Rationale for Community Justice
April 20, 2016

Call to Worship: Psalm 146: Deacon G. Stone

Opening Prayer: Deacon L. Sadler

Prayer for courage to do justice: World Council of Churches: Servant Leader K. Kelly

Responsive Reading: Deaconess H. Cofield (Courtesy of the Micah Institute)

Introduction: Understanding the biblical/theological rationale for seeking justice: Rev. Kim

Lesson Aims:

- Engage the biblical text by collectively reading Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:1-12; 28:19-20, and Luke 4:18-19 (collectivity);
- Accept that in seeking justice for the beloved community, we will face opposition, pain, indifference and diversity of thought, mind and deed (hard work); and
- Understand that we must continue to serve as beacons of light as we teach, preach, go and make disciples in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (servants teach others).

Scripture(s): Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:1-12, 28, 19-20 and Luke 4:18-19: Read collectively.

Rev. E. Goins: Relational Quotes:

“I don't focus on what I'm up against. I focus on my goals” by Venus Williams; and *“The game has its ups and downs, but you can never lose focus of your individual goals”* by Michael Jordan.

Our Work Has A Theological Purpose: Micah 6:8 (ESV)

Key Verse: Micah 6:8: He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Reflection Questions: Who is speaking in this text? What's going on in this one verse? In what ways might unbelievers be drawn to God through us when we act out Micah 6:8? What should we do as disciples?

Our Work Is Biblically Based: Matthew 5:1-12 (NLT)

The Sermon on the Mount is intended to identify the ways in which the followers of Jesus should behave in living a life of acceptance of God's gracious invitation to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Key Verses: The Sermon on the Mount: 5 One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ² and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

³“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

⁴God blesses those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.

⁶God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they will be satisfied.

⁷God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
for they will see God.

⁹God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.

¹⁰God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

¹¹“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

Reflection Questions: What are some challenges to this passage of scripture? How do we deal with opposition to our mission? What is Jesus calling us to do as Christian disciples? How might we be gathered around Jesus?

Our Work Is the Great Commission: Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV)

The Great Commission is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be Christ's witnesses, fulfilling the Great Commission in our cities (Jerusalem), in our states and countries (Judea and Samaria), and anywhere else God sends us (to the ends of the earth).

Key Verses: Matthew 28:19-20: ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

Reflection Questions: In what ways might we make disciples? What does baptism look like to someone who is in a wheelchair or otherwise disabled? How do we teach those who don't want to know about God? Where does the source of our help come from in fulfilling the Great Commission?

Our Work Has Been Anointed By the Spirit of God: Luke 4:18-19 (NJKV)

All the gifts and graces of the Spirit were upon Jesus Christ without measure. By Christ, sinners may be loosed from the bonds of guilt, and by his Spirit and grace from the bondage of

corruption. Jesus came by the word of the gospel, to bring light to those that sat in the dark, and by the power of His grace, to give sight to those that were blind. And Jesus preached the acceptable year of the Lord. Let sinners attend to this invitation when liberty is proclaimed. Christ's name was Wonderful; in nothing was Jesus more so than in the word of grace, and the power that went along with it. We ought to do likewise as we go forth. Amen.

Key Verses: Luke 4:18-19: ¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to *the* captives, And recovery of sight to *the* blind, *To* set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Reflection Questions: What are some ways to preach the gospel to the poor? How do we heal the brokenhearted who don't know about the power of Jesus Christ? In what ways do “set at liberty the oppressed” in our communities? How do we proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord right now in Harlem, in Ghana and beyond?

A Litany to Serve: Deacon C. Baynes (Courtesy of the Micah Institute)

Prayer of Awareness: Servant Leader D. Brown (Courtesy of the Micah Institute)

Closing Prayer: Servant Leader J. Laguer

Because we had been in community with one another, it was so much easier and relaxing to engage the selected biblical text. Admittedly, I didn't understand the purpose in reading aloud and all together during the services at St. Luke. There are also times when we read responsibly. After having read these community justice scriptures aloud and collectively, I soon realized that reading together in this way fosters cohesiveness in the body of believers. For starters, you cannot get ahead of a slower reader because it throws off the entire hearing of the text. Moreover, you cannot read too fast because you'll be ahead of the other readers. Therefore, reading in unison forces everyone to proclaim the Gospel at a cadence that is workable for the whole. In so doing, we met the first objective of the lesson aim; collectivity.

Next, we talked about the theological purposes behind doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Interestingly enough, we embraced the notion that doing the will of God may call for us to walk alone. Not everyone is accepting of difference. In fact, most people are comfortable with those who look like them. Yet justice requires us to go into the

very places that Jesus would go as Dr. Jeremiah Wright told us. Moreover, our reflective responses to the questions posed about this text resulted in our recognition that diversity is God's idea. God thinks it is beautiful when we dwell together in unity (Psalm 133). Not only does God think it's beautiful, it is required of us (Micah 6:8). As noted author Maya Angelou once said; "people will always remember how you made them feel." To love kindness and show it to others despite opposition is key to community justice. It makes people feel loved when we are kind to them. In recognizing and talking about these things, our second aim was likewise satisfied; hard work. Our third aim focused on service as disciples of Christ. Along those lines, The Beatitudes guided our discussions. The words that permeated our thoughts were; "God bless those who..." (Matthew 5:1-12). We recognized that just as Jesus sat down with the disciples and taught them, so must we as servant leaders. Accordingly, our last aim was accepted and accomplished; servant leaders teach others.

Separate from the theological and biblical purposes, we took the time to engage one another in understanding the spirit of the biblical text versus the literal interpretation of same. For example, a person who is wheelchair bound may not be able to get baptized by full immersion in water. However, we talked about baptism of the heart and about flexibility in carrying out this discipleship mandate of God. We concluded our session with a genuine acceptance that our work in justice has been anointed by God (Luke 4:18-19). Not only that, but we recognized that the power of Jesus Christ resides in us as believers. Along with that power to heal, and to forgive is the ability to show love and to demonstrate grace to all.

Guided by these understandings, we were energized for the 2016 Community Justice Day which was set to occur on Saturday, April 23, 2016.

CHAPTER 6
OUR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE
The 2016 Community Justice Day

God calls us to make a transformational impact on the world not provide a carnival of frenetic activity for ourselves. But to make this impact, we must engage in God's mission for God's sake and on God's terms. We must move from entertaining consumers and into engaging Christ's mission.

Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer

St. Luke Baptist Church
Reverend Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr., Pastor
1916 Park Avenue, New York, NY
Community Justice Day
Saturday, April 23, 2016

Call to Worship: Deacon Gilbert Stone: Luke 4:18-19

Prayer: Minister-in-Training Dana Thomas

Welcome: Deaconess Hannah Cofield

Purpose of CJD: Rev. Kimberly K. Holmes

Scripture: Micah 6:8 and Matthew 5:1-12

Topics:

Police/Community Relations: Strengthening Relationships
Inspector Steven Griffith with Deacon Corey Green

World Consciousness: African Initiative Ministry - Ghana Initiative
Joi Sampson with Servant Leader Deidra Jordan

Topics:

The Environment - Eco-Justice: WE ACT
Charles Calloway with Deacon Lenora Sadler

The Beloved Community

Minister Reinaldo Danny Diaz with Servant Leader Kim Kelley

Measured Outcome/Survey: Servant Leader John Laguer

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20

Final Remarks/Benediction: Reverend Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr., Pastor
Leading Lady T. McCann, Overseer

Our Community Justice Day, April 23, 2016, finally arrived! All the strategic planning sessions, letter writings, telephone calls, consensus building moments and prayer meetings lead us to this one day. Even though we planned it, I still couldn't help but wonder if it would be a "carnival of frenetic activity for ourselves" or something else. Thank God, this "something else" was truly a ministry event where we engaged community concerns and met God on God's terms. Admittedly, adjustments had to be made on the spot. As the Word declares, "we make plans but God orders our steps" (Proverbs 16:9). There were some cancellations and new speakers instead.

One of the scheduled speakers was Minister Reinaldo Danny Diaz.⁹⁴ I spoke with him prior to the project date and he was so energized about being a part of it! He was set to speak about his journey from drug addiction and homelessness to being a doctoral student at NYTS. The purpose of his story was to show us what happens when the church community embraces strangers by engaging in Christ's mission. Minister Danny had to cancel on the day of the project because his grandmother suffered a heart attack. He informed Servant Leader K. Kelly, who stopped right in his tracks and prayed with him. While Minister Danny didn't have an opportunity to share his story that day, I met with him a few weeks later and learned so much more about this humble servant of God. Sadly enough, a few weeks after we talked at a Micah Institute meeting, Minister Danny died. And yet his ministry of service still thrives!

Critical to having any event is having the ability to make adjustments. Indeed, an agenda was created for the day and the speakers did confirm. However, life happens and plans change. As a leader, the team was looking to me for guidance in the immediate changes. We were able to flow with the adjustments for the sake of God's mission to the 75 people in attendance that day. In addition to Minister Danny not being able to attend, I had to change the presentation speaker

⁹⁴ Minister Diaz was a Cesar Chavez Fellow at NYTS who served as a liaison with the Latino Pastoral community. He was also a worship leader at Love Gospel Assembly Church, Bronx, NY (livingwagenyc.org.).

for the session dealing with world consciousness as DeLorenzo Sampson couldn't make it. A wonderful change was made by Mrs. Sampson herself. She sent her daughter-in-law, Joi Sampson, to conduct the session. Joi was phenomenal! She came with her family and conducted a PowerPoint presentation of a Ghana mission trip to minister to the people. She even had her daughter provide a reflective moment of her experiences there and the importance of community service for young Millennials. They also took questions from the community. In addition, Joi provided handouts about the African Initiative Ministry and encouraged us to go to Ghana.

Police Inspector Griffin's session about effective community policing was powerful. Just as he was in our small group meeting a few months back, Inspector Griffin's presentation was equally compelling. He had a scheduled day off on the day of our project. However, Inspector Griffin was so committed to engaging us that he came to the Community Justice day on his day off to talk with us. There were many questions about what to do and what not to do when stopped by law enforcement. He also encouraged the community to help the NYPD by becoming police officers in Harlem. He, like Joi Sampson, was open to questions about community policing. Inspector Griffin left his contact information and made a commitment to attend services at St. Luke so that our newfound relationship could continue.

Charles Calloway of WE ACT also conducted a presentation about environmental stewardship and advocacy. He spoke about all the places we went during the tour of Harlem. He was very intentional about the need to own ones' community by serving on various community boards to have a say when decisions are being made that impacts air quality and the environment. Charles encouraged us to become involved in WE ACT by spreading the word that an organization of this kind exists in New York for many of the participants never heard of it prior to the Community Justice Day. Charles ended his presentation by talking about the link

between economic deprivation and environmental justice. The lack of clear air is greater in depressed neighborhoods for people of color and of a poor income level. For Charles, the church ought not be silent to this relational dynamic. Instead, we ought to be in the forefront fighting the good fight in faith and in justice. Charles Calloway, like Joi Sampson and Inspector Griffin, took questions. He left by impressing upon those 75 people present to get and stay involved with the environmental impact of community development. He left maps which charted the success of his organization in Harlem with respect to eco-justice.

In addition to the outside speakers, members of the LAC also shared sentiments about the focus areas of our project. Moreover, we wanted to keep God central to our day. Therefore, we took moments throughout the day to read, and reflect on the scriptures we discussed during our theological reflection session just three days before. It kept us centered and the participants appreciated the link between the church and community justice issues.

Once the project was completed, Servant Leader John Laguer exercised control over the survey portion of the day. It was important that each person provide feedback and critically evaluate this first community justice day at our church. Accordingly, once the surveys were distributed by Servant Leader Laguer, they were collected by our official timekeeper, Rev. Esther Goins. I thanked the other disciples who assisted with technology needs and additional copying. We also had other church disciples who wanted to be a part of the ministry event, and simply assisted us with greeting people as they arrived and thanking them as they left. And with the collection of the surveys, we exhaled as our mission, thus far, was complete.

We didn't meet immediately after the community justice day as we had to be at church the next day at 7:00 AM. Instead, we hugged, prayed, laughed and left only to return in the morning. All that we knew was that this was a good thing which ought to continue.

CONCLUSION
RADICAL CHANGE
The Heart of our Christian Message

There are some valuable nuggets that I'd like to leave with you as this 2016 Community Justice Day has ended. While the project is over, our work in terms of radical change has only just begun. It is my sincere hope that as you have journeyed with this project as a reader, that you also have gained some valuable insights about church growth, leadership, community and most of all, about the love of God made manifest through Christ. After all, radical change is at the heart of our Christian message. As such, please consider the following:

- 1) Begin with prayer and end with prayer.
- 2) An idea for radical change almost always is met with opposition. However, the opposition may be based on fear of change. It is important to recognize the origin of the opposition.
- 3) Connect with various people in your church of different ages, nationalities, and spiritual levels to have diversity of thoughts and ideas.
- 4) Once you collectively have an idea for ministry, try to find a theological basis for this idea to keep the Word central to your faith and to bring the idea to fruition.
- 5) Reach into the resources at your local church.
- 6) Invite the pastor into the process from the very start.
- 7) Seek assistance from persons with a vested interest in your ministry location.
- 8) Don't be dismayed if something doesn't work out as planned. Be adaptable to change.
- 9) Take the necessary time to just sit and talk with one another about whatever you want to talk about. Even if it seems like the conversation is irrelevant, trust me it is not.
- 10) It is permissible to laugh, cry, be upset, agitate, exhale and to love on each other.

Finally, in terms of an evaluative process, the completion of a one page survey proved to be very beneficial for the LAC. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for us to meet after the community justice day and examine the strengths and areas of concern. Furthermore, once the project is over, exhaustion sets in and little time is left on the day of the event to analyze it from the perspective of those in attendance. However, once the dust settled and we met after the project, a careful review of the survey results was very helpful. Those survey results gave way to a few recommendations. Accordingly, please consider the following:

- Expanding the scope of the project to include law enforcement and their interactions with teenagers;
- Planning a justice day outside of the local church at a location that would draw the people to the event;
- Distributing more informational handouts about free community resources;
- Playing music to attract a more diverse group of people; and
- Always having a back-up plan in case of last minute cancellation.

Planning and effectively implementing a project of this kind requires collective cooperation with the community and the participants. While you may not be able to precisely predict what will happen, a review of the survey results is helpful in terms of having an idea about the effectiveness of the project and measuring the accomplishments of objectives. Moreover, the review of the survey results can serve as an effective tool for a critical analysis of what worked well and what ought to be retooled for future community justice endeavors.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. 2016 CJD Invitation..... | A1 |
| 2. First View..... | A2 |
| 3. Photographs..... | A3 |
| 4. Example of the Survey..... | A4 |
| 5. Examples of Completed Evaluations..... | A5 |

Unity in Community

Eco-Justice

Community Policing

World Consciousness



SATURDAY
APRIL 23, 2016

4:30PM - 8:30PM

THE PARK (EAST 130TH STREET)
1916 PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY 10037

Rev. Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr.
Pastor

Leading Lady T. McCann
Overseer

Rev. K. Holmes
Doctoral Candidate

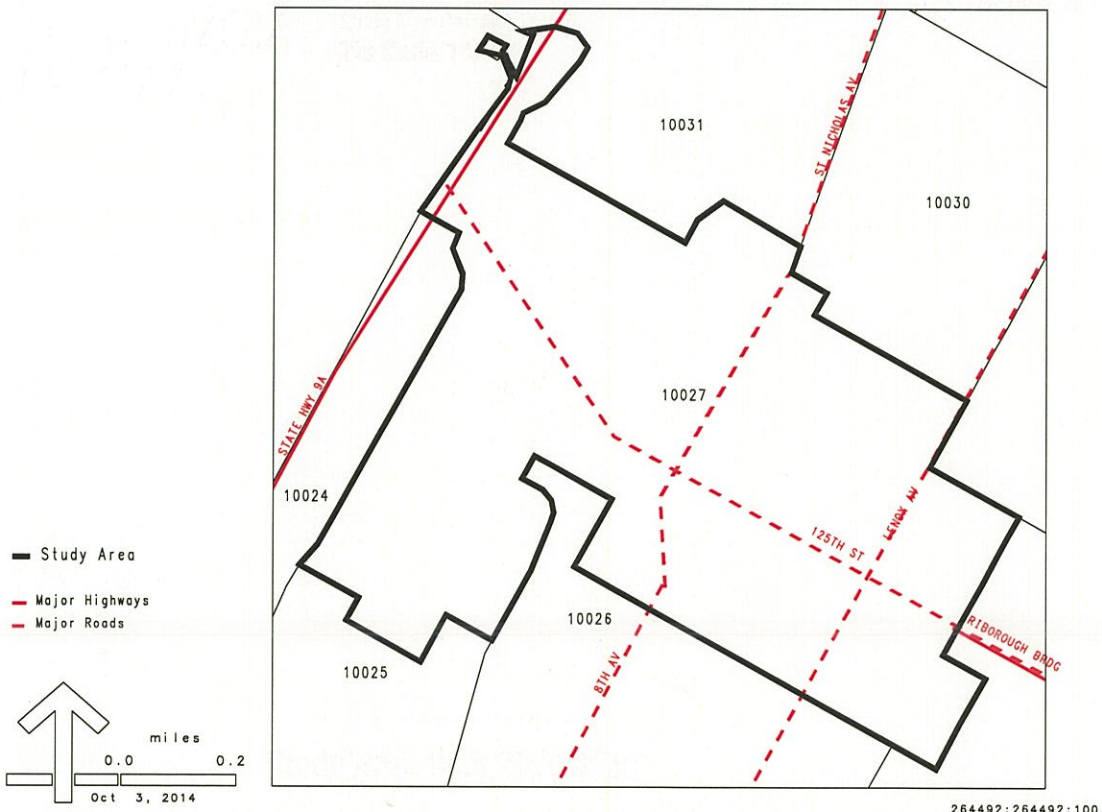
People and Place ... pgs 2 & 4

Community Issues ... pgs 3 & 5

Faces of Diversity ... pgs 2 & 4

Faith Preferences ... pgs 3 & 6

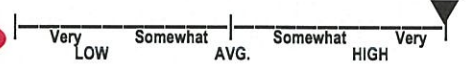
Study Area with Zip Codes



People and Place

P1 PROJECTED POPULATION DENSITY

EXTREMELY HIGH



P2 PROJECTED POPULATION CHANGE

STABLE



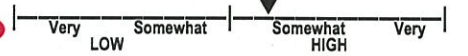
P3 POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

HIGHLY DISPERSED



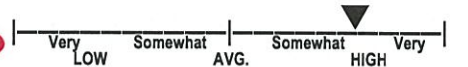
P4 DIVERSITY

SOMEWHAT HIGH



P5 AREA DYNAMIC LEVEL

VERY HIGH



Faces of Diversity

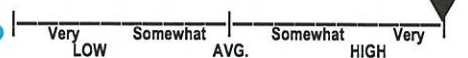
D1 U.S. LIFESTYLES GROUP

ETHNIC/URBAN DIVERSITY



D2 NON-ANGLO POPULATION

EXTREMELY HIGH



D3 FASTEST RACIAL/ETHNIC GROWTH

ANGLOS



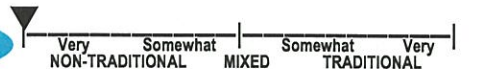
D4 GENERATION

MILLENNIALS



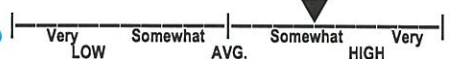
D5 FAMILY STRUCTURE

EXTREMELY NON-TRADITIONAL



D6 EDUCATION

SOMEWHAT HIGH



Community Issues

C1 PRIMARY CONCERNS

THE BASICS



C2 RISC LEVEL (Stress Conditions)

VERY HIGH



C3 POTENTIAL RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

AVERAGE



Faith Preferences

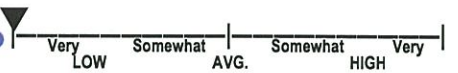
F1 FAITH RECEPTIVITY

VERY LOW



F2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT POTENTIAL

EXTREMELY LOW



F3 CHURCH STYLE

SOMEWHAT TRADITIONAL



F4 CHURCH PROGRAM PREFERENCE

COMMUNITY/SOCIAL SERVICES



F5 HAVE A RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

SOMEWHAT LOW





Prepared For:
St. Luke Baptist Church
 103 Rev. Walter L. Harding Place
 New York, NY 10027

Study Area Definition:
Zip Code 10027



People and Place Detail

P1: How many people live in the defined study area?

Currently, there are 61,641 persons residing in the defined study area. This represents an increase of 7,253 or 13.3% since 1990. During the same period of time, the U.S. as a whole grew by 25.9%. (see MAP page 4)

| Population History & Projection | 1990 Census | 2000 Census | 2012 Update | 2017 Projection |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Study Area | 54,388 | 59,493 | 61,641 | 62,419 |

P2: Is the population in this area projected to grow?

Yes, between 2012 and 2017, the population is projected to increase by 1.3% or 778 additional persons. During the same period, the U.S. population is projected to grow by 3.9%. (see MAP page 4)

| Population Change | Actual Change From 1990 to 2000 | Actual Change From 2000 to 2012 | PROJECTED Change From 2012 to 2017 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Study Area | 9% | 4% | 1% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 13% | 11% | 4% |

P3: How spread out is the population in the study area?

In the study area, the top three quarters of the population resides in approximately 100% of the geographical area. In the U.S. as a whole and in the average community, the top 75% of the population resides in just 25% of the populated geographical area. In comparison, the study area population is *highly dispersed* within the overall area.

P4: What is the overall level of diversity in the area?

Based upon the number of different lifestyle and racial/ethnic groups in the area, the overall diversity in the study area can be described as *somewhat high*. See D1 and D2 below.

P5: How dynamic is the study area?

As the population density and overall diversity in an area increase, the environment becomes more complex and challenging. Given these factors, the study area dynamic level can be described as *very high*.

Faces of Diversity Detail

D1: How much lifestyle diversity is represented?

The lifestyle diversity in the area is *very low* with only 12 of the 50 U.S. Lifestyles segments represented. Of the six major segment groupings, the largest is referred to as *Ethnic and Urban Diversity* which accounts for 71.9% of the households in the area. The top individual segment is *Struggling Urban Diversity* representing 44.2% of all households. (see MAP pages 13 and 14)

| Households By U.S. Lifestyles Group | Affluent Families | Middle American Families | Young and Coming | Rural Families | Senior Life | Ethnic & Urban Diversity |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Study Area | < 1% | 1% | 25% | 1% | < 1% | 72% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 15% | 31% | 15% | 13% | 7% | 18% |

D2 & D3: How do racial or ethnic groups contribute to diversity in this area?

Based upon the total number of different groups present, the racial/ethnic diversity in the area is *extremely high*. Among individual groups, *Anglos* represent 24.6% of the population and all other racial/ethnic groups make up a substantial 75.4% which is well above the national average of 37%. The largest of these groups, *African-Americans*, accounts for 38.8% of the total population. *Anglos* are projected to be the fastest growing group increasing by 9.7% between 2012 and 2017. (see MAP pages 4 and 7)

| Population By Race/Ethnicity | Anglo | African-American | Hispanic | Asian | Native Am. and Other |
|------------------------------|-------|------------------|----------|-------|----------------------|
| Study Area | 25% | 39% | 26% | 8% | 3% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 63% | 12% | 17% | 5% | 3% |

D4: What are the major generational groups represented?

The most significant group in terms of numbers and comparison to national averages is *Millenials* (age 11 to 30) who make up 34.6% of the total population in the area compared to 27.3% of the U.S. population as a whole. (see MAP page 4)

| Population By Generation | Gen Z 0 to 10 | Millenials 11 to 30 | Survivors 31 to 51 | Boomers 52 to 69 | Silents 70 to 87 | Builders 88 & up |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Study Area | 13% | 35% | 31% | 14% | 6% | 1% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 15% | 27% | 29% | 20% | 8% | 1% |



Prepared For:
St. Luke Baptist Church
 103 Rev. Walter L. Harding Place
 New York, NY 10027

Study Area Definition:
Zip Code 10027



Faces of Diversity Detail (cont.)

D5: Overall, how traditional are the family structures?

The area can be described as *extremely non-traditional* due to the below average presence of married persons and two-parent families. (see MAP page 6)

| Population By Marital Status (15 and older) | Single (never married) | Divorced or Widowed | Married |
|---|------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Study Area | 58% | 12% | 30% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 32% | 17% | 52% |

D6: How educated are the adults?

Based upon the number of years completed and college enrollment, the overall education level in the area is *somewhat high*. While 81.1% of the population aged 25 and over have graduated from high school as compared to the national average of 85.1%, college graduates account for 42.1% of those over 25 in the area versus 27.8% in the U.S. (see MAP page 8)

| Households with Children by Marital Status | Single Mothers | Single Fathers | Married Couples |
|--|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Study Area | 52% | 6% | 42% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 26% | 8% | 66% |

| Adult Population By Education Completed | Less than High School | High School | Some College | College Graduate | Post Graduate |
|---|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|
| Study Area | 19% | 21% | 18% | 17% | 25% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 15% | 29% | 29% | 18% | 10% |

Community Issues Detail

C1: Which household concerns are unusually high in the area?

Concerns which are likely to exceed the national average include: *Affordable Housing, Racial/Ethnic Prejudice, Finding Companionship, Social Injustice, Employment Opportunities* and *Neighborhood Crime and Safety*. As an overall category, concerns related to *The Basics* are the most significant based upon the total number of households and comparison to national averages. (see MAP page 16)

| Households By Primary Concerns Group | The Basics | Family Problems | Community Problems | Hopes and Dreams | Spiritual/Personal |
|--------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Study Area | 28% | 9% | 18% | 27% | 15% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 24% | 11% | 16% | 30% | 15% |

C2: What is the overall community stress level in the area?

Conditions which can contribute to placing an area at risk (particularly, the children) are at an overall *very high* level. This is evidenced by noting that on the whole the area is significantly above average in the characteristics known to contribute to community problems such as households below poverty line, adults without a high school diploma, households with a single mother and unusually high concern about issues such as community problems, family problems, and/or basic necessities such as food, housing and jobs. (see MAP pages 5, 6, 8, 9 and 16)

| Regionally Indexed Stress Conditions (RISC) | Households Below Poverty (\$15,000) | Households with Children: Single Mothers | Adult Pop.: High School Dropouts | Primary Concerns: The Basics | Primary Concerns: Family Problems | Primary Concerns: Community Problems |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Study Area | 30% | 52% | 19% | 28% | 9% | 18% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 13% | 26% | 15% | 24% | 11% | 16% |

C3: How much overall resistance to change is likely in the area?

Based upon the assumption that as a group of people become older and more diverse the potential for resistance to change becomes more significant, the area's potential resistance is likely to be *about average*. (see MAP pages 4-5, 13-14)

| Population By Age and Diversity | Average Age | Overall Lifestyle and Racial/Ethnic Diversity |
|---------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Study Area | 34.3 | 6 |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 37.5 | 5 |



Prepared For:
St. Luke Baptist Church
 103 Rev. Walter L. Harding Place
 New York, NY 10027

Study Area Definition:
Zip Code 10027



Faith Preferences Detail

F1: What is the likely faith receptivity?

Overall, the likely faith involvement level and preference for historic Christian religious affiliations is *very low* when compared to national averages. (see MAP page 15)

| Households By Faith Involvement Level | Not Involved | Somewhat Involved | Strongly Involved |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Study Area | 43% | 30% | 27% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 35% | 30% | 35% |

F2: What is the likely giving potential in the area?

Based upon the average household income of \$55,310 per year and the likely contribution behavior in the area, the overall religious giving potential can be described as *extremely low*. (see MAP page 4 and 17)

| Households By Religious Giving Potential | Average Annual Household Income | Households Contributing More Than \$500 per Year to Churches |
|--|---------------------------------|--|
| Study Area | \$55,310 | 26% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | \$67,315 | 31% |

F3: Do households prefer an overall church style which is more traditional or contemporary?

Based upon likely worship, music and architectural style preferences in the area, the overall church style preference can be described as *somewhat traditional*. (see COMPASS pages 3 and 4)

| Households By Church Styles Preferences | Worship: Traditional | Music: Traditional | Architecture: Traditional | Worship: Contemporary | Music: Contemporary | Architecture: Contemporary |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Study Area | 17% | 23% | 28% | 23% | 16% | 14% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 20% | 24% | 27% | 26% | 20% | 16% |

F4: Which general church programs or services are most likely to be preferred in the area?

Church program preferences which are likely to exceed the national average include: *Food Pantry/Clothing Resources, Cultural Programs (Music, Art, etc.), Care for the Terminally Ill* and *Twelve-Step Programs*. As an overall category, programs related to *Community/Social Services* are the most significant based upon total number of households and comparison to national averages. (see COMPASS page 2)

| Households By Church Program Preference Category | Spiritual Development | Personal Development | Community/Social Services | Recreation |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Study Area | 21% | 8% | 28% | 37% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 25% | 10% | 20% | 38% |

F5: How likely are people to have some religious preference?

In the study area, 83.6% of the households are likely to express a preference for some particular religious tradition or affiliation, somewhat below the national average of 85.1%. (see MAP page 15)

| Households By Religious Preference | No Preference | Non-"Historic Christian" Groups | "Historic Christian" Groups |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Study Area | 16% | 14% | 69% |
| U.S. AVERAGE | 15% | 8% | 77% |

St. Luke Baptist Church
1916 Park Avenue
New York, NY
Rev. Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr., Pastor
Rev. Kimberly K. Holmes (Candidate)
Community Justice Day Survey
Saturday, April 23, 2016

Affiliation with St. Luke Baptist Church: (Please circle one)

Disciple

Visitor

Community Leader

Friend

Of the issues discussed today, which two are most important to you for community justice?

- a. Unity in Community
- b. World Consciousness
- c. Police Relations
- d. Environmental Justice

What are the two most pressing community justice issues that churches are facing today?

Name them:

- a.
- b.

What are some ways that the church can “go and make” disciples to the nations?

List two:

- a.
- b.

“God bless those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” Matthew 5:6. What are identified ways to measure being satisfied in our quest for righteousness?

List two:

a.

b.

How would you rate the effectiveness of this Community Justice Day on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being extremely beneficial? Write in one number from 1-10

Was the time, date, and location convenient for you? If not, please explain.

Your Response:

Is there anything else you would like to share with us? (Optional)

Please complete and return to any member of the Community Justice Lay Advisory Committee

Reverend Kimberly K. Holmes

St. Luke Baptist Church, 1916 Park Avenue (East 130th

Street, New York, NY 10037

Deacon Cory Green and Minister-in-

Training/Deaconess Deidra Brown (Co-Chairs)

Rev. Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr., Pastor of St. Luke B.C.

Deacon Gilbert Stone, Sr., Chairman of Diaconate Ministry

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Reverend Esther Goins Associate Minister of St. Luke

Dana Thomas Minister-in-Training

Kim Kelly Minister-in-Training

Deacon John Laguer Minister-in-Training

PROJECT SITE REVIEW FORM

Doctor of Ministry Program

Drew University

Name of Candidate: Reverend Kimberly K. Holmes

Name and Address of the Church: St. Luke Baptist Church, 1916 Park Avenue (East 130th Street, New York, NY 10037

Chairperson of the Lay Advisory Committee: Deacon Cory Green and Minister-in-Training/Deaconess Deidra Brown (Co-Chairs)

Names and Positions of Lay Advisory Committee Members, i.e., lay leader, board member, etc.

POSITION NAME

Rev. Dr. J.G. McCann, Sr., Pastor of St. Luke B.C.

Deacon Gilbert Stone, Sr., Chairman of Diaconate Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

To the Candidate, Advisory Committee, Parishioners, and other interested persons: Greetings!

By this time you all know of the fine doctoral project which has been developed by your Pastoral Leader with the assistance of the Drew Faculty, the Advisory Committee of your church, and other interested persons. We congratulate you on the vision, hard work, and commitment to ministry which the Project represents.

Normally, one of the requirements of the DMIN Program is a Site Visit by Drew Faculty to the site where the project has been conducted. The site visit is a meeting of the candidate, faculty, advisory committee, and church officials for the purpose of critically assessing the progress and accomplishments of the project. This important step gives valuable feedback to the candidate and helps him/her prepare for writing the professional paper. It is a chance for faculty to guide the project towards its successful completion. It is also an occasion on which to lift up and celebrate the learning, ministries and spiritual growth generated by the project.

However, in certain cases, when a candidate has moved to another state, or when the site is located at a distance over 200 miles from Drew campus A Guided Site Review conducted jointly by the candidate and the Lay Advisory Committee Chairperson is permitted. Therefore, utilize the following outline to conduct a site review. Please complete the Site Review Form, affix the appropriate signatures, and return the form to the Faculty Leader. It will be most helpful if you type the information (and email it to Donna) If you hand write it, please print or write legibly. Please feel free to add additional sheets to the form as needed. Your detailed and extensive feedback, reflection, and suggestions are welcomed and are deeply appreciated.

Drew Colloquium Faculty Team:

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. List the dates when the Advisory Committee has met during the course of the Project.
See Attached

2. Has the Advisory Committee been trained in its duties and made aware of the nature and scope of this Project? If so, answer "yes". If not, please explain.

Yes

3. Have all of the Advisory Committee Members read the Prospectus? (Y/N)_Y.
Do they understand the purposes, goals, and ministries proposed in the Prospectus?
(Y/N)_Y. If not, please explain.

4. What steps in the Action Phase of the Project have been taken? What is the result?

Before planning the community justice day the candidate ensured that this would be a learning experience for herself, the team, and the community. With each meeting we had a guest speaker and each speaker informed us of how the community was affected based on their area of expertise. It ranged from police enforcement to environmentalist. Each individual made us aware of the things going on in our community and what we could do to help. It was as if we had mini community justice days before the actual event. The results promoted learning, congregational and personal growth, thorough teaching, and community outreach.

5. Have the Advisory Committee and Candidate followed the Prospectus in the implementation of the Project phases so far? (i.e., timetable, meetings, research, leadership recruitment, collaboration, reporting? (Y/N) _Y If not, please explain.

6. Have there been problems, difficulties, or strains which have impeded the progress of The Project? (Y/N) __N If yes, please explain.

7. What is your overall evaluation of the project and of the impact it is making on the Candidate, the Committee, and the Congregation? Be thorough and document your evaluation with specific observations. Use separate sheets as needed.

Overall the project was incredible and I'm overjoyed that I got the opportunity to be apart of it. There is a quote that says "our people suffer due to a lack of knowledge" and what this project did was enlighten the team, the congregation, and the community. When I was asked to be apart of this project, I would have never thought that I would embark on a journey that taught me so much. The numerous amount of guest speakers that came in to speak with the advisory team, left us all with the desire to do more for our community. We realized that the first step was education and as we gained knowledge we imparted that onto those in our congregation. Us as well as those around the community learned how to appropriately engage with law enforcement, we learned the dangers placed on one environment and the disparities due to geological location, we also learned how to engage youth and get them involved so that violence will decrease. It did not just stop with community outreach nationally but abroad as well. We learned how we could be a helping hands to communities in Countries such as Ghana Africa; donating as little as a pencil, or pocket change. I would love to applaud the Candidate for having the courage, the drive, and the will to educate. This project was incredible and just as it changed my life, I'm certain that it changed the lives of others.

8. Assess the Candidate's leadership on the Project so far

a. Has the Candidate taken initiative to educate the Committee, church leaders, and the congregation about the project? (Y/N)_____ If yes, how was that accomplished? Be Specific.

The Candidate has taken initiative to educate the Committee, the church leaders, and the congregation by having guest speakers come in and expound on what we could do to better service our community. She went to a number of individual meetings to ensure that each topic area was covered. The Candidate used her networking skills to provide her team as well as the congregation with expert information. She did not settle for less but allowed us to receive knowledge from the best speakers.

b. Has the Candidate demonstrated to the congregation the potential benefits of the Project for the life and ministry of the congregation? (Y/N) _____ Y, State what you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the Candidate's leadership on this project. Be Specific.

The Candidate has numerous strengths. She was timely, organized, she was thorough, she held her team accountable for their roles and commitment, she was engaged, hard working, dedicated and showed an enormous amount of effort. She consistently emailed and texted the team with updates and worked around our schedules to ensure the perfect time to meet. It was a joy and a privilege to work with her.

c. Has the Candidate guided the Committee's work sufficiently and stayed engaged with the Committee's work process? (Y/N) _____ Y If not, please explain.

d. Has the Candidate shared the results of his/her research and involved the Committee in its interpretation for the ministries of the parish? (Y/N) _____ Y If not, what more can the Candidate do to facilitate this?

e. Has the Candidate demonstrated effective and appropriate communications skills in his/her leadership? (Y/N) ____ Y Do you have any helpful suggestions for improvement?

9. Please record the substance of any feedback or comments on the Project offered by church members, officials, consultants, or observers who were not members of the Lay Advisory Committee.

PROJECT SITE REVIEW FORM
Doctor of Ministry Program
Drew University

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Normally, one of the requirements of the DMIN Program is a **Site Visit** by Drew Faculty to the site where the project has been conducted. The site visit is a meeting of the candidate, faculty, advisory committee, and church officials for the purpose of critically assessing the progress and accomplishments of the project. This important step gives valuable feedback to the candidate and helps him/her prepare for writing the professional paper. It is a chance for faculty to guide the project towards its successful completion. It is also an occasion on which to lift up and celebrate the learning, ministries and spiritual growth generated by the project.

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Please complete the Site Review Form, affix the appropriate signatures, and return the form to the Faculty Leader. **It will be most helpful if you type the information (and email it to Donna)** If you hand write it, please print or write legibly. Please feel free to add additional sheets to the form as needed. Your **detailed and extensive feedback, reflection, and suggestions are welcomed and are deeply appreciated.**

Drew Colloquium Faculty Team:

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. List the dates when the Advisory Committee has met during the course of the Project.
See Attached

2. Has the Advisory Committee been trained in its duties and made aware of the nature and scope of this Project? If so, answer “yes”. If not, please explain.
Yes

3. Have all of the Advisory Committee Members read the Prospectus? (Y/N) Y.
Do they understand the purposes, goals, and ministries proposed in the Prospectus?
(Y/N) Y. If not, please explain.

4. What steps in the Action Phase of the Project have been taken? What is the result? (i.e., learning, congregational and personal growth through teaching, preaching, seminars, group activities and celebrations, community outreach, healing of conflicts, increase in cohesion and understanding, spiritual advance, etc.)

5. Have the Advisory Committee and Candidate followed the Prospectus in the implementation of the Project phases so far? (i.e., timetable, meetings, research, leadership recruitment, collaboration, reporting? (Y/N) Y If not, please explain.

6. Have there been problems, difficulties, or strains which have impeded the progress of The Project? (Y/N) N If yes, please explain.

7. What is your overall evaluation of the project and of the impact it is making on the Candidate, the Committee, and the Congregation? Be thorough and document your evaluation with specific observations. Use separate sheets as needed.

The Community Justice Day project was a complete success where in Church, Community, Law Enforcement, Eco and world conscious partners came together for the overall good in glorifying our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Rev. Kim Holmes was instrumental in engaging all partners ensuring the topics of discussion were centered around the word of God.

8. Assess the Candidate's leadership on the Project so far

a. Has the Candidate taken initiative to educate the Committee, church leaders, and the congregation about the project? (Y/N) _____ If yes, how was that accomplished? Be specific.

Rev Kim Holmes was very instrumental and informative in keeping the lay committee apprised with updates concerning the project. The committee met on site/church, in person, via conference call, electronic communication.

b. Has the Candidate demonstrated to the congregation the potential benefits of the

Project for the life and ministry of the congregation? (Y/N) Y State what you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the Candidate's leadership on this project. Be specific.

Rev Kim Holmes is self motivated and determined to succeed. Rev Kim is a team player and a natural leader with exceptional personal communication skills. Rev Kim is hardworking, intelligent, self-confident and most importantly a child of God. No weakness to point out. Rev Kim has a heart of gold, and has demonstrated that all things are possible to those who believe.

c. Has the Candidate guided the Committee's work sufficiently and stayed engaged with the Committee's work process? (Y/N) Y If not, please explain.

d. Has the Candidate shared the results of his/her research and involved the Committee in its interpretation for the ministries of the parish? (Y/N) Y If not, what more can the Candidate do to facilitate this?

e. Has the Candidate demonstrated effective and appropriate communications skills in his/her leadership? (Y/N) Y Do you have any helpful suggestions for improvement?

9. Please record the substance of any feedback or comments on the Project offered by church members, officials, consultants, or observers who were **not** members of the Lay Advisory Committee.

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CANDIDATE

1. Have you followed the structure and process as detailed in the Prospectus for timetable, meetings, research, leadership recruitment, and collaborative work? Explain.

2. Critically evaluate how well you have been able to fulfill the Project Specifications outlined in your Prospectus.

3. What research have you completed for the Project to date? (i.e., reading, ethnographic observations, surveys, interviews, etc.) Please generalize. Do not list books and articles.

4. What have you done to involve the congregation in your Project and secure their collaboration with you in meeting its goals? Be specific.

5. Critically assess the impact the Project has had on the congregation so far. Note such things as understanding the Project, affirming its goals, revisioning ministry, response in developing new ministries, theological and spiritual insights, etc. Give examples.

6. Have you run into any problems in carrying out the Project in the parish so far, such as misunderstandings, failures of communication, negative feedback, obstructions to its progress? Please elaborate. Describe the nature of these problems, your interpretation of them, and what you have done to deal with them.

7. What is your assessment of your leadership of the project so far? What have been the strengths and weaknesses of your leadership?

8. Critically evaluate the overall quality and effectiveness of the Project so far.

9. Please assess the effectiveness of the Faculty Colloquium Leaders in guiding your project. If we have been helpful, we would like to hear about what has gone well. If you have suggestions for improvement, your honest feedback will be very valuable to us in strengthening the DMIN Program.

10. Describe the process you went through to involve the Advisory Committee in the Project.

What actually happened in the meetings? How did you go about preparing the committee for their work, supporting them in it, and collaborating with them in developing and implementing it?

FOR THE CANDIDATE AND THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Together, please complete the following check lists:

| THE PROJECT | POOR | FAIR | GOOD | EXCELLENT |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| Theological and biblical soundness | | | | X |
| Focused and understandable | | | | X |
| Realistic goals | | | | X |
| Timely progress made | | | | X |
| Involved congregation/ministry context | | | | X |
| Meaningful to church's /context's ministry | | | | X |
| Has evoked positive change in the congregation/ministry context | | | | X |

THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

| GOALS | POOR | FAIR | GOOD | EXCELLENT |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| Met often enough to complete the tasks | | | | X |
| Understood the project and its goals | | | | X |
| Stayed focused | | | | X |
| Shared decision making with candidate | | | | X |
| Interpreted project to congregation/ministry context | | | | X |
| Kept to the specifications of the prospectus | | | | X |

THE CANDIDATE

| Goals | POOR | FAIR | GOOD | EXCELLENT |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| Presented the project well | | | | |
| Worked collaboratively with the committee | | | | |
| Demonstrated interpersonal process skills | | | | |
| Based the project on sound biblical and theological foundations | | | | |
| Listened to, accepted and processed criticism and feedback | | | | |
| Was open to guidance from the committee | | | | |
| Supported the committee's work with guidance, pastoral friendship, and prayer | | | | |

Thanks so much to the Candidate, the Lay Advisory Committee and others who helped to complete this review. Blessings and God's peace!

Please affix signatures below. Keep one copy; return one to a Faculty Leader.

Chairperson(s) Lay Advisory Committee:

Candidate: _____

Date: _____





