

MAKING DISCIPLES: A CHURCH IN  
TRANSITION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

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## ABSTRACT

### MAKING DISCIPLES: A CHURCH WITHIN TRANSITION IN THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

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This project examines the dynamics of discipleship and missional community. The concept and perceptions around both topics are relational. As all relationships are, by definition Discipleship is multilayered and multifaceted. Christian Discipleship is revealed through Christ's example, as evident in His teachings and His ministry within the community. This project begins with a specific definition of Christian Discipleship followed by a demonstration of how that definition can be executed within a particular church. The paper will not limit Discipleship solely within the church but will articulate discipleship through community outreach and conclude with an evaluation of the project and its methodologies.

The goal of the project is to define and effectively utilize Christian Discipleship principles as revealed through the life of Christ. This paper seeks to explore the making of Christian Discipleship within a church in transition, as we seek to be engaged with the larger neighborhood context. This project will address two major social challenges in East New York: Mental illness and homelessness. It will examine discipleship as a model for effective ministry among and within those realities.

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## INTRODUCTION

This project includes a description of God's power as exhibited by the church, which serves as a conduit to the community and ultimately renders hope, healing, transformation, and empowerment. Much discussion springs forth when seeking to define discipleship in a given ministry context. This launching into the deep leads to thought-provoking questions. What is the essence of discipleship? Is there a clear-cut answer? Might discipleship be defined one-way with a particular group of believers and defined in a very different way with others who do not know about the God that the church serves? How might these authentic conversations evolve as a community in transition evolves together?

God's *Agape Love* is manifested to humanity through discipleship and community. This is illustrated in scripture. We will also examine some biblical passages to assess the essence of discipleship within the community.

As we explore these inquiries, it is my prayer that we witness church growth within the community. I am also hopeful that a spiritual, social, and economic change will result from our witnessing, evangelizing, and spreading of the gospel. I have served twelve years as an associate minister at St. Luke Baptist Church in New York, New York. Currently, am serving as a pastor of Grace Baptist Church of Christ within the East New York section of Brooklyn, New York. Grace Baptist Church of Christ has always been a pillar of the community that has rendered hope, healing, and restoration for the past fifty-four years. It was founded by Reverend Jacob N. Underwood in October 1962. Reverend Underwood pastored the church for forty-eight years and later relocated to Anderson, South Carolina. Reverend Michael Rogers served as co-pastor for five years before

relocating to Columbia, South Carolina. The church was founded with mission principles and a strong zeal for outreach within the community called “street evangelism,” which entailed going out into the community knocking on doors, visiting the sick, taking resources of information on health, financial literacy, food to nourish, etc., to those in need of assistance.

The church was allotted government funds for housing to serve those in the community. These governmental funds for housing development were sought from various governmental agencies which loaned the church 10,000 for seed money. Also, the church was instrumental in providing early childhood education for many within East New York.

The Church is a living breathing organism for humanity. Yet in conducting a critical church evaluation, I have seen an exodus of those who have joined our church. The sobering reality is that we must further examine the impact of our church in the community and make the necessary changes to grow and keep disciples. The continuous cycle of individuals who enter our church and community without the proper spiritual guidance, encouragement, and social empowerment skills needed to transcend the over gentrified community can result in a challenging neighborhood.

The people of God who frequent our community possess the power, cadence, and ability to step forward. However, there is also the battle with the surrounding structures designed to impede their spiritual progress. This is also at the crux of this project because within the ministry context there is great potential for social and community empowerment through discipleship models and a paradigm that is prophetic in its implementation.

## CHAPTER 1

### GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The biblical text that will serve as the spiritual launching pad for this project is found in Jeremiah 29:4-7:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who are captive whom I have caused to be carried away from Babylon: Build houses and dwell *in them*; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give daughters to your husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace. (NKJV)

The Prophet Jeremiah is a core model for Grace Church and the pastoral team.

Great work can happen through breaking down walls that have gripped community. Our community is held captive by vicious gun violence, dangerous drug dealings, multiple individuals with mental illness, and horrific homelessness. Yet, we are still in God's hand and commissioned to build disciples for Christ, as well as summoned to construct houses and support the community while praying for the peace within our city.

The church is surrounded by about three to four homeless shelters. Moreover, many of the residents come to our church with mental, emotional, financial, social, and spiritual needs. Starting with this last point, we need to consider that a lack of a universal healthcare system in this country can make the homeless more vulnerable to mental illness as they are unable to afford the treatment that they require. This can also result in those who are mentally unwell becoming homeless, as they cannot afford both treatment and the upkeep of their living arrangement. Lacking a secure housing option for people leaving inpatient facilities can also be problematic.

We have provided help for those needs to the best of our ability. However, more is required of the leadership team and the congregation. My faith has been challenged upon seeing these captive people suffering from various issues and economic struggles.

These realities have moved me and members of this project to look inwardly and externally to see what resources we can employ for transformational change. I feel sent by God to East New York to pray for the peace of the city and the community. With faith and good works, we will meet the growing needs of the community, build houses by way of governmental funds, resources, information provided to see bigger developments, which can result in economic progress in our city, church, and thus achieve community transformation.

Within our ministry context, it is vitally important to be intentional with a mission to inform the people that God desires us to continue to pray for the *shalom* (peace) of the city and be a ministry of presence for those struggling in need of spiritual empowerment. It is out of this context that an innate desire grew to make disciples, and to bring health, hope, and spiritual restoration within my ministry context. As I carry out ministerial duties, every day when I walk around, I see the pain and perplexity of the serious emotional and societal yokes around the necks of our people who desire an economic change and a shift in the way their current circumstances are being handled so that they can look towards the future with some sense of hope.

I observed various types of agony within our ministry context. For example, the young people within our ministry and community had some deep underlying problems with depression, which served as a major barrier to reaching out to other youths. As I counseled with them, I understood that this hurt was due to low self-esteem, violence in



the neighborhood, theft of their property, robbery, shootings, and murders of their peers. Second, some of their parents were drug addicted. The youths in our ministry attend church with the expectation of finding encouragement. Therefore, being present with strong disciples of Christ during their time of need is essential. Through youth group participation, they have felt our counseling through mentoring which gave them the support and love which inspired their souls, it is intrinsically a form of justice. The youths need to feel that they belong and that they matter. Youth experience a strong sense of membership in the youth group and a commitment from the disciples of Christ. They also need a sense of individual or group recognition. They need a close sense of connection with the youth leader, but also opportunities for bonding with other adults and younger children. Young people are offered the opportunity to develop stronger relationships for moral and spiritual support skills. Further, with the youth ministry, they are encouraging young people to feel a connection to their larger community and world.

Matthew J.M. Coomber articulates that being in the community is a form of justice when he stated:

Being made just and doing justice are a matter of being immersed in the life of the ecclesial community; to do justice is to be a part of the community whose life is centered in and ordered by Jesus, God's justice.<sup>1</sup>

A spirit of inclusion, friendliness, and love has been created within our congregation. One factor that has led to positive growth has been the cultural shift from the older saints being more receptive to urban clothing without condescending but embracing them with an openness to accept the youth in their current trends.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew J.M. Coomber, *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges* (London Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2011), 74.

This has broken down a major barrier that was present in the church for a very long time. The culture has shifted from the older saints being very strict and close-minded to realizing they need our guidance, some have accepted the fact that the youth from right down the street are coming into our church, which is engulfed in cultural conformity.

It is uplifting to see a young man who somewhat mirrors my past self - come into our church confused, discouraged, helpless, and in dire need of hope, and who is now coming on his own to the worship service. He now reaches out to the church and shares how he has been guided through the preaching, teaching, fellowshiping, and service, which continues to be the normality. The people that frequent the doors of our church are looking for authenticity, therefore, we need tools and strategies to speak with this generation. The leadership team and congregation needs to engage youth on their levels: Leonard Sweet quotes Virginia Woolf with the thought from one of his chapters entitled "*Blood Supply Incarnation and Culture*" by simply stating: 'The tools of one generation are useless for the next.'<sup>2</sup>

My basic working definition of discipleship is "growing deeper in the Word of God and then extending that relationship to those within the community."

We have to meet the needs of the total person within our church and community, irrespective of race, color, age, or sex. The target populations we are trying to serve are youths who attend K-12 public school systems in the area. The systems are on our agenda as intimated by Tony Evans who said:

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard Sweet, *A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching: Giving Blood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 243.

First and most obvious, churches are located everywhere. In fact, there is an average of fourteen churches for every public school in America. Consequently, churches are closer to the needs of the people since they are located in the heart of the community. The church provides holistic, long-term solutions that change how people think, which ultimately determines how they live. As such, churches must be intentional about having a comprehensive program that connects both the spiritual and the social so as not to affect only the lives of their members but also the broader community that they serve.<sup>3</sup>

This insight into the identity of the church as being a real presence not only with a sign out front, but truly involved in the daily lives of those we consider children of God. This is life changing and is truly balancing the practical theology of going into the neighborhood and assessing the mental, spiritual, and emotional concerns of the people. As I observe the neighborhood, further its important people know they have some people in their community as noted by Leonard Sweet when he shared;

Part of the pastoral assignment from God is to be a ministry of presence. People need to know and feel that there is someone who cares about their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The profundity of walking along with God discerning and knowing our own God-given calling is quite powerful. What pleases God is participation—in our calling and closeness, in our community of followers, in our walk with Christ. The quality of our participation in God’s calling for our lives and our closeness for ministry and mission.<sup>4</sup>

This walk and discipleship call play itself out as we serve the people to ensure that they are further encouraged and inspired and gain a sense of intimacy with them in the community. This change is vital to the upward mobility of our church and constituents that make up the body of Christ, seeking to make an impact in the neighborhood that we serve as representatives of God. During this process, to ascertain

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced Through the Eyes of Tony Evans: A Fresh Look at Reconciliation, The Kingdom, and Justice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2001), 288.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet *The Well Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have To Be Such Hard Work* (Bonita Springs: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 36.

our effectiveness, we need to look at some of the demographics that we have inside our community and define the terms utilized in this project.

*Definition of key Terms*

*The body of Christ* – A group of believers within the church among other individuals that make up the congregation.

*Grace Baptist Church of Christ* – A predominately African American church with a membership of roughly 150 people located in the East New York section of Brooklyn.

*Disciples* – An individual who is willing to go into the community and replicate the process of bringing others into a relationship with God.

*Members* – A baptized believer who accepts and assist others within the church to become a part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

*Evangelism* – The mandate of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ through Christian witness.

*Sustainability* – Ensuring that new members and disciples receive support with the necessary information to grow spiritually, mentally, and socially.

*Christian* – One who believes and in the process of seeking an intimate relationship with God.

*LAC* – Lay Advisory Committee, disciples of Grace Baptist Church of Christ

### *Timeline for the Project*

*October 2016:* The selection of who would become a part of the Lay Advisory Committee.

*November 2016:* The follow-up meeting continuing with feedback and pertinent information for the project and expected outcomes.

*December 2016:* The follow-up meeting with LAC to discuss, refine, and clarify ideas that would render information with a specific focus on the ministry's needs.

*January 2017:* The follow-up meeting to discuss logistics centered around focus questions, with an intended execution of the plan regarding feedback from the group on shaping, building, and discipleship outcomes.

*February 2017:* The LAC meeting followed up with a specific focus on discipleship implementation and surveys, pretest, etc.

*March 2017:* The beginning of the five week Lenten season discipleship Bible classes series.

*April/May 2017:* The conclusion of the five week Lenten season discipleship bible classes series.

*June 2017:* Final LAC meeting to discuss the project's conclusion and the beginning of the analysis and writing phases.

## CHAPTER 2

### DISCIPLESHIP AS A MODEL OF JESUS IN THE COMMUNITY

Discipleship entails a simple definition of a disciple as a committed follower of a teacher or group. The word *disciple* in Greek is *Mathetes*, which implies one who is a learner seeking to understand and a follower of a teacher.<sup>5</sup>

This insight shed further light on the fact that the gist of discipleship entails sacrifice and depicts the actual cost of being a disciple.

Leonard Sweet evokes a stirring thought about this reality about Disciples of Christ being available to work and go out into the community:

Many seek the “sanctuary” of universalism or the “sanctuary” of ecumenism or the “sanctuary” of political correctness to avoid going “out” into the evangelistic mission field to resonate the voice of Christ to the world.<sup>6</sup>

The community, world, and abroad are ripe for making disciples, and we can truly become God’s conduits of grace. Although Grace Baptist Church is an African Baptist church, the congregants at weekly services are ethnically and racially diverse. This creates a weekly space where people of diverse backgrounds—who might not associate with one another under ordinary circumstances—can come together as one and demonstrate love and hospitality. It serves as a model of discipleship because Jesus is directly in the heart of East New York and in any other challenging neighborhood or

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<sup>5</sup> Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, *Key Insights into Gods Word* AMG Publishers (Chattanooga, Tennessee 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Sweet, *A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching: Giving Blood*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

unsafe environment. Jesus would show compassion for those who are downtrodden and ostracized from society. A biblical perspective of Jesus Christ, community, and mission is to be found in conversation looking at the world with an agenda to evangelize as a part of fulfilling the scripture. Therefore, it is referred to as “the great commission” where Jesus Christ gives a powerful command:

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.<sup>7</sup>

Dave Early and Rod Dempsey offer some profound insight as it pertains to discipleship. Dave noted:

The great commission cannot be fulfilled without intentionally pursuing the lost. Just as He was *sent* by His Father, Jesus has *sent* us out in a deliberate quest to win nonbelievers to faith in Christ (John 20:21, 31). Those who are sent are disobedient until they *go*. It is not enough to go; we must also tell. The second practice needed to fulfill the Great Commission is evangelism: proclaiming the good news. Christians are to display the gospel. They must also tell nonbelievers the message of Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrecting for their sins. The third action is “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). This involves incorporating them into a community of believers. The fourth action is “teaching them to observe everything Jesus’ commanded. This involves more than downloading information. Disciple making is about comprehensive training in obedience leading to reproduction and multiplication”. Disciple making is practicing everything Jesus commanded, including the command to make more disciples.<sup>8</sup>

One cannot separate discipleship without also noting that it entails a certain element of sacrifice. Dietrich Bonhoeffer aides our right understanding of discipleship

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<sup>7</sup> *Holy Bible, Matthew 28:18-20.*

<sup>8</sup> Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 4-5

and gives his opinion by measuring what one does outwardly as a connection to an inner change to be united with Christ. He says:

When Christ calls a man, “he bids him come and die. There are different kinds of dying, is it true; but the essence of discipleship is contained in those words.”<sup>9</sup>

It is this desire to see Christian growth and continue to build the community that will be one of building a relationship with the people to stimulate growth, understanding, and spiritual empowerment to the people of God. The life of Discipleship embodies relationship, understanding, purpose, and meaning. It is characterized by and nurtured through worship, Discipleship, and compassion for our fellow neighbor who resides within the community. This depiction is a spiritual, moral, and economic replica of the overall mission of this project and how it can be beneficial for the community.

In the previous reference Biblical text, Jesus saw a large crowd beginning to gather around his circumference and knew that they believed and accepted the message. However, prior to this point, Jesus had to expose the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy. Ironically, He became even more popular with the crowds as he questioned the motives and hidden thoughts of those who were following Him.

Jesus made it clear that, when it came to personal discipleship, He was more interested in substance rather than style, and quality over quantity. This became the litmus test for all those who desired to be a disciple wholeheartedly. Jesus examined the intent of the heart for discipleship, and this misguided focus leads to a significant risk of misunderstanding the purpose behind Christian Discipleship.

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<sup>9</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 11



Therefore, we discussed a text in Luke 14:25-33 where Jesus Christ required the disciples to leave all and follow him:

<sup>25</sup> Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup> And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*— <sup>29</sup> lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? <sup>31</sup> Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup> So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.<sup>10</sup>

This insight shed further light on the fact that Discipleship entails sacrifice and one should seriously consider the actual cost of being a disciple.

Jesus Christ challenged the crowds to think about what it will cost prior to stepping out and following him, which requires total submission and thus not a superficial form of religion. Ezekiel Lesmore credits Walter Brueggemann in one of his articles with a profound definition of Discipleship:

It is a summons away from our characteristic safety nets of social support. It entails a resolve to follow a leader who himself has costly habits, in order to engage in disciplines that disentangle us from ways in which we are schooled and stupefied, and that introduce new habits that break old vicious cycles among us, drawing us into intimacy with this calling God. Brueggemann reminds us of the urgency to embrace a culture that ignites the passion to be authentic in discipleship that is rooted in transformation. He affirms further, ‘discipleship requires a whole new conversation in a church that has been too long accommodating, at ease in the dominant values of culture that fly in the face of the purposes of God. Brueggemann concludes with a strong argument: “the God

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<sup>10</sup> *Holy Bible, Luke 14:25-33.*

who calls is the God of discipleship, the one who calls people to follow, to obey, to participate in [God's] passion and mission.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Jesus Christ was proactive in His instruction towards His followers, the church must also have a purposeful program of teaching, fellowship, and accountability, to show new believers and members how to follow the path of discipleship.

As the Savior taught and instructed, it is important to recognize the disciple's willingness to submit to His authority and teaching. After one accepts His offer for eternal life and service, He does not force anyone to follow, but those who follow fall under the force: His love and grace. In their willingness to learn and serve, the disciples would continue to develop their theology, faith, and practice and then they would minister and share their faith. The pattern that Jesus established was for believers to become mature in their faith so that they could then in turn disciple others. Therefore, it is up to the church and the established disciples of the world to make sure that the work of discipleship is still a priority to fulfill the will of the Father.

There must be an undeniable passion in the heart of the believer. This passion should be seen as he/she seeks God whole-heartedly, and there must be passion from the church to disciple those who meet the Savior. Discipleship should be a "journey" and not a "destination," as the believer continuously strives to interact and serve the world and the lost. Becoming a disciple, as shown by the examples of the Savior and the original church, is truly a lifelong process to become like Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel Lesmore Gibson, *Missional Discipleship: A Transforming Paradigm for the Churches in Africa* (International Review of Mission Houston Texas, Copyright World of Churches, 2016), 159.

## CHAPTER 3

### DISCIPLESHIP TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

The biblical narrative that is essential and is resounding with a theme of spiritual, mental, and emotional wellbeing is Luke 8:27-29:

Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!" For it had often seized him, and was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. (NKJV)

As intimated earlier, I contend that prayer is needed for the (*Shalom*) of the city because so many of our people are grappling within our communities with many social and spiritual barriers. I have worked with the population of mental illness for the past ten years, and I see a striking correlation between the scripture and the obvious symptoms in our ministry context. For example, depression, such as spiritual or emotional bondage, could create a mental struggle coupled with society' ills in the form of economic strain, increase barriers to individuals who desire change. However, regarding discipleship, reaching out to the community is a progressive work that is missional and has the potential for true change; yet a shift in perspective and methodology is precisely what God has led me to do in this time and place. Working with the population afflicted by mental illness and seeing the crippling effect of homelessness has placed a burden and concern in my life for these people. There is a major misconception within the church involving the issue of mental illness, namely thinking that only "prayer" will change the situation. However, after working with the population and being in the church, I think

that it takes more than prayer, specifically awareness and some strategies and realistic mechanisms.

My passion is to see these individuals get the care, concern, and help that they need for transformation. As this is my profession as an assistant manager apart from pastoral ministry, partnering the knowledge and skills of mental health professional outreach with ministry is a natural fit for my focus in the church. There can be some true insight to further assist those in need in the community.

I am coming to realize the importance of my role as pastor in this season. Thomas Oden reaffirmed my position when he stated:

This is the vocation of the pastor: to know the parish territory, its dangers, its green meadows, its steep precipices, its seasons and possibilities. The shepherd is able to anticipate their needs in advance and is willing to deal with each one individually.<sup>12</sup>

As the pastor it is essential to lead by example, which includes contributing time and commitment towards finding resolutions to a rising problem within the community. The needs of those in the community in which we serve are not only spiritual but encompass physical, emotional, and mental needs as well.

I think that the increasing mental health challenges we see displayed throughout our community and world abroad by use of harming themselves and others among ethnic minority young adults necessitates a thorough exploration of disparities that continue to affect their awareness and self-acceptance. Stigma, therapeutic relationship problems, and lack of culturally centered care appear to be the common threads that create barriers to adherence and motivation for treatment.

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: HarperOne, 1983), 52

The scripture found in Luke 8:27-29 was mentioned in detail on Wednesday evenings amongst the LAC team and with the congregation as we observed the neighborhood that we felt would be befitting to discuss as well because depicts a man who has been without clothes and in his predicament a long time after being held hostage by demonic activity. Another of those tombs that are coordinated with the biblical narrative that correlates with our ministry context is in the streets of East New York. As I interface with individuals on the streets seeking solace and in need of assistance, the New York City Department of Homeless Services (NYC DHS) below captures some harrowing truths that speak to the importance of community integration. These startling statistics cover our neighborhood, and we have seen the effects of these numbers when people show up to our worship service in need of shelter, food, encouragement, medical attention, clothing, and overall empowerment.



## REPORT

## DAILY

1/22/2018

(Data from Sunday, January 21, 2018)

<b>SINGLE ADULTS</b>	
Drop-in Center Clients Served	649
Drop-in Center Overnight Census	314
Faith Bed Census	160
Outreach Contacts	313
Outreach Placements	4
Safe Haven Utilization	945
Veterans In Short-term Housing	204
Criminal Justice Short-	131

term Housing	
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<b>FAMILY INTAKE</b>	
Families Requesting Temporary Housing at PATH	86
Adult Families Requesting Temporary Housing at AFIC	7
Families Placed in Overnight Accommodations	0
Families w/children at PATH Overnight (pre 10PM)	0

<b>TOTAL SHELTER CENSUS</b>	
Adults	37,8
Children	29
	22,8
	74
<b>Total Individuals</b>	<b>60,703</b>

<b>SINGLE ADULT SHELTER CENSUS</b>	
Men	10,8
Women	34
	4,12
	4
<b>Total Single Adults</b>	<b>14,958</b>

<b>FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN CENSUS</b>	
<b>Families</b>	<b>12,8</b>
Adults	47
Children	17,5
Children	71
	22,8
	74

<b>Individuals</b>	<b>40,4 45</b>
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<b>ADULT FAMILIES CENSUS</b>	
<b>Families</b>	<b>2,51 1</b>
<b>Individuals (Adults)</b>	<b>5,30 0</b>

Figure 2

After attaining this knowledge and seeing the great need for transformation within the ministry and so many people crying out for help, we are now adopting a discipleship project and model of awareness to educate ourselves to be of better assistance to those in emotional turmoil. This awareness of individuals that need help to which we are called of God to encourage is necessary; the following words that we feel personify the characteristics of Jesus Christ and would be helpful to further assist those within the community.

The stigma of homelessness and mental illness continues to be a growing concern in society, specifically in urban communities, religious institutions, and within various cultures. Approximately 1 percent of the U.S. population experiences homelessness in any given year. Approximately 25 percent of the homeless population has a serious mental-health diagnosis, compared with 6 percent of the overall U.S. population. Mental illness is a major contributing factor to a person becoming homeless.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rabiner, Mark. and Amy. Weiner. "Health Care for Homeless and Unstably Housed: Overcoming Barriers," *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine*, 79, no. 5 (2012): 586-592.

Both epidemics are multifactorial, so there are no single pathways about the causes and or onset process. At the Grace Baptist Church of Christ, our strategy is encouragement, moral assistance, with practical resources to meet the need of the total person by way of compassion and Discipleship.

### *Discipleship and the Homelessness Connection*

The church community can be the most resourceful social support for the homelessness population. As followers of Christ, we must be a catalyst for compassion within our efforts of discipleship. The church should never be limited to the awareness and assistance of societal and social problems that continue to oppress and hinder opportunities for empowerment and abundant living. Moreover, we are committed to seeing that those in our community embrace healthy relationships that Christ intends for humanity.

At the Grace Baptist Church of Christ, for the past fifty-five years of operation addressing issues of homelessness has always been a central need of our ministry. As advocates for better housing in the community, collective efforts, and inputs of leadership and outside resources have led the way in seeking government funds to secure housing in the community. As a result of these networking efforts, in 1970 the Grace Housing Development Fund, Inc. was organized.

Today, the Grace Towers affordable housing development continues to provide housing for 168 families nearby the church. However, the problem of homelessness continues to worsen because of the vast number of social problems (e.g., untreated mental illness, substance abuse, domestic issues) that often occur in urban areas and render it very complex to explore and secure permanent housing. The church location is nearby

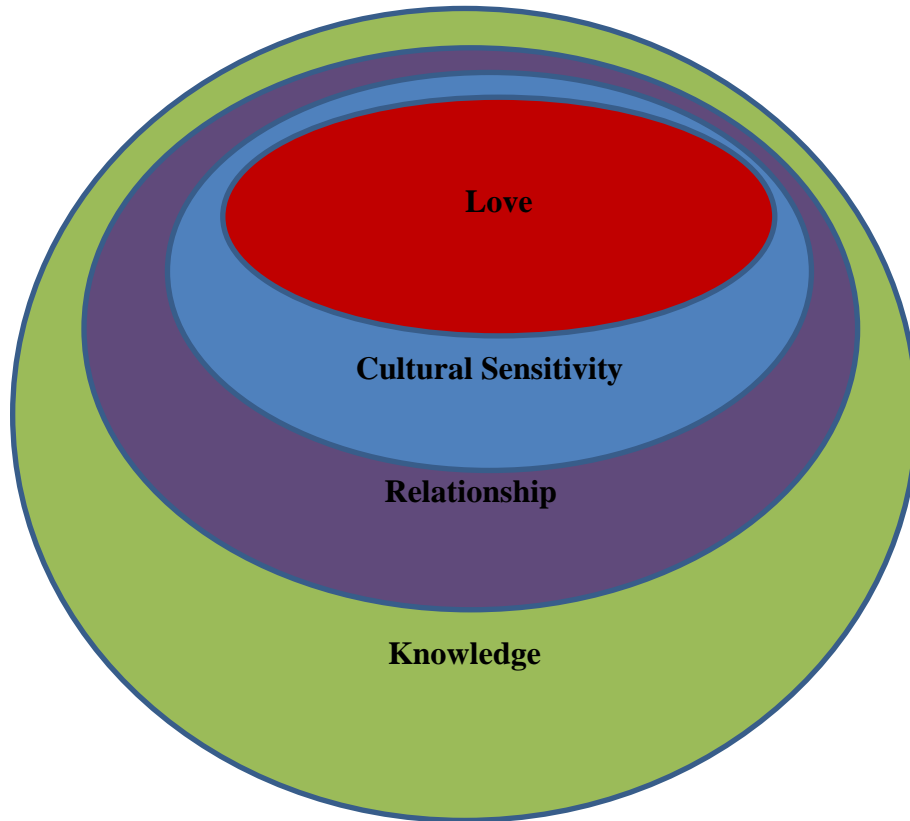


several housing shelters and substance abuse programs: BRC Fulton House Men's Shelter, Help USA Women's Shelter, Federation Organization Transitional Housing, Samaritan Village Drug and Alcohol Program, BRC Liberty Family Shelter, CAMBA Transitional Housing, and others.

Homelessness continues to be a major problem in the five boroughs of New York City. The number of homeless people in New York City has reached unprecedented levels and is in dire need of assistance. Although the number of homeless people has declined nationwide, this population has increased in New York City. Of the nation's homeless population, one out of five homeless people are located in New York City or Los Angeles. The Coalition for the Homeless posits that more than 111,000 homeless men, women, and children in New York City used the shelter system in 2013. This means that the number of homeless people is 87 percent higher than it was January 2002.

The past four years of my experience in pastoring and teaching the congregation about discipleship has helped to deepen the perspective of understanding the scriptures and the functions of Christianity as it pertains to the forgotten population. Working several years with individuals who are challenged with co-occurring disorders (mental illness and substance abuse issues) and observing the attitudes toward mental illness within various communities (including the Christian church) has motivated me to incorporate opportunities to increase the awareness of mental illness at Grace Baptist Church of Christ.

### *Mental Illness*



Graph 2

The LAC team and I discovered four key words after noticing those who frequent our church would be necessary to show empathy to build discipleship. Our discipleship class as illustrated in our graph above is based upon these four pillars:

- *Love* – we felt the strong urge and firmly believe it is incumbent upon us to show people love by way of community outreach, which consist of phone calls, food pantries, assisting with clothing, etc. we incorporate that with the action of Discipleship by being present with individuals who are struggling despite their economic status, sexual preference, race, color, creed, etc. we understand that “*God is love.*”

- *Cultural Sensitivity* – we observed within our congregation we have those from various ethnic backgrounds and the neighborhood although predominantly African American, have also shown to be diverse races of all ages. Therefore, we offered cultural sensitivity training courses to the LAC team and the Leadership as a way to be friendly and to understand other’s lifestyle and their culture.
- *Relationship* – we firmly believed we could not empower people without getting to know them through prayer, corporate worship, and weekly conversation. It was through modeling the way Jesus would develop relationship with his followers that we found to be the most beneficial in reaching new congregation of the church and those in the community seeking to develop their faith practices.
- *Knowledge* – we noted it was vitally essential to have a level of awareness of our neighborhood and precisely who reside in it to ascertain the needs of the community so that we could better serve them.

It is through the word of God, along with patience, that we have been equipped with the relevant resources, knowledge, and information to help those within our congregation. After several years of working with the homeless, we have seen that those suffering from substance abuse and mental illness; could safely release feelings of shame and vulnerability when positive relationships combined clinical assistance could be established. Moreover, when individuals with life debilitating issues are supported by a pastor who understands them from the avenues of spiritual, clinical, and emotional, they may be within the church and community organizations.

On a personal note, there have been several incidents in which I was able to collaborate with treatment and community providers to assist a few of the disciples who

were experiencing housing issues related to mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Having a set of lenses which includes pastoral care and mental experience gives me an advantage to better support and guide disciples that encounter these challenges.

The location of Grace Baptist Church of Christ is somewhat of a benefit for this specific population, thanks to a networking relationship with various transitional housing programs, substance and mental outpatient clinics, and medical facilities, which are within walking distance from the church. Faith-based relations with the integration of community support are very effective systems that have been utilized and have resulted in positive outcomes. The only challenge regarding this location is that it is in a volatile area filled with people with issues, which can be difficult to combat with limited support. As Dr. Gary Simpson shared in quoting a sermon by Cleo LaRue: “if it’s in your community then it’s in your church.”

To help these disciples, along with the pastor who has a working knowledge and a concern for this population, we have several human service workers, mental health clinicians, healthcare providers, and entitlement specialists that are disciples of Grace Baptist Church of Christ. These individuals unselfishly share their expertise, and we collectively assist these individuals to our best ability. Discipleship allows them to maintain a spiritual relationship that influences other aspects of their lives. There are also opportunities for empowerment through our professional development workshops, dress for success exchange, and educational panel discussions for those who are interested in returning to school. These ministries and forms of support can help reduce homelessness by way of the church. Moreover, I have taken the Apostle Paul’s message of following Christ in the example in 1 Corinthians 11:1 as a source of strength and modeling.

Richard Longenecker expounded on this letter from Paul by showing how devoted he is to sharing the gospel and lifting up Jesus Christ as his example:

Paul exhorts his converts to a life of imitation twice in 1 Corinthians. Once he invites them to imitate him (4:16); another time, he asks them to imitate Christ (somewhat indirectly) through imitating him (11:1). In so doing, he calls them to a life of discipleship that has as its exemplars him immediately and Christ ultimately.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdsman, 1996), 121.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCIPLESHIP TO ADDRESS MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

We have started out on a journey to assess the needs of the community to ensure that God is glorified, seen, and uplifted to the highest standard of Christian living.

Furthermore, speaking to the needs of the people, by synchronizing my profession as a person assisting those with mental illness and pastoring as well, has given me the tools, knowledge, and information to further help the people of God.

#### **Discipleship and the Mental Illness Connection**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health ([www.NIMH.nih.gov](http://www.NIMH.nih.gov)) report last dated in November 2017, mental illnesses are common in the United States. Nearly one in five U.S. adults lives with a mental illness (44.7 million in 2016). Mental illnesses include many different conditions that vary in degree of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. These conditions are not limited to specific environments, but also have a strong presence in church communities, culture, families, etc.

According to several researchers and clinicians, individuals and/or family members that have a loved one challenged with mental illness often seek the support of religious communities in efforts to cope with and recover from associated dilemmas with their psychiatric health. Edward B. Rogers and Matthew Stanford point out those religious communities are appearing to be a frontier for psychological service; those seeking help are often present there, and religious support and positive religious coping are associated with reduced incidence and improved recovery from mental illness.<sup>15</sup> The author's Edward and Stanford further state that religious communities are geared

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<sup>15</sup> Rogers, Edward. B. and, Matthew. S. Stanford. "A Church-based Peer-led Group Intervention for Mental Illness," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 18, no. 6 (2015): 470.

towards supporting their members; when churches actively assist those struggling with mental illness, the power of congregational support and religious resilience factors are unleashed in the service recovery.

Each year Grace Baptist Church sponsors a community event during our church anniversary called East New York Family and Friends Day. This event starts with Sunday school and our morning worship services and is then followed by activities that educate the community. These activities include physical health awareness surrounding diabetes and hypertension, prostate disease, and colonoscopy screening facilitated by one of the city networking hospitals. It was during my second year of pastoring that I suggested and invited a mental health clinician from Harlem Hospital to facilitate a workshop on mental illness. Mental health professionals can help church communities to understand the struggles of individuals and families dealing with mental illness and can encourage the creation of a more adaptive response. To achieve this, they need to be proactive in building relationships with faith communities.<sup>16</sup>

Untreated mental illness is a major social problem that leads to several dilemmas in an individual's overall well-being and the community. Stigma is one of the most common reasons why mental health services are underutilized. Such stigma among this homeless population causes various dilemmas that may be described as spiritual, religious, psychological, social, environmental, etc.

The stigma experienced by these individuals often also affects their participation in treatment. It may lead individuals to try to distance themselves from the negative label, to misunderstand their illness, and to believe that treatment itself is possibly stigmatizing,

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<sup>16</sup> Rogers, E. B., M. Stanford and D. R. Garland. "The Effects of Mental Illness on Families Within Faith Communities," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15, no. 3 (2012):301.

harmful, or ineffectual.<sup>17</sup> Moses further suggests that, although stigma is certainly not the only barrier to treatment, it can derail individuals' capacity or willingness to engage in treatment at any point along their "illness career."

I have witnessed and listened to the cries of these individuals feeling broken, confused, unaccepted, and often misunderstood by family members, co-workers, and religious institutions within their communities. For this reason, from a pastoral perspective it is important that I first help these individuals and family members to discover who they are in Christ, and what Christ's love can do for them. Discipleship also entails outreach, relationship, and informing those ostracized because of their mental and social barriers that they too can become connected within the body of Christ. Based on years of practical experience, more than prayer but awareness and some strategies and realistic mechanisms. Church awareness of mental psychosis is one pathway to understanding those in the community grappling with addiction, and I do believe it cannot continue to be overlooked. Spiritual interventions integrated with clinical services are possible and can be effective.

Authors Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin shared the following:

We are relational beings. We were created in God's image with a yearning to commune with God, and with other relational beings.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Moses, Tally. "Stigma and Self-concept Among Adolescents Receiving Mental Health Treatment," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 79, no. 2 (2009):261.

<sup>18</sup> Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies or Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing; 1992), 96



As a shepherd leader, balancing ministry can be cumbersome and somewhat challenging. Moreover, the demands of ministry are discussed by Barbara Brown Taylor who shared the following:

With just seven days in a week, where is the time to be a good preacher, teacher, pastor, prophet, celebrant, prayer, writer, foot washer, administrator, community activist, clergy colleague, a student of scripture, and wholesome exemplar of the gospel?<sup>19</sup>

We have been able by the grace of God to supply some of the basic needs that these families battling mental illness. Our motto “meeting the needs of the total person” is not just a slogan in the program, but a lived reality so that we can all see God in our acts of service. Before discussing the projected timeline, a pertinent goal of the project is to see the people grow through our witness of discipleship in the East New York community. This will take place with the following tenets; empower people spiritually by attempting to make disciples according to the scriptures.

Also, our dates are a five-week post and pretest Bible study along with information to see if the goal is reachable through our project of hope and change. Our intended target is ages 25-80 as noticed the age range has varied, but mainly the direct link between homelessness and mental illness as these two factors have played an intricate role as observed in our community, Moreover, how do we make disciples out of this perceived forgotten population who we have seen to have no hope? We intend to give training based on my prior knowledge as stated working with the population to empower the community. This is the premise of ensuring that discipleship does not only

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York: HarperOne Collins Publishers, 2006), 45-46.

have one modality, but everyone could be a disciple of Christ despite your current circumstance.

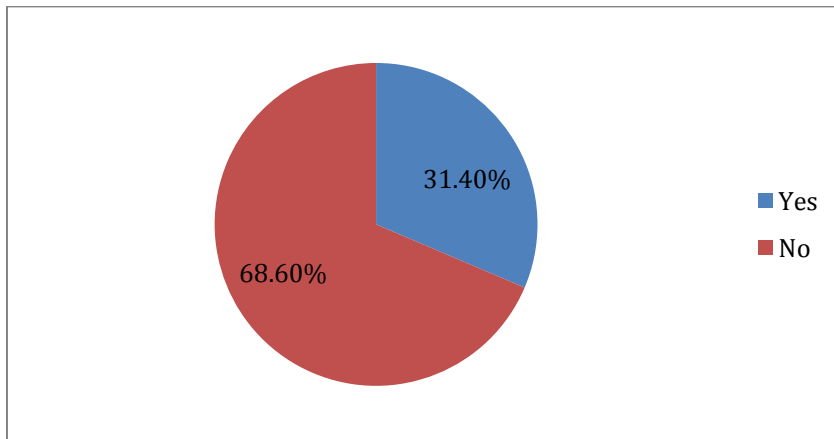
While homelessness has always existed, it was generally thought to be a condition that pertained to the outcasts of society such as drunkards and the mentally ill. Mental illness and drug and alcohol use are well-cited causes of homelessness; the ever-increasing lack of affordable housing has also proven to be a definitive cause of homelessness. Homelessness is not merely perceived as a housing problem. Individuals who are only having housing problems are not considered homeless, but rather houseless. Homelessness should be understood as a multifaceted social problem that often coincides with a host of other problems, not just lacking a residence. While mental illness is certainly one of the many causes of homelessness, it also appears that mental illness is exacerbated by the physical and mental toll of the homeless experience. The homeless are just like the rest of us, except they lack a home.

Research has suggested that homeless individuals are three to four times more likely to suffer from mental disorders and five times as likely to suffer from co-occurring alcohol/psychiatric disorders as persons who have never been homeless. While mental illness rates are significantly higher among the homeless population, we are to be aware of reducing the homeless to a psychiatric diagnosis. The present study was undertaken to assess common attitudes toward mentally ill congregants in the Christian church. Individuals who had interacted with the church in reaction to a specific mental disorder were surveyed. It was hypothesized that despite increased awareness and understanding of mental illness, a significant number of participants would report negative interactions with the church. Negative interactions in this study were defined as (1) Abandonment or

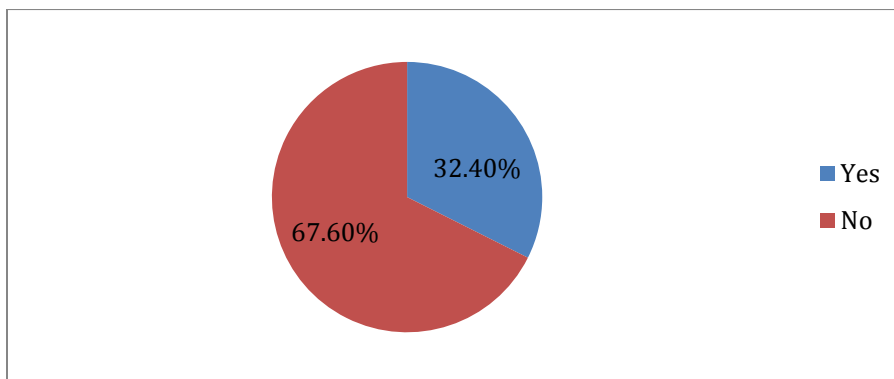
shunning by church because of the mental disorder, (2) Suggestion that the mental disorder was the work of Satan or demons, (3) suggesting that the mental disorder was a result of personal sin and/or that they would be “healed” if they deepened their faith.

All participants responded to the following survey questions:

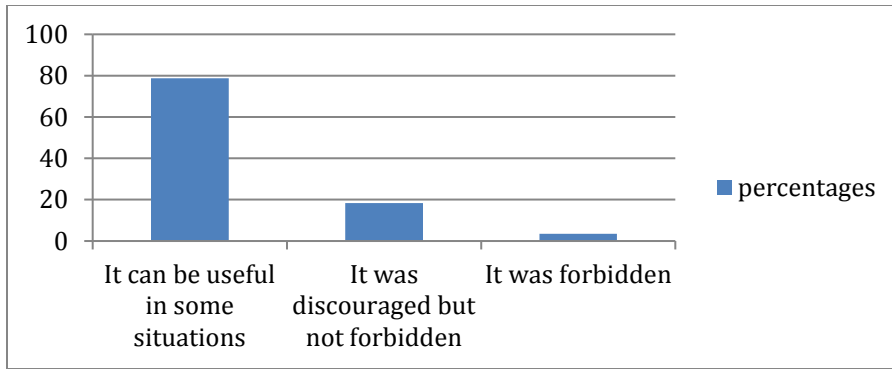
1. Did the church make you feel like the mental illness was the result of personal sin?



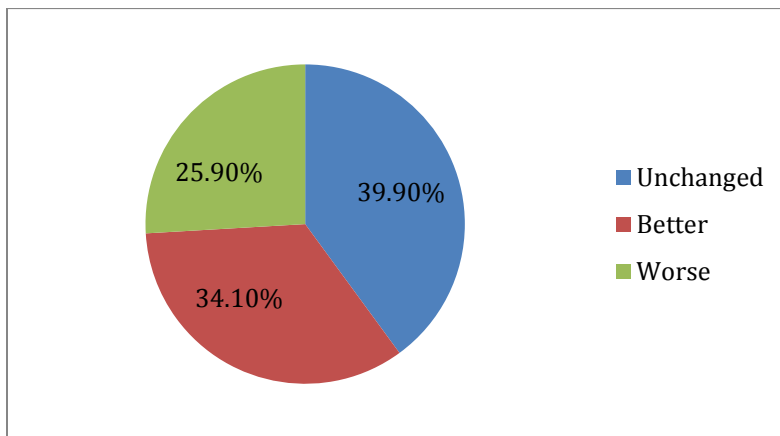
2. Did the church ever suggest that you or your loved one did not really have a mental illness, even though a mental health professional said that you did?



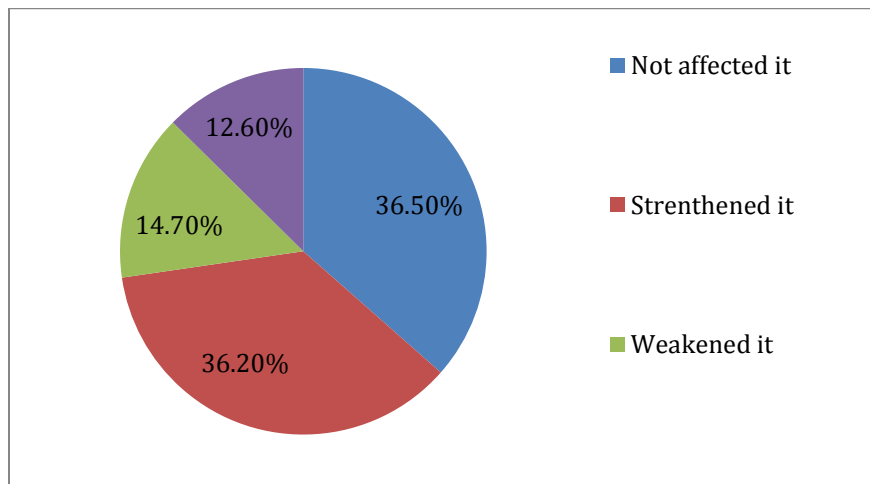
3. What was the church's position on psychiatric medication?



4. As a result of the church's involvement, the problem seemed to change?



5. How has this interaction with the church affected your faith?



## CHAPTER 5

### A COLLABORATIVE TEAM EFFORT

The project outlined below were the actual dates of classes:

- *March 1, 2017:* Identification and formation of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). Met with the pastor to discuss potential LAC members and begin LAC outreach.
- *March 8, 2017:* LAC meeting and outline of the project idea. Received feedback on how to shape the project and potential activities.
- *March 22, 2017:* LAC meeting to discuss the potential questions and how to set up a focus group. Developed logistics and structure of focus group session.
- *March 29, 2017:* LAC met to finalize focus group and release of church survey. Facilitated two church focus groups to explore narratives surrounding views on discipleship and community. Post-session LAC meeting to analyze and reflection findings from the focus group. We also conducted a baseline survey surrounding views of discipleship and community.
- *April 5, 2017:* Began five-week Bible series.
- *April 19, 2017:* Completed five-week Bible series.
- *April 30, 2017:* Final LAC meeting to discuss project conclusion.
- *May 3, 2017:* Gathering narratives and to implement the results in the church for application of findings.
- *May 10, 2017:* Debriefing on the process of analysis.
- *May 17, 2017:* Final meeting and debriefing process of the project.

This following section of the project proposal will cover the four parts of how the project was conducted. The methodology of the project sought to lead the congregation of Grace Baptist Church of Christ to follow the biblical pattern of discipleship without undue compulsion or embarrassment. Motivational fervor is a premium characteristic that was shared within the ministry LAC team. The project was completed in large part due to properly motivating the congregation from the pulpit, through public encouragement, and within the discipleship module. Grace Baptist Church in the East New York section is a Baptist Church that has an average congregational attendance of one hundred people. There were 8 congregational members who participated in this project and were adults between 25-80 years of age. All participants focused on the following scriptures; Luke 14:25-33, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 9:57-62, and 1 Corinthians 12:26-31. Also, we gleaned from Thom S. Rainer's book on membership on Wednesday nights entitled, "I am a church member."

Despite the wide age ranges, the active participants were pivotal and encouraging members. The target participants provided relevant feedback and encouragement for future growth in the church. Eight ministry persons assisted in the project, of both men and women who are members of the church by profession of faith, baptism, letter or statement of faith, and who have been believers for at least five years or longer. The group had a core leadership team comprised of the pastor, assistant pastor, two ministers, two youth leaders, a person serving on the Shepherd's ministry, and the assistant Sunday school director. These men and women assisted to carry out the project.

Collaboratively, the team planned the best approaches and calendar placements of the lesson plans and discipleship studies. Limitations for this smaller ministry team were

that every team member must be at least twenty-five years of age and must be a member of Grace Baptist Church of Christ. The primary lesson plans for the project were developed via two methods, the first of which was introducing the project and its various components with the sole purpose of building the church and community. Second, we utilized -eight-week discipleship training module on Wednesday nights, implemented at night. Finally, participants were given a seven-question assessment as a post-test about discipleship eight weeks began on Sunday morning March 12th, 2017 and updates as well information on the logistics were provided to the entire congregation during the Sunday morning corporate worship hour. The series continued each week through April 7th, 2017. Moreover, the inclusion of weekly technology was anticipated to include PowerPoint slides and corresponding bulletin outlines for note taking. Additionally, video clips, props, and music were identified and employed as visual and auditory aids to teaching the biblical text.

The teaching goal aimed to show the congregation how people walked obediently and closely with God from a biblical perspective. An additional goal was to find practical ways to replicate the discipleship process by pursuing a Godly character in ourselves and by evangelizing others. The discipleship training module was composed of a message series that laid the groundwork for the second phase of instruction encompassing discipleship study group meetings planned at Grace Baptist Church of Christ on Wednesday nights from 5:30-7:00 p.m. in available classrooms. The study material was selected after the LAC team agreed that Luke 14:25-33 was as the most suitable scripture focus as it closely reflects the biblical model of discipleship that would be taught on Wednesday evenings.

We discovered that our spiritual growth depends upon following the will of God made manifest through Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus laid out very strategically the tests and requirements of discipleship (Luke 14:25-35).

The project planned for the congregation to study in small group Bible study. Among the targeted studies were two specific courses specifically pursuing men and women, with addiction recovery, along with homelessness, based on the evaluation of the surrounding community and the present church surroundings.

The action plan of the project relied on the teachings about Discipleship and on some Sunday mornings as a way to further promote the project it got announced with the other programs within the church. As a result of the training, the pastoral team and participants continued to work together and challenged the congregation with a renewed biblical discipleship mindset. We further informed the congregation from my announcements from the pulpit as stated on Sundays and during the week to connect everyone with active involvement in discipleship with acronyms like Commitment, Obedience, Sacrifice, and Time (C.O.S.T.) and linking that with Bible study to encourage the importance of discipleship. The candidate also planned and strategized with the LAC. The LAC team also carefully chose the leaders for the studies. The original schedule had meetings planned to confirm the small group leadership in March and April of 2017.

The promotion had begun with the use of artful posters displayed around the church, and the congregation was expected to join in one of the small group discipleship studies offered in March 2017. Among other studies from which the leadership could have chosen were special outreach studies for the community men through outdoor witnessing and we are doing this at our church starting in the fall for recovery ministry of



addicts, depression, and divorce care. Both areas of ministry remain definitive needs within the surrounding ministry setting.

The project material was designed in a nine-week set, but for the purposes of discipleship teaching at Grace Baptist Church of Christ, it was to be accomplished in an eight -week series. The first discipleship study rotation changed in schedule due to weather condition but began on March 1, 2017, and ended on May 22, 2017. It remains our goal to continue with growing discipleship, homelessness issues, and care for those grappling with mental illness, which would begin again for those in the East New York area with ongoing addictions.

Prior to the discipleship studies each week, the plan was for the congregation to meet in brief corporate worship as a large group for approximately twenty minutes of music and prayer. As a team, we felt that this time should be planned in meetings with the music director to also promote a sense of worship. Immediately after the music and prayer time, the congregation began the individual and smaller discipleship groups. The purpose of the corporate worship time was to prepare the congregation through prayer and music to study the Bible.

The discipleship project was specifically set up for the adults in the church to encompass the evening worship hour from 5:30-7:00 p.m., adding 30 minutes to the regular time. During the expository teaching period, there were outreach conversations with those normally in attendance for the Sunday morning service to motivate them to continue and give this new rotation a fair attempt. Also, as a team, we felt there should be additional visitations and personal urgings to increase motivation to promote evangelism within the congregation.

This could also encourage Wednesday night attendance to receive the discipleship module training. We intended to use a pre-test and post-test to gain more perspectives on the success of the project and belief transformation.

Included in the post-test were questions to evaluate and determine the success of the Wednesday night discipleship module and if there is interest in continuing the format on a regular basis. The sanctuary and media equipment were needed for the expository teaching series to promote the Wednesday evening discipleship hour. Additional tools used were the curriculum already mentioned and other initiatives that the leadership team recommended, such as giving out physical flyers and spreading the information to everyone we saw at the time.

## CHAPTER 6

### LAC ROLE OF DISCIPLESHIP INTEGRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

On every Wednesday night during Bible study, we set out to discover the impact of Discipleship. We always envisioned as a leadership team that Discipleship would be a lived experience within the people of God. This process was quite interesting to observe, as many people within our church were very motivated, while a few said they were uncomfortable in evangelizing in the community.

Although resources are needed to reach the masses as previously mentioned, we are sharing the message of Jesus Christ with those in the community. The spiritual impact this had been evident as many people shared that the information and implementation of the discipleship model were very insightful and helpful. Moreover, we demonstrated the power of small groups; for example, the LAC shared that intimate settings in their opinion have always proved to be more effective. They conveyed their sentiments, and we agreed not only to meet for this project but to continue to meet quarterly to ensure sustainability among the congregation so that people could grow and feel a deep sense of connectedness. We discovered even more so through these meetings that this was helpful because, within our ministry, some older people are not always comfortable in a crowd. William H. Willimon shared a thought very profound from Robert Wuthnow of the impact of small groups:

Small groups encourage many members to regard biblical wisdom as truth. In simplest term, the sacred comes to be associated with small insights that seem intuitively correct in the small groups rather than wisdom accrued over the centuries.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 233.

As believers, we continue to live out the power of small groups, seeing their effectiveness which we have experienced. Some people have shared in our ministry context they need a personal and intimate setting. Others recounted that they have gone through some battles with substance abuse, violence, childhood trauma, and abandonment. Therefore, they felt welcomed, appreciated, and a part of a family in our setting of just a few people. Roger Walton expounded on the importance of small groups, citing the Bethany Church in Houghton-le-Spring as follows;

A small group helps you study the Bible and learn more about the Christian faith. A small group is the best place to get to know people. A small group is the best place to grow as a follower of Jesus. A small group is a great place to find love and support when times get bumpy. A small group is a great place to bring your friends, relatives, and work associates so they too can find out what it means to be a follower of Christ and grow. A small group is a great place to develop your skills and gifts as you contribute in the group. Being part of a small group is the New Testament pattern.<sup>23</sup>

The LAC team and I experienced what Dr. Terry Todd deemed as “holy moments,” where God’s power and presence were evident in our conversations to discuss ways of outreach and in reach with our church. We discussed the outreach of empowering the people with the biblical knowledge of what is entailed in actually doing the work of discipleship in the community, to which they were open. This involves showing love to people, regardless of their economic, racial, or social background. The in-reach part consisted of those within our ministry who have already joined, but still need encouragement, hope, and healing for their current day battles. We did not want to be so community driven that we neglected our own community of believers that also need sustainability with whom we worship and see on a weekly basis.

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<sup>23</sup> Roger Walton, *Disciples Together* (West Yorkshire: Equinox Publishing, 2012), 103-104.

After ascertaining our level of growth by informing and equipping the people to know the scriptures and show how they can be operative in the life of a believer.

Moreover, our discussions were centered on having a discipleship mindset that included a vision beyond us for the entire community. John E. Kaiser mentioned following the command of Jesus Christ:

Although Jesus gave many instructions and examples to his followers over the course of his ministry before the Crucifixion, none are as explicitly presented as the now familiar words at the end of the first Gospel: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matt 28:18-20). While three important participles qualify the command, there is a single imperative: to make new learners (mathes) from every culture (ethne). Going is how we find them, baptizing is how we mark them, and teaching them to obey is how we mature them; but the core of the mission is to make more of them. The good news is too good to keep to ourselves. Mission, which belongs to the church, is implemented in each individual congregation by means of vision in a particular place and time.<sup>24</sup>

This vision expanded further as we delved even deeper into our conversations as a team and with the people to ensure that we were attempting to make an impact with the project.

One spiritual blessing was to see a congregational member transition from a different denomination and of another ethnicity come under our leadership and flourish into a mature Christian. To see that person walk in, somewhat reserved and a bit apprehensive, but come every Sunday and feel very comfortable and now sharing his/her faith with others is an incredible testament of how small group discipleship can influence

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<sup>24</sup> John E. Kaiser, *Fish or Cut Bait: How Winning Churches Make Decisions* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2011), 28.

and empower congregational members. To see God's power and glory totally transform a person into growing and understanding that discipleship constitutes growth overtime and does not necessarily happen overnight but he/she can and develop a relationship with Christ is truth; within these examples, I see them as "moments of grace" where God shows up in our relationships with those within the community. These "holy moments" come subtly and unexpectedly, and for which we were at times totally unprepared and caught off guard. These moments of favor, grace, mercy, and truth appear without notification to show that the community is the hearts and pulse of the church and the church becomes intertwined with the community.

During this process, as we embarked upon the journey, we set out to discover the through pre and post surveys. We wanted to gain their perspective on discipleship as it pertains to the Christian faith. During the process, we discovered that some people did not feel the need to venture out beyond the four walls of the church. Others felt this innate desire to not only go outside the church but to take to heart the gospel message, while others saw the necessity of being transparent, accessible, and available for God to use them as conduits and agents of change in the community.

These views were quite interesting because the church grew numerically and spiritually because evangelism was absolute necessity, as I intimated at the beginning of this paper. The ministry started with the grassroots approach of going out into the community and seeing the needs of the people while making it known that the church had a presence and not just a name on the front of the building. It is our hope that this evangelical thrust will further become a resurgence and revisiting of the time when going outside the walls to witness was the normality.

We also discussed the vast difference between discipleship and membership. If we are not careful as believers, an incorrect view of the church can result in coming with the wrong mentality. Thom S. Rainer shared the following:

Membership means perks. Membership means privileges. Membership means others will serve me. Just pay the going rate, and you can have others taking care of you while you enjoy a life of leisure. And, tragically, this understanding of membership is what many church members hold. Those who have an unbiblical view of membership. Their view of membership is more aligned with country club membership. For them membership is about receiving instead of giving, being served instead of serving, rights instead of responsibilities, and entitlements instead of sacrifices.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly enough the verses in 1 Corinthians 12:27-28: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. And God has placed these in the church.”

As growing disciples of Christ who have understanding and seek that others continue to grow as well, it is a humbling task to know that we are chosen by God to assist others. It is about being God’s choice that Leonard Sweet mentions:

What makes us first followers is not that we love God but that God loves us. And who did Jesus choose? Jesus didn’t choose members for his team who would make him look good. Jesus didn’t choose the best and brightest, Jesus didn’t choose the cream of the crop but the curdled milk, the skimmed milk, and the dregs at the bottom of the cup<sup>26</sup>

This is the example of living out the gospel message from the aspect of continually going out into the community with the message of hope, reconciliation, and encouragement to let people know that God is still in the city. Within our efforts and

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<sup>25</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *I am A Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I am A Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 41.

implementation of the concept of discipleship, we are grateful to see that Discipleship can become a lived reality.

The research and data collected along with information from DHS continues to provide knowledge so we could become more sensitive to the needs of those individuals within the community. The information was pertinent because some churches know they have members without homes. Many do not. One of the striking facts about the experience of homelessness is how widely it can vary, from living on the streets to “couch-surfing,” staying with whichever friend or relative is willing to take you in for a little while.

People can spend decades cycling in and out of shelters and programs, or they can spend several months living out of their car. The Department of Housing and Urban Development collects statistics on how many Americans are homeless on a given night (over 500,000 in 2016), but this vastly underestimates how many Americans have experienced some period of homelessness. Even shorter-term and relatively safer periods of homelessness often leave serious claw marks on people’s souls, on their idea of who they are and how others see them.

In attempting to give a few homeless a chance to share their experiences in the process of becoming homeless, a qualitative method was utilized. We surveyed the neighborhood and spoke to eight individuals whom we found by visiting several homeless shelters, personal connections, and walking around in East New York where we live. This tiny group does not include anyone who was homeless while caring for children or anyone who became homeless before age 18.



Some of the people we spoke to were homeless only briefly, some for rather long extensive periods of time, they come from widely different back grounds, they have different interest, different personalities, and yet their experiences of homelessness were intense enough to make most of them in starkly similar ways. A sense of both exposure and invisibility came up repeatedly in our conversation.

Table 1

*Participant's Demographic Information*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>General background information</b>
Participant 1 (P1)	Male	23	Single, White male, 4th-grade education
Participant 2 (P2)	Male	36	Married, African American male, High School Grad
Participant 3 (P3)	Female	45	Separated, Hispanic Female, 11th-grade education
Participant 4 (P4)	Female	49	Separated, African American Female,
Participant 5 (P5)	Male	32	Divorced, African American Male, MA in Computer Tech
Participant 6 (P6)	Male	36	Separated, White male, High School Graduate
Participant 7 (P7)	Female	41	Separated, White Female, College Graduate (B.A. Health)
Participant 8 (P8)	Male	60	Single, African American, Army Veteran

As shown in table 1, the participants in this study included five men and three women. The participants included three African Americans, three Caucasians and one Hispanic. The participants ranged in age from 23 to 60 years old.

A conventional qualitative content analysis of semi-structured interviews was also conducted with the 8 participants (P) who experienced the process of becoming homeless within the 12 months before the interview. This analysis yielded the causes of homelessness.

The causes of homelessness are diverse and related to many systemic and institutional structures within our country. As a pastor I have recognized that there are many causes of homelessness and many are interwoven. Unfortunately, there is not always good data to demonstrate the impact of these forces. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to highlight only a few causes of homelessness in our country:

1. Poverty from a lack of jobs at competitive living wages.
2. The disparity between housing costs and minimum wage, the public supports, or earned benefits.
3. Lack of affordable housing and inadequate housing assistance.
4. Lack of affordable health care.
5. Inadequate support for mental health and substance use challenges.
6. Racial inequality.
7. National opioid crisis.
8. Domestic violence.

Table 2 below shows the different subcategories as well as the breakdown of percentage for each category and subcategory.

<b>Thematic category</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Percentage of Responses</b>
Poverty from a lack of jobs at competitive living wages.	P1,P2,P3,P5,P7,P8	75%
The disparity between housing costs and minimum wage, the public supports, or earned benefits.	P4,P6,P8	38%
Lack of affordable housing and inadequate housing assistance.	P3,P5,P7,P8	50%
Lack of affordable health care.	P1,P3,P5,P7,P8	63%

Inadequate support for mental health and substance use challenges.	P1,P2,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8	88%
Racial inequality.	P2,P4,P5	38%
National opioid crisis.	P1,P2,P3,P5,P6,P7	75%
Domestic violence.	P1,P4,P5	38%

The challenge in doing this portion of the project recognized that in our efforts we could not help everyone. The LAC team was determined, focused, and possessed a special zeal to reach out to the community to display what transpires in our ministry context around the neighborhood of Grace Baptist Church of Christ. The other challenge we understood that despite of anyone who has mental illness or experienced homelessness could still be a disciple of Christ because the love of God extends to all of humanity.

One individual is my example who is a disciple of Grace, through my profession I was able to assist this person's mother with all the necessary information to relay to his treatment team since he battles with multiple psychiatric disorders. However, despite the efforts, we have been unable to get him to service and worship on a consistent basis because of his consistent hospitalizations.

This has certainly challenged our work and project, another woman who was homeless and had episodes of battling depression and Schizophrenia from the neighborhood had a mental breakdown. I had my daughter in my hand, and we called 911 to get her psychiatrically evaluated to ensure that she get the help that is needed to integrate back into society. I still believe that the individual who I was able to assist in getting the psychiatric necessities and this women are still Disciples of Christ although we could not provide them with what we felt was meeting the needs of the total person.

## CHAPTER 7

### PROJECT EVALUATION

As I evaluate this insightful and powerful project, it has been nothing short of amazing, exhilarating, inspiring, and empowering to the people of God. To see various people attend church and come to the ministry and begin to grow, and to see the evidence of love, peace, joy, and patience take root in the heart of newly and seasoned disciples are favorable. This perspective on the commission has been reinvigorated in the discipleship paradigm that evidently drew us closer together in our walk with God. Our people have been changed, charged, and challenged with such vital information that this has brought some quite positive feedback resulting in people growing in their relationship to God.

These individuals that are growing in their relationship with God include friendliness, encouragement, and love. The inspiration has helped us to define our identity and revisit the call to Discipleship in a way that is life-changing. This challenge has also caused a deeper analysis in a spiritual introspection of our connection to God's agenda, which is not self-seeking. J. Henrich Arnold shared the following:

Discipleship demands that we drop everything, including everything we count positive in ourselves. The radicalism of Christ's way must challenge us. He does not want to win numbers but dedicated hearts. He seeks those who want to give themselves unreservedly to God and to their brothers, without seeking anything for themselves. The decision to follow Christ must be a deeply personal one. But it can never mean—as someone said to me, “Only Jesus and I remain.” Discipleship must always be related to one's brothers and sisters.<sup>27</sup>

It has been very transformative to witness our stories of redemption; empowerment, love, and faith come alive and result in a new evangelistic way of making disciples within a new framework. Despite the obvious and many societal ills that plague

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<sup>27</sup> J. Heinrich Arnold, *Discipleship* (Farmington: The Plough House, 1994), 18.

the people who desire an even deeper change are considered disciples continually feel this inward thrust to speak out loud.

Their contributions shall not remain stagnant but shall be shared on a continual basis. Moreover, the premise has also been that we are not alone within the community. This call to discipleship is also a call to struggle. Bonhoeffer challenges us to revisit the call as one to the community. He said:

You are called into the community of faith; the call was not meant for you alone. You carry your cross, you struggle, and you pray in the community of faith, the community of those who are called. If you neglect the community of other Christians, you reject the call of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup>

This call is one of sacrifice, commitment, and loyalty that strikes at the heart of what it entails to be a disciple and also encourages us to go into the community with a reinvigorated passion.

As believers, we do not want to reject the call of Christ but adhere to the mandate of God. We are summoned, commissioned, and led, but mainly guided to make a radical impact on the lives of those within the community. Christians have been called by God to define the relationship with those with whom we have been charged the task of empowerment, and also to be in a relationship with all of humanity. As a church in the community, the LAC and I as a whole have been mandated with a greater purpose that will show proof that God is real in our midst.

After our Bible studies, conversations, and surveys, we observed that a large percentage of participants, as intimated prior to the sessions, had one perspective, but afterward concluded that discipleship requires more than attendance. Before the surveys

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<sup>28</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: Prayerbook of The Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 82-83.

were given out, the understanding of Discipleship, outreach, and witnessing, was only for clergy or certain people who are “called,” but now the impression is that “everyone” can participate in reaching out to those within the community.

Some understood even further that while membership within the body of Christ is a necessity, discipleship calls for a level of sacrifice that demands absolute obedience. This has continued to take the ministry to another level and show that the power of God continues to manifest itself through the sharing of service, discipleship, and community outreach with the love of God. This quest to ensure that we make attempts to bring healing, wholeness and total restoration to our community has been liberating.

We have strived, with displaying God’s agenda of service in the community, and this work has been one of continued growth, dignity, and empowerment. We have seen the power of God throughout witness, worship, work, and discipleship building within the community where people are now inspired and ready to see change. This has taken a profound turn because, with the implementation of the discipleship class, we utilized scriptures about following Jesus Christ and becoming a disciple, as stated earlier.

I observed that we had individuals within our congregation who were from all different spectrums of life who just simply love God. These different ethnicities included the following: Jamaican, Caribbean, Guyanese, Hispanic, African American, Caucasian, and Korean, to name a few. Therefore, we see the diversity and the Biblical mandate that admonishes “*all nations*” (Matt 28:19), which is not exclusive but rather inclusive. The diversity of the church also improves the relationship building within the community because they will witness the coming together of many under one accord.

All that I did, along with the assistance with the LAC, was to provide the vision and then, as a result, the class spoke for itself. For example, we started in one small room with only about eight people teaching “new disciples” that consisted of new people who had joined our church, but then the word began to spread. We then added another table inside this small room and eventually, people who were not necessarily “new disciples” but seasoned saints started to join the class, and we had standing room only. Moreover, the class began to grow even more, so that we had to transition out of the small room with a table to the sanctuary; we have grown so much with the discipleship model that it is now changing lives. The shift from “membership to discipleship” is in full swing and taking the church by storm. The church’s motto for over fifty years has been “membership,” but being led by God to put the spiritual focus on “discipleship” in the church has given us a resurrection of the church’s initial mission of going out into the community.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The vision that God has shown throughout this entire process has proven to be one of invigoration, transformation, and power. This has demonstrated to be a movement that reaches all people with spiritual insight that will enlighten mental barriers and will encourage growth and normalcy.

It has gone beyond the call of sacred duty to ensure that God gets the utmost reverence, and glory for leading, guiding, and directing our hearts, heads, and hands to reach a community with love. As Jeremiah was led to do great work for God, this project of becoming has proven to be the purpose, plan, and provision because the church has grown in multifaceted ways: spiritually, numerically, financially, and socially. I utilize the word “becoming” because we have not arrived, but the Grace Baptist Church of Christ is currently in the midst of a major shift even as I write: new dimensions and levels are being shown to us as a church family to keep the community and world abroad at the forefront so that God is always glorified. The challenges we still face as a church community are ensuring more young people are reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ within the community. In addition, we are in the process of capturing the importance of evangelizing as well which is healthy for the growth of any church body. More and more disciples are sharing their faith with others with the hopes that we remain relevant by sharing the discipleship teachings of sacrifice, faith, and obedience.

As I stated at the beginning of this project, many people were and are still battling with multiple problems such as depression, hurt, abandonment, confusion, and forgiveness. However, we know that we are on the frontlines with the people to ensure



that discipleship is not words in the sacred text, but that it is alive in our hearts on a daily basis. Churches cannot only strive to deepen the biblical knowledge of their members but must find ways to connect those discipleship discoveries with the social circumstances of their neighborhood. The metrics by which is utilized to measure this project is the changed lives by way of our research, spiritual growth, and mainly consistent testimonies of how God is touching those of all ages.

I am reminded of a four-year-old who asked me the question “Why did God die?” His question pierced my soul after our communion service since he was so young, and it was such a profound question for his age. I simply replied because “God loves us”, and to know that his grandmother was one of the first disciples in the beginning phase of our class reveals the power of discipleship reflected on the families of those we are serving. She is also committed and faithful and has a servant’s disposition after moving from “membership to discipleship.” She is now sharing the gospel with staff, friends, family, and co-workers through the teaching that she learned from the Bible study and discipleship class.

Although some people felt that they were not living up to this standard and sense obligated to rededicate themselves back to God to see that other people know Jesus Christ, others did not see it as an obligation, but as a way to stay inside the church and still be impactful through their witness.

Another person who was not in regular church attendance now sees it as a priority to come to our services along with her family, despite her economic, social, and spiritual struggles. These are examples of the testimonies we received as a result of the work we did. These accomplishments necessitated a significant paradigm shift within our church.

The disciples have gleaned that from the biblical stories and have integrated them into their daily lives by making them part of their own. They are literally taking them outside the four walls of our church building, and they no longer have a “member mindset” and reflecting more on the Discipleship that was mentioned earlier “growing deeper in the Word of God and extending that relationship to those within the community.” This inspiration further informs our faith to let people know that they can enter our sanctuary to experience restoration from any problem that may be seeking to steal their hope.

This transition did not come without some discontent, pushback, criticism, and inner turmoil as well, and many frankly did not see the need for such a class. However, there is also a certain populace as in every ministry, organization, etc., who just feels that there is no need to go any further than their current state. For example, when the project was in the implementation phase, we constantly overheard some share “it’s not necessary,” while others just willingly chose not to participate in anything. While that was disheartening because we believed it would help the church; we still had to maintain a positive demeanor knowing some were not for the project.

Therefore, it was very challenging to attempt to keep the LAC encouraged through prayer, sharing the word of God and daily inspirational phone calls. This had to occur consistently because we understood the bigger picture of seeing those individuals who knew that something like this project was necessary for the ministry to grow. The church has previously been under only two leaders: an organizer who did not possess theological training and one who had limited training, so my arrival caused many to have questions.

Moreover, it has and will always be my goal to protect the integrity, character, and legacy of my predecessor seeing that he paved the way and laid the spiritual foundation upon which I now stand leading the church. One of the major obstacles as a new leader is allowing others who have had prior disagreements with leadership to cause others to disrespect the work, energy, sacrifice, passion, and tears it took to build such an edifice.

However, I have to give credit to my theological training in equipping me with the necessary information, insight, ideas, and study habits to implement this ongoing project for the community and people. Engaging in what I refer to as “plumbing the text for its theological depth” has proven to give insight for the expansion and growth of our church and community. The greatest expression has been to know that we are viewing people through the lens of love and not through their past. For example, we have also begun to empower women for ministry.

The new ideas relate to different approaches to Discipleship, evangelism, preaching, and teaching, although there are still many skeptics, the fact remains that this project has produced fruit in the lives of so many people. There was a young man who joined our ministry who was (and still is) battling very harsh conditions such as drug abuse, depression, and economic hardship. He entered into our church without “church clothes,” but now brings his daughter to worship and his love of our ministry is phenomenal. We have shared some very powerful conversations about God and his own role within the community and church, and he is sharing with his friends about how we have helped him change his life around. The Great Commission is meant to be shared and lived out, not just in theory, but also in practice every single day.

To see a young lady who was also a part of the LAC team and who was once very apprehensive, shy, and timid, but is now bold, fierce, and pursuing her own theological education and call to ministry with vigor is a powerful testament to the outcomes of engaging in the project. The discipleship content shows in her worship, teaching, and overall lifestyle, as she is also sharing her faith with other people. Moreover, her witness has brought various other young people to the church who have also shared with others and thus are examples of discipleship.

My overall evaluation of the project has come through the actual people who started this journey with little understanding but are now growing in their knowledge of discipleship. This is all the more why this project continues to be a voice in the city. It personifies the actual power and presence of God for the “*Shalom*” of the city that needs prayer, hope, and healing. Throughout this journey, we have all changed and are still being refined, tested, and charged with the task of being authentic witnesses and disciples of Jesus Christ. Jim Putnam and Barry Harrington expounded upon the necessity and powerful influence of discipleship as follows:

A disciple of Jesus is a person who is becoming spiritually mature. This occurs when a Christian knows his Bible inside and out. That’s what’s most important in our church: knowing the Bible a disciple is a person who cares for the lost. He regularly invites his friends, neighbors, and unsaved family members to our church so they can hear about Jesus. A disciple is a person who is doing life with others. He is focused on working together in a small group to serve some need in the community. He wants to right a wrong in the culture in the name of Jesus. A disciple is a person who loves the poor and marginalized, we live and love like Jesus lived and loved. A mature disciple is a witness for Christ in every way. He knows how to win someone to Jesus and participates in sharing his or her faith as individuals and as part of the local church.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington with Robert E. Coleman, *Christian Discipleship: Five Steps That Help Your Church Make Disciples who Make Disciples* (Zondervan Grand Rapids: 2013), 43.

Due to the outcomes and testimonies of the congregation, it is with great confidence that lives will continue to grow by the grace of God through these classes and our commitment to turn our discipleship into mission in our community.

## Appendix A

### Local Advisory Committee Biographies

**Rev. Lindon M. McKenzie**  
Assistant Pastor/Comptroller  
Rev Lindon McKenzie

Reverend Lindon McKenzie has over twenty-eight years of experience within the walls of Grace Baptist Church. Because of his prior professional experience as a layperson with financial experience, Brother McKenzie became the church comptroller 1989. Being steadfast, he then became a Deacon in training and then a confirmed Deacon over the subsequent seven years. Deacon McKenzie, abounding in the work of the Lord, became a licensed minister and has assisted the now Pastor emeritus in the leadership of the church. Ordained as Reverend in 2013, he has presided over weddings, funerals, and other events of the church.

Reverend McKenzie became Assistant Pastor in 2014 and currently operates as the church comptroller, overseeing and approving all financials and administration dealing with the upkeep of the church.

### **Minister Stephanie Barnes**

Minister Stephanie C. Barnes joined Grace Baptist Church of Christ on her Christian experience in the Spring of 2016. Her commitment to Christian discipleship began at thirteen years old and continued through Christian education at the King's College 1976-1977. She continues her studies at Rhema Bible Studies 1984-1987, and years of biblical life application experiences holding positions in the church as leader of Sunday school. She was Superintendent of Sunday school, worship leader, Minister of Liturgical Dance, Youth Minister, licensed Minister and Chief Administrative Assistant of Prophetic Grace Ministries out of Maryland, with leadership spanning over eight churches under the leadership of the presiding Bishop, 2013-2015.

She relocated to Brooklyn, N.Y. and was installed in good faith as Minister serving under Pastor Shane Hilliard in January 2017, and licensed as Minister of Grace Baptist Church of Christ in February 2018. She is also a member of the LAC and Co-Liaison of the Women of Grace Ministry.

### **Minister Angelina Bolden**

Angelina Bolden began as a member of Grace Baptist Church of Christ over twenty-seven years ago. She has served in several ministries such as the missionaries who visit the sick and practice outreach in the community. In addition, she taught the Women's Adult Sunday School class and Vacation Bible School each summer for two weeks. Sister Angelina Bolden continues to serve and assist in a leadership capacity, doing various tasks as requested by the Pastor, leading designated events, serving on leadership committees. She also ensures that programs in the church run smoothly and in accordance with the expected outcomes, and uniting the church family to the overall vision of Grace Baptist Church of Christ.

In January 2018, Pastor Shane Hilliard installed Angelina Bolden as a licensed Minister of Grace Baptist Church and as Co-Liaison of The Women of Grace, a united fellowship of women of all ages. She collaborates with Minister Stephanie Barnes, using different strategies to engage women in a deeper study and application of the word of God. Minister Bolden is a member of the LAC-Layman Advisory Committee, and is currently pursuing her Bachelor's Degree in Business as Organizational Management at Nyack College.

### **Sister Jamara Hallett**

Currently one of the churches youth leaders, Jamara Hallett began attending Grace Baptist Church of Christ at five years old. She grew up as a student of New Grace School and faithfully attended services and bible study, serving as a prime example to the youth attending Grace Baptist Church of Christ. She uses her gifts and talents in the church as worship leader and a member of the choir.

Jamara is currently functioning as youth leader and liaison of youth programs; she has served on the Liturgical Dance team at Grace and now is teaching the art of Liturgical Dance to the children of New Grace School. Currently serving as a Vice Liaison of the youth ministry, she continues to grow her talent as worship leader while serving as a member of the Pastor's LAC group.

### **Training Deacon Michael Hinds**

Michael Hinds has been a Disciple of Grace Baptist Church for the past four years. Since joining Grace, he has been on a path of discovery as it relates to his place in ministry. He has become one of Pastor Shane Hilliard's adjutants, traveling on ministry assignments

and providing various administrative, ministerial services such as technology and sound for presentations, as well as fulfilling the task of an armor bearer.

In January 2018, Michael Hines accepted the call for deeper responsibilities in leadership to be trained as a Deacon. Under Pastor Shane Hilliard's tutorial training, Deacon Michael Hines will continue to grow in faith, love, and knowledge of the word of God as it pertains to his willingness to help others as an active member the body of Christ. He currently is involved in several ministries in addition to his service for Pastor Hilliard, including being the Liaison of the Young Adult Ministry, the Shepherd's Ministry, and the Sunday School Ministry.

### **Training Deaconess Frances Ray**

Francis Ray has been a part of Grace Baptist Church of Grace since the start in 1962. Having traveled to Brooklyn, NY with her family, Rev. J. N. Underwood Sr. was kind enough to find employment for her mother and two aunts, and this began her time at Grace. As a young girl, Frances Ray sang with the Sunshine Choir. Growing up, she became one of the original members of the J. N. Underwood Choir (52 teenagers) and served as a Jr. Usher.

Since January 2018, she has been singing with the Adult Choir and serves as a member of the Floral Ministry, a member of the Lay Advisory Committee, the Sunday School Ministry, and the Vacation Bible School. It is under the tutelage and leadership of Pastor Rev. Shane Hilliard that now Training Deaconess Ray has changed from membership to discipleship and honored to accept the call upon her life.

### **Sister Gail Smith**

Gail Baker-Smith has been a disciple of Grace Baptist Church of Christ for approximately fourteen years. She is a true woman of God, who loves the Lord, serve and worship, and a faithful member attending bible studies and discipleship classes to further her knowledge of the word while preparing to go deeper in understanding the calling of the Lord.

She serves in various ministries such as Shepherd's ministry and assists Pastor Hilliard with various assignments both spiritual and financial. Sister Gail Smith also sings with the choir and works with the Sunday school teaching the word of God.



**Sister Beatrice T. Williams**

Beatrice T. Williams joined Grace Baptist Church of Christ in January 2010. She attends regular services and serves on the Evangelistic Ministry as Program Chairman, and is the Vice Liaison of the Shepherd's Ministry.

She has served as an administrative assistant for the Pastor to perform administrative duties for the church in taking and transcribing minutes, as well as preparing weekly bulletins, certificates, event flyers, and whatever is needed. Through the business of those positions, Sister Beatrice Williams serves on the LAC Committee.

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Questions

#### *Pre-Bible Study Survey*

Prior to launching the ten-week Bible study, we also conducted a twelve-question survey to provide additional disciples of the church with an opportunity to share feedback on the topics of discipleship, evangelism, and community. This also provided us with quantitative research data to support the qualitative data derived from the questions. This information also served as good data research, which compared to the post-bible study survey. Our goal was to use the data to see which areas would produce the greatest shift in thoughts and perceptions.

1. What is your first reaction to the word discipleship?
2. How would you define discipleship?
3. What type of activities do you think are included when describing discipleship?
4. How do you feel personally about participating in discipleship?
5. How do you think others within the church view the idea of discipleship?
6. How likely are you to participate in some form of evangelism within the next thirty days?
7. Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to participate in discipleship and evangelism activities?
8. Have you ever said or done something to make another person feel unwelcome or not invited to participate in a church activity?
9. Do you think you have ever made someone feel left out of church activities or unwelcomed in the church by something you said or did (even by accident)?

10. How likely it is that you would reach out to someone inside or outside of the church who is different from you (different meaning age group, race, gender, occupation, marital status, etc.) and try to have a conversation with them or invite to join you at a church activity?
11. In your own words, why do you think some people might not feel comfortable or welcome at church.
12. Do you think Jesus taught that believers might be expected to provide outreach to people who might be considered sinners by the church community?

## Appendix C

### Pre-Bible Study Survey

#### Grace Baptist Church of Christ Survey Responses regarding DISCIPLESHIP (Lenten Season)

Began March 8<sup>th</sup> 2017

Concluded May 17<sup>th</sup> 2017

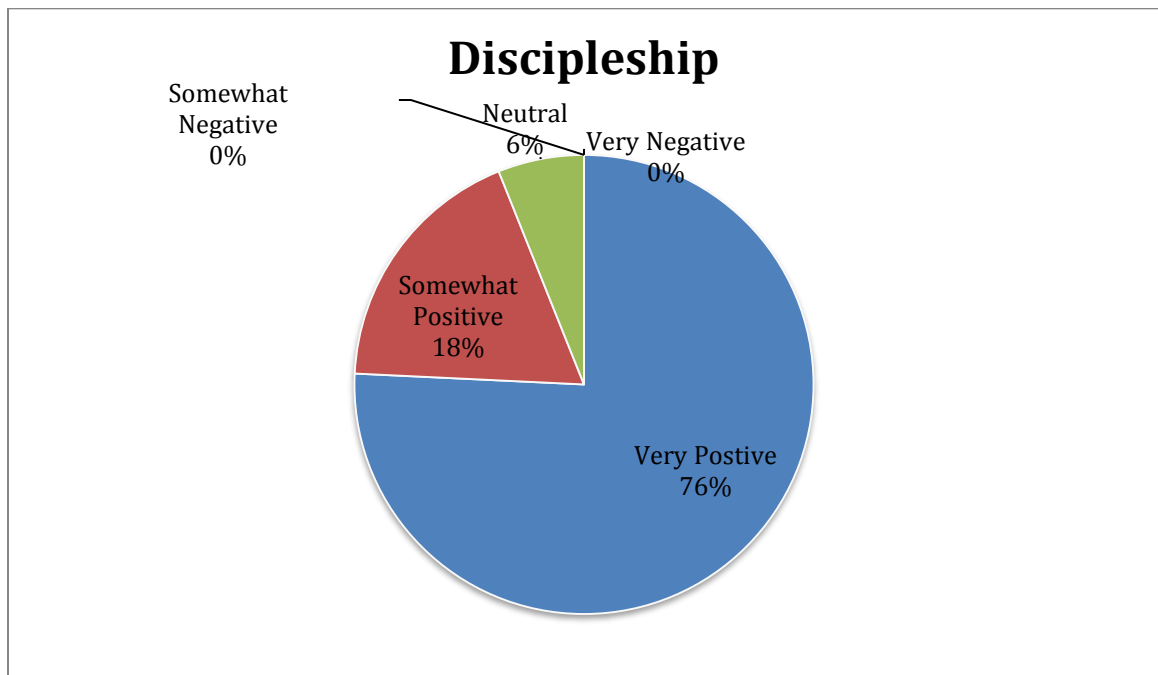
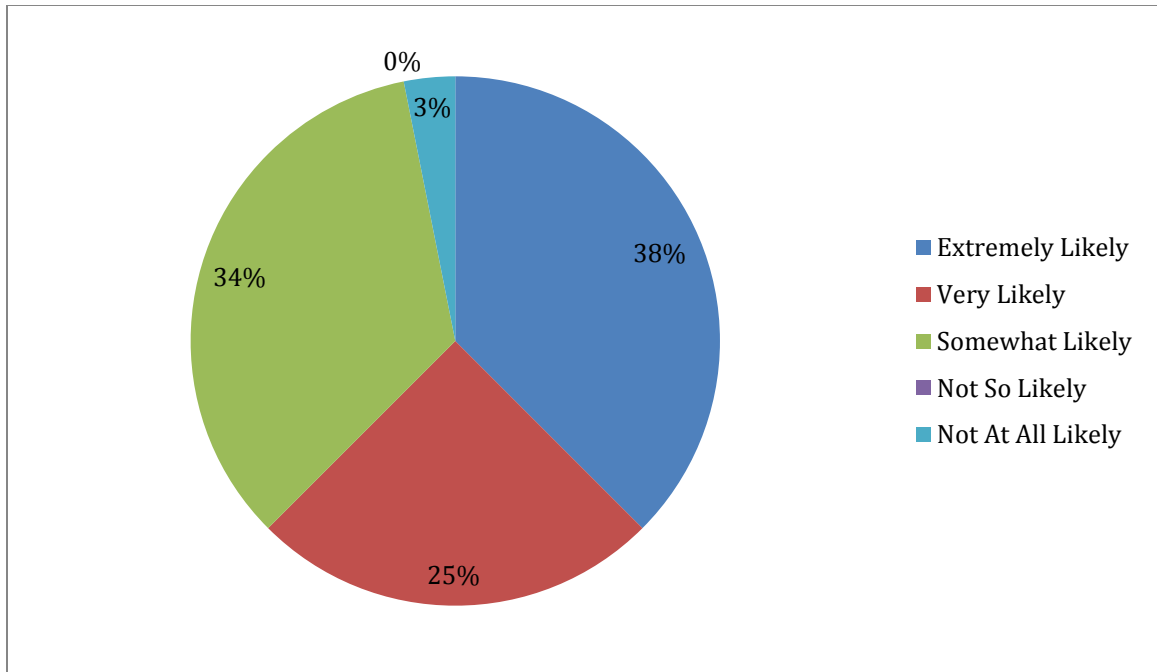


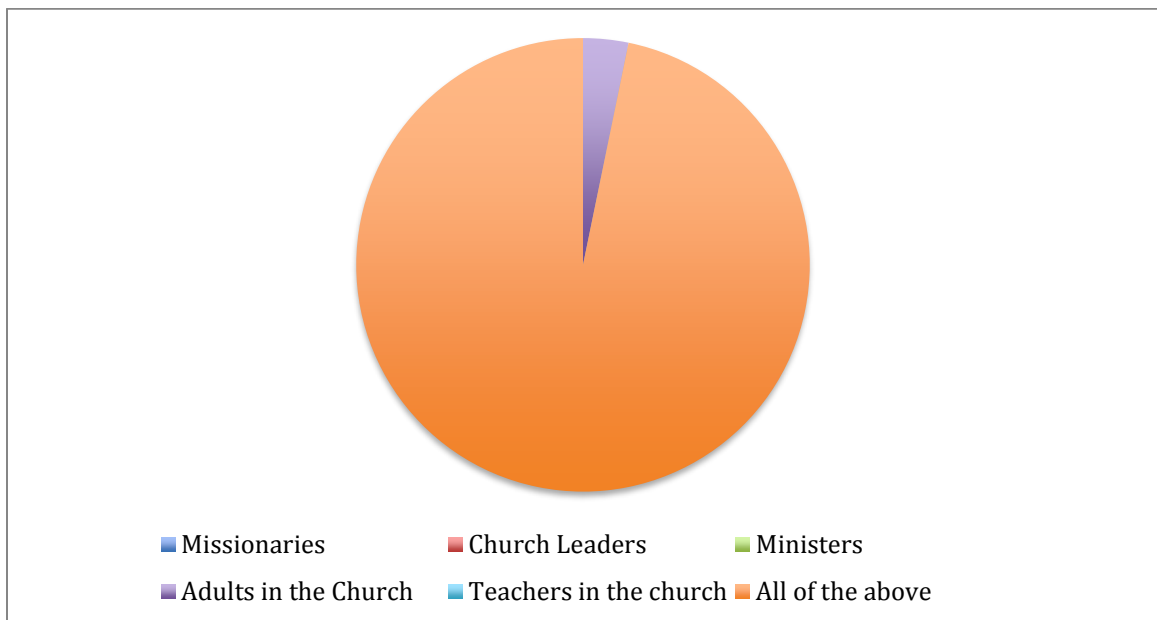
Fig. 1. Results for all who responded to the three questions below.

- What is your first reaction to the word discipleship?
- How do you feel about personally participating in discipleship?
- How do you think others within the church view idea of discipleship?

It can be seen from Figure 1 that the majority (76%) of participants in the survey indicated very positive, 18% somewhat positive, 6% neutral, and 0% somewhat negative and very negative.



**Fig. 2. How likely are you to participate in some form of evangelism within the next 30 days?**



**Fig. 3. Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to participate in discipleship and evangelistic activities? (Check all that apply)**

- All who are chosen by Christ, who is spirit led and spirit fed. (Anointed)
- Everyone. Because you need to grow and then you can know what to share. But also, you have a testimony and scripture to your testimony.

- Everyone in the church
- All Christians or followers of Jesus
- The entire church body (congregants), believers of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- The whole church
- A humble person with life experience
- All of us
- Every child that is saved by Jesus
- The church/body of Christ “the members.”
- I “know” that it is everyone’s responsibility, but I do not “think” everyone is ready.

### **How would you define discipleship?**

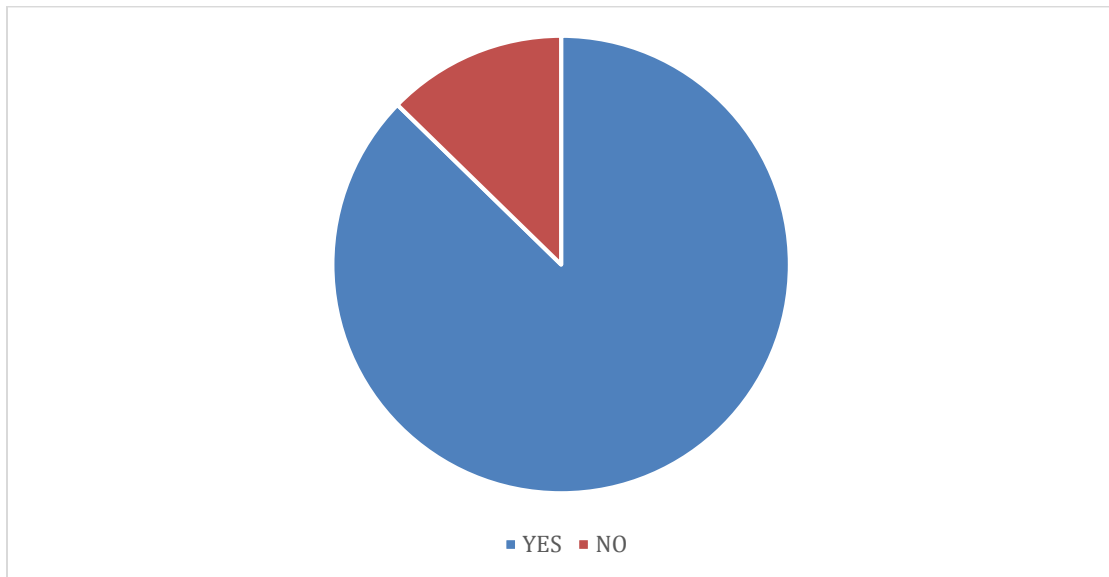
- Helping others
- Telling people about Jesus
- Someone who speaks the gospel through God’s word and love to lead others to Christ
- A follower of Christ
- Being a follower of Christ (concerning religion or a member of a group being led by doctrine or person(s))
- Discipleship is growing into being disciplined in God’s word by learning it and applying it
- To follow Jesus
- Discipleship possibly relates to those who are strong in leadership and have a sense of guiding and teaching others
- To study the word and teach it
- Leading people to Christ
- Being a follower of the examples of Jesus Christ, Matthew 29:19-20
- Discipleship is reading God’s word and living a life imitating Christ at all times.
- Unity, power, love
- Follow the teaching of Christ
- To become closer to God and work with him
- Being equipped to go out and reach souls that are lost
- To go into the world teaching, preaching, evangelizing and reaching out
- To grow deeper in Christ
- A follower of Christ in characteristics, doctrine, and lifestyle with the commission to go forth with the word to make ministry for more disciples
- I would describe/define discipleship as being a social worker for the Lord, one who spreads the word/good news

- A vessel that was anointed to bring sick people to the church hospital and guide them through life
- Spreading the word of God to those who may not know Christ
- Discipleship to me means to go out and talk to other people about Christ and being saved
- Walking in the steps of Christ. Learning and growing in the precepts of God our Father
- Spreading the word of God
- The practice of following in the belief of Christ
- Discipleship is sharing the word of God with those who may not know Jesus
- Learning more about the word of God
- A faithful follower of God
- To be a rooted and educated follower of Christ while simultaneously being a leader for those who may not know him
- Being adept at spreading Christianity

**What type of activities do you think are included when describing discipleship?**

- Mentoring, exercising, patience, generosity, love, sacrifice
- Praying for people, reading the Bible, inviting people to church
- Everything
- Walking worthy of your calling, what you are called to do by Jesus Christ
- Sharing: physically, spiritually and emotionally. Teaching, giving, caring, helping, learning, witnessing, loving, accepting others ways, etc.
- Learning what the word means so I can walk it out in my life and know to do it by faith
- Following Jesus
- Teaching, holding seminars, etc.
- To share what God has given to each of us
- Go outside of the church to speak to people to lead them to Christ
- Outreach/fellowship outings or gatherings calling someone absent to few Sundays
- Telling others about Christ and sharing that God sent his son to redeem us back to him
- Showing that agape love to everyone
- Communication with all
- Not sure
- To bring forth the word and spreading the good word about God and to bring sins to the light of god
- Reaching out, evangelizing, praying, encouraging

- Being involved within the church, Sunday school, Bible study, Sunday services, outreach/in reach
- Ministering and living a Christ-filled life
- Outreaching/in reaching on the church and in the community workshops. Outings, etc.
- Feeding the homeless, visiting the disabled and juvenile centers
- Evangelism, church functions
- Ministering to unsaved people and helping the ones in your own home (church)
- Fellowship, study groups, seminars, role play, worship and praise and prayer to get the mind of Christ and wisdom of God
- Supporting one another, teaching someone about God and his love
- Prayer, attending church regularly, communion, participation in church programs

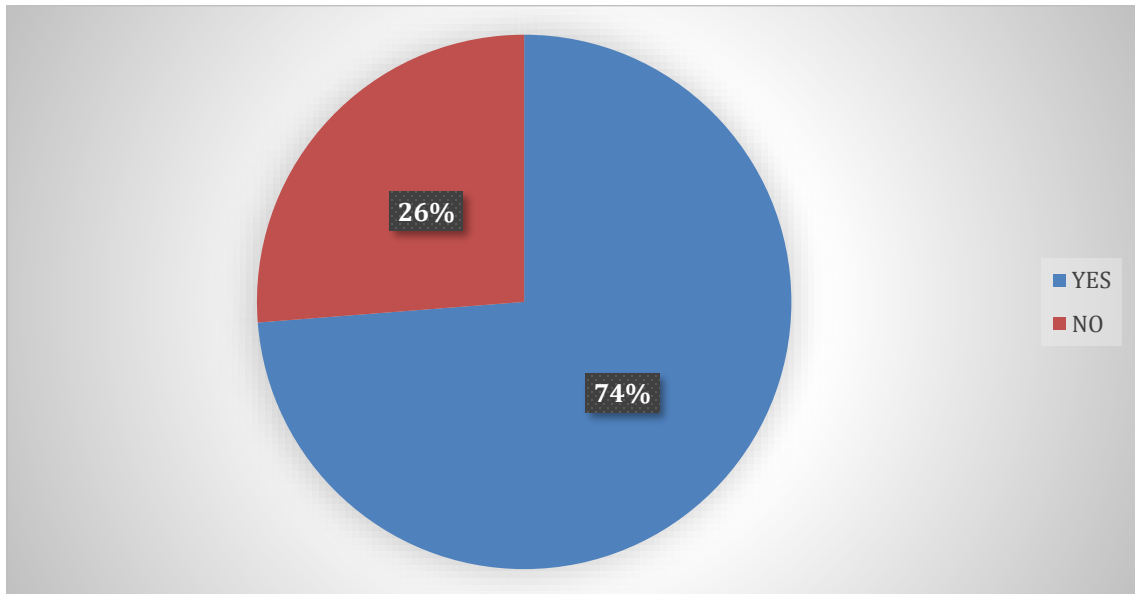


**Fig. 4. Have you ever seen someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcome or not invited to participate in a church activity, if “YES,” please share why you think the person felt unwelcome:**

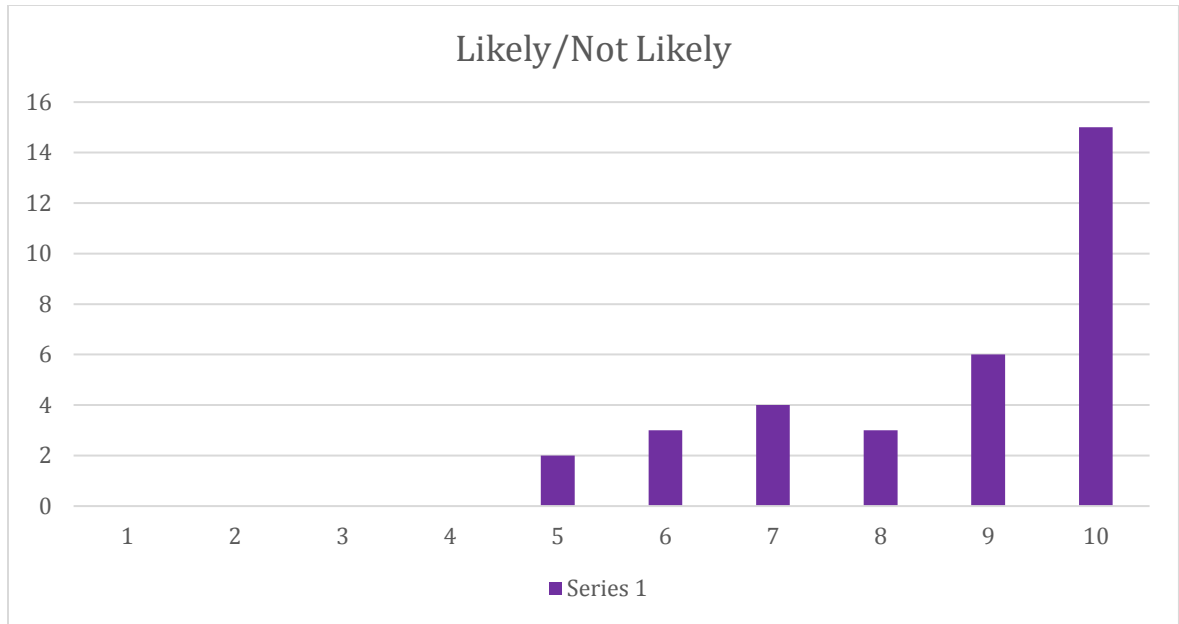
- Words that were spoken and how they were spoken
- Denied the opportunity to sit at a specific table or pew
- Bad spirit
- Judging them
- Not a nice demeanor
- Cliques and gossip, bad attitude and busybodies.
- The person’s words and actions were not caring or thought out. The visitor might have been offended and upset by the manners of the church member.



- In some cases, some people are spoken to in a harsh tone or are left out of cliques in the church because of selfishness or an unawareness
- They were told they could not come in pants (a female)
- Walk past without saying hello or acknowledging the individual
- They did not allow the person to feel welcome because they wanted to be in control of everything. Did not allow the person to do the job that was assigned to them



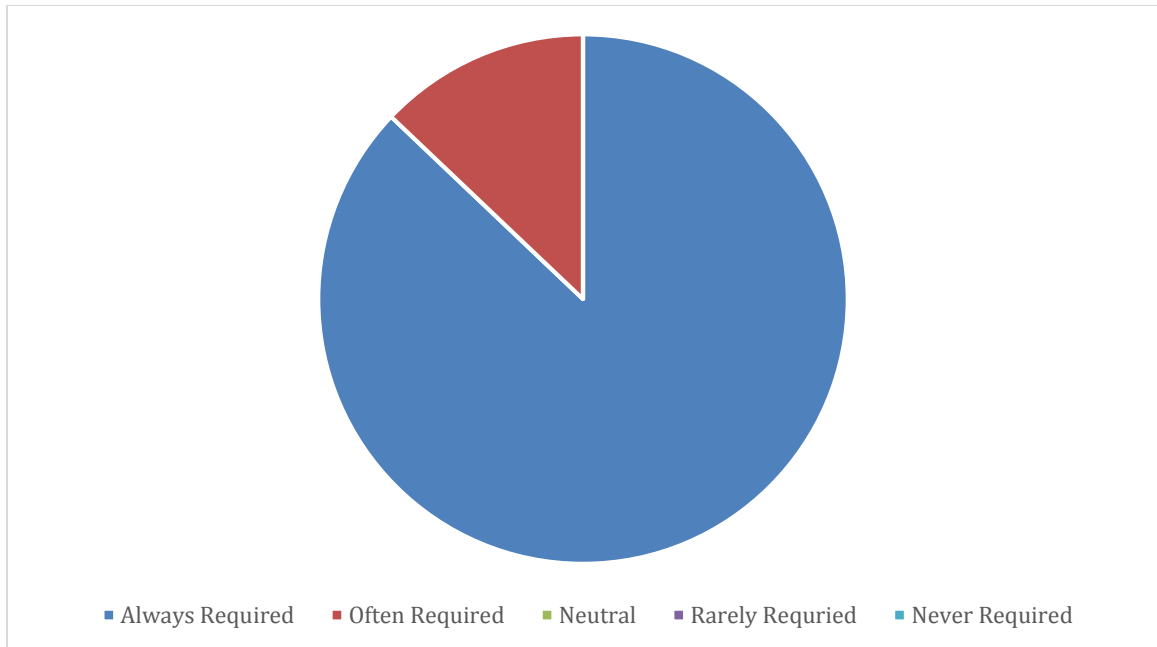
**Fig. 5. Do you think you have ever made someone feel left out of church activities or unwelcomed in the church by something you said or did (even by accident)?**



**Fig. 6 How likely is it that you will reach out to someone inside or outside of the church who is different from you (different meaning age group, race, gender, occupation, marital status, etc.) and try to have a conversation with them or invite them to join you at a church activity. (1 being not likely and 10 being very likely)**

**In your own words, why do you think some people might not feel comfortable or welcomed at church (Open Text)?**

- No one speaks to them; no one invites them to sit with them; no one introduced themselves to them.
- Too many people in the church just talk to whom they know, instead of talking to the new people.
- The way people look at them, talk to them or lack connection. The feeling of being judged. I feel that there are people who are not led by the Holy Spirit and always have something to say or look at someone in a way that makes them uncomfortable. Always whispering and laughing and it's not welcoming to season saints, so I can imagine not welcoming to new saints.



**Fig. 7 Do you think that Jesus taught that believers should provide outreach to people who considered to be sinners by the church community?**

## Appendix D

### Post-Bible Study Survey

1. Have your views of discipleship changed since we started learning more about discipleship? If so, why? If not, why?
2. Where are you in your relationship with Jesus Christ right now as being a disciple?
3. Has your world vision changed as it pertains to discipleship?
4. How do you feel about family/friends/coworkers who you contact about church?  
How do you feel about them not being part of your church activities?
5. As a disciple, do you feel there is any room for growth? If so, why?
6. Did the discipleship classes challenge or shift you to a better place in your faith?  
If so, why?
7. What are the differences between membership and discipleship? Are they one or the same?

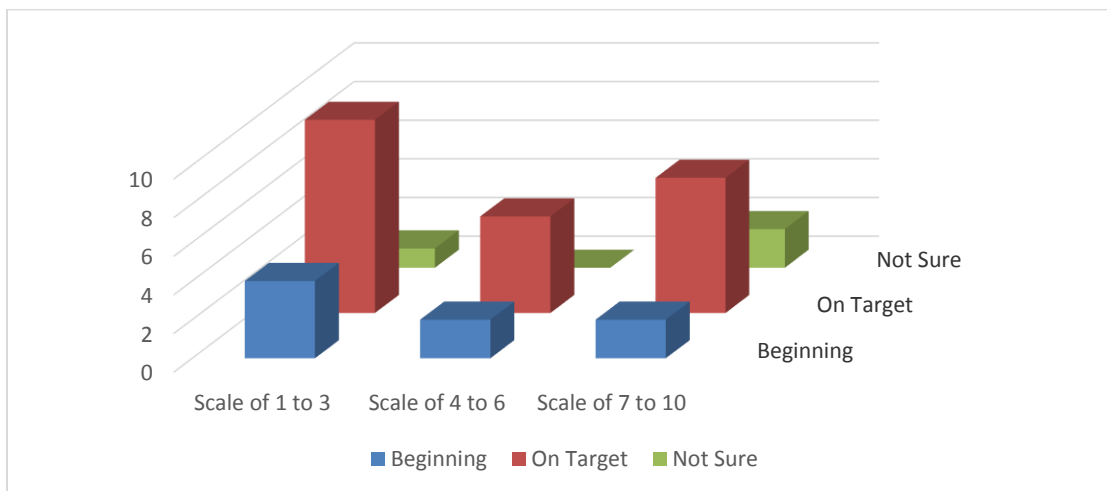


Fig. 1. Where is your relationship with Christ right now to engage in discipleship?

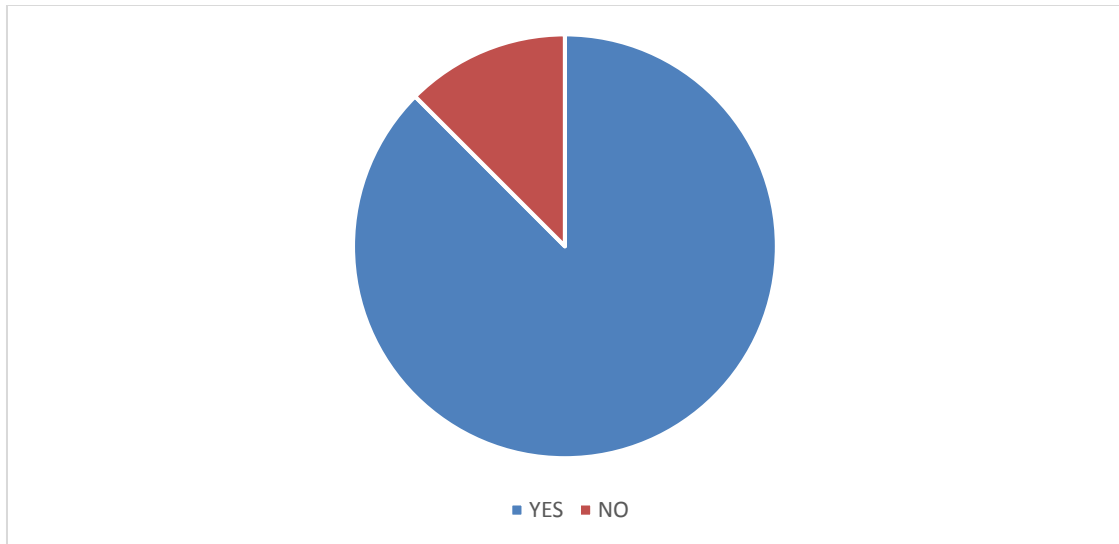


Fig. 2. **Has your world vision changed as it relates to discipleship?**



Fig. 3. **Did the discipleship classes shift you to a better place in your faith?**

What are the differences between membership and discipleship? Are they the same?

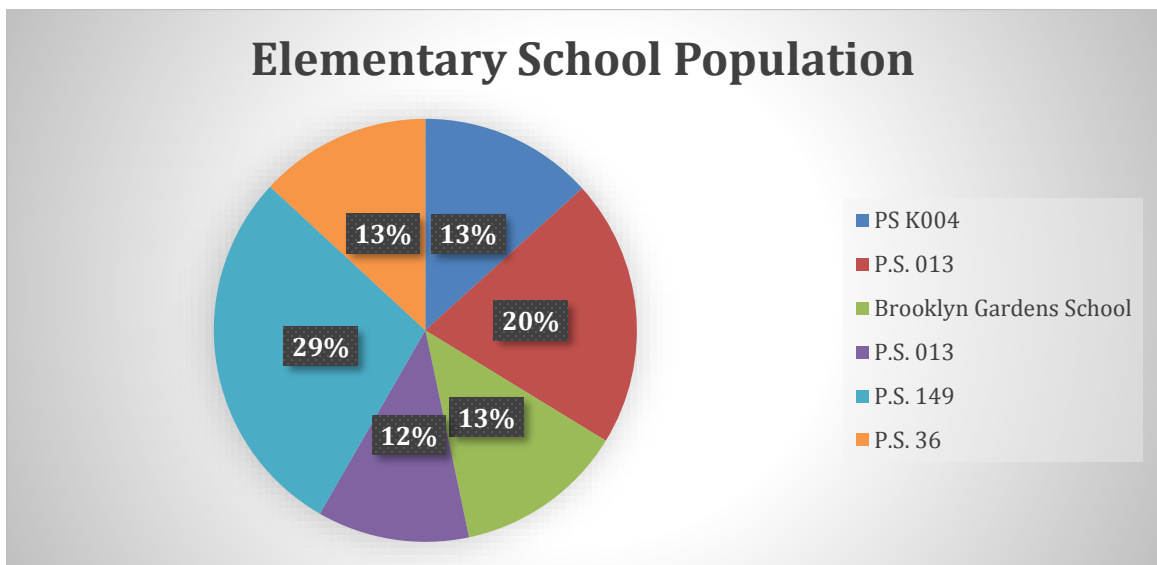
- Membership is coming in and joining the church and study to go out and do discipleship.
- There is a vast difference; discipleship requires spiritual accountability that membership cannot offer.

Membership is perks, where you come and receive but are not giving back. Discipleship is meeting the total needs of the body.

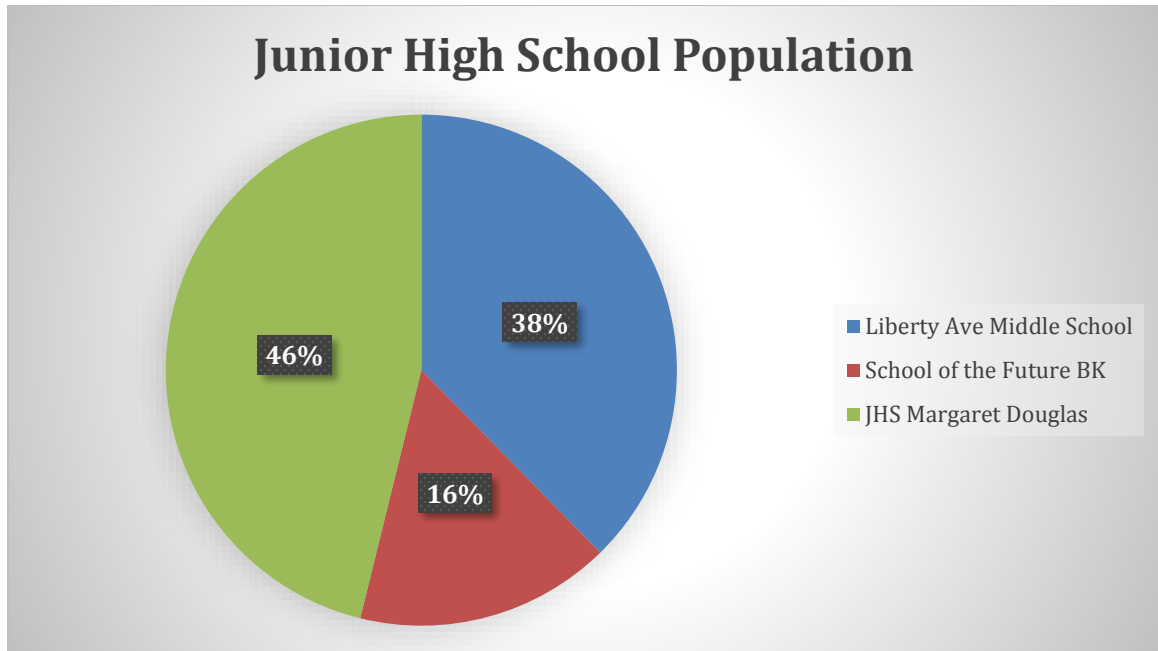
## Appendix E

### Community Schools

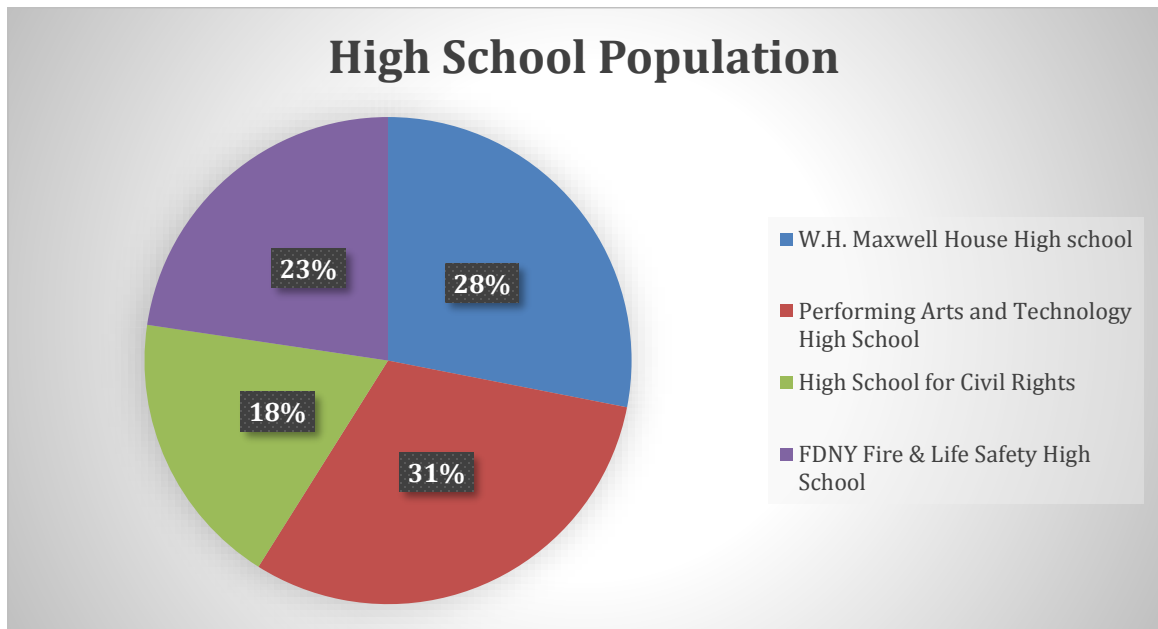
To promote sustainability in our discipleship curriculum, we connected with the staff and engaged students who are a part of the congregation that work for the school at the church. This information was insightful and helpful to give us a glimpse of the children we have in the neighborhood, with the hopes of engaging them in discipleship and to further reach out to those in the community with available resources.



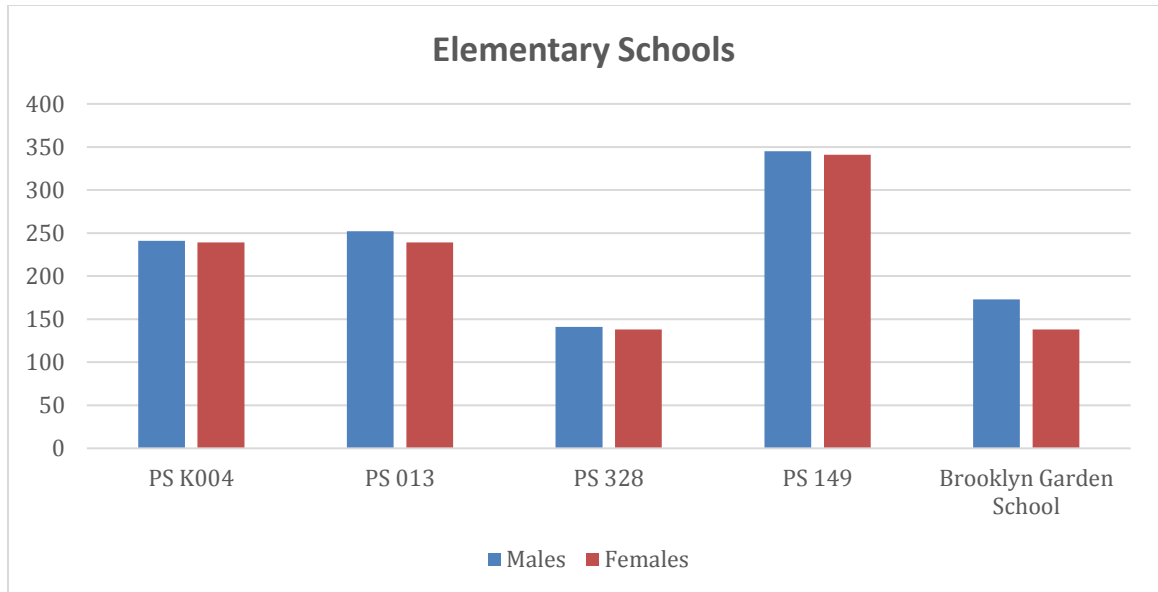
**Fig.1. The elementary schools population based on the six schools that participated.**



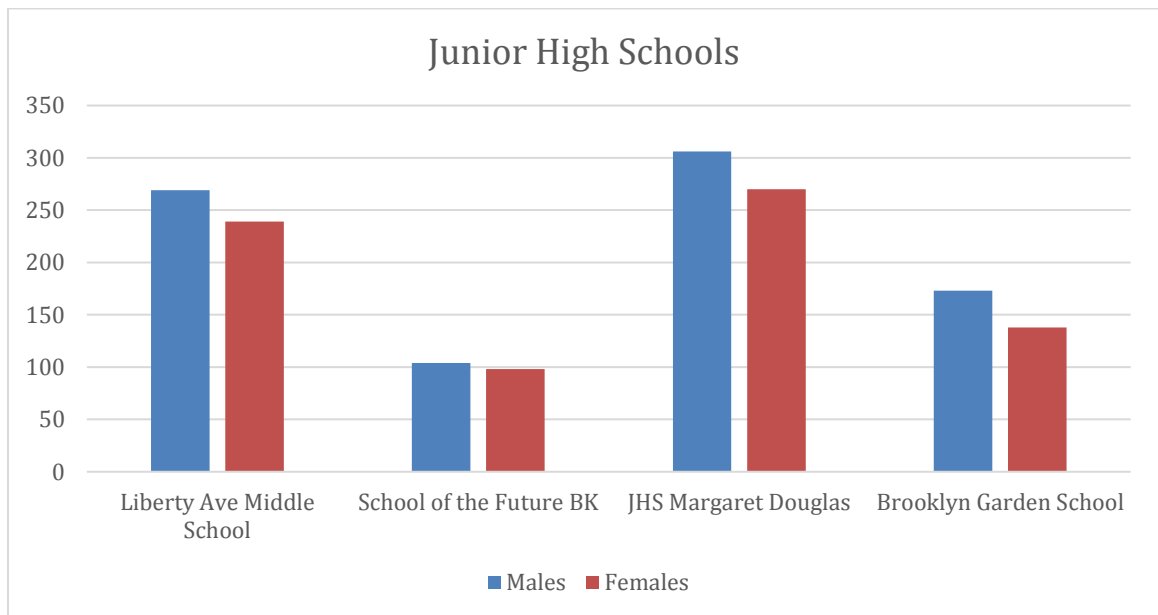
**Fig.2. The JHS schools population based on the three schools that participated.**



**Fig.3. The high schools population based on the four schools that participated.**

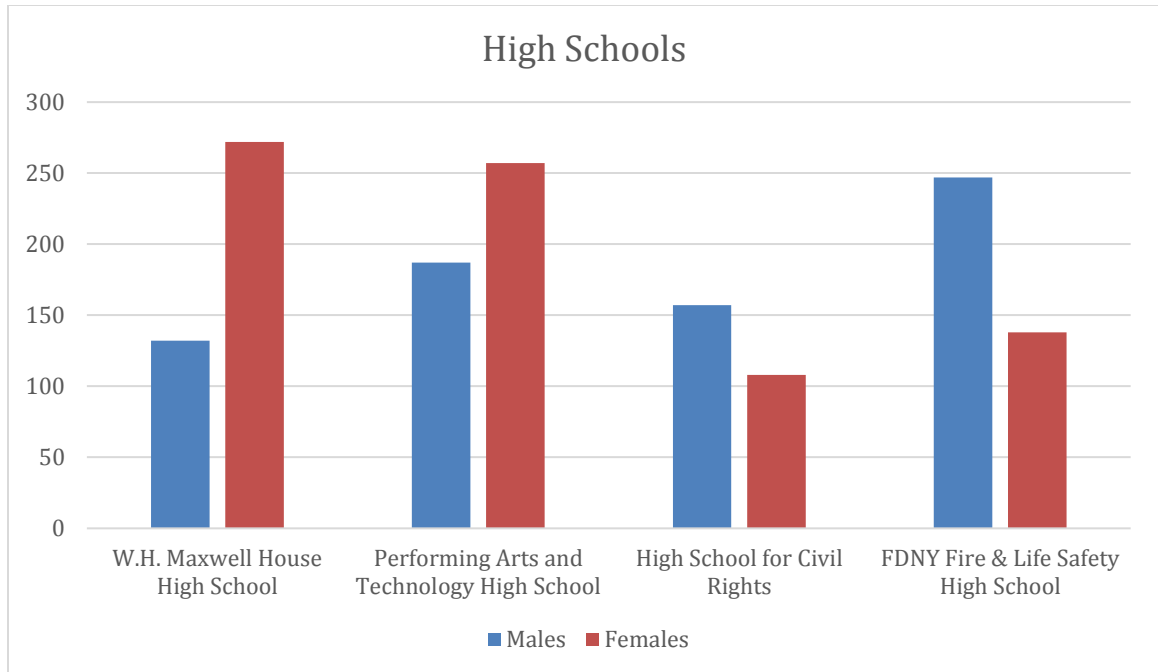


**Fig. 4. Gender distribution**



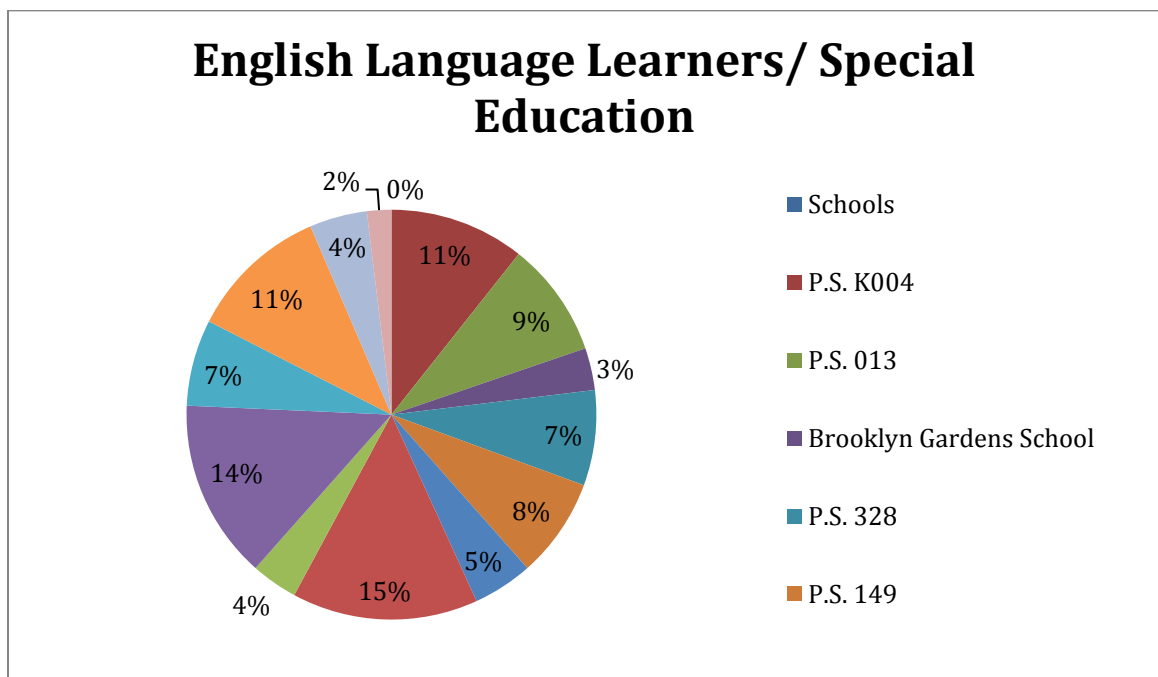
**Fig. 5. Gender distribution**





**Fig. 6. Gender Distribution**

By comparing all the schools, we can see that the females sometimes outnumbered the males.



**Fig. 7 Percentage of English Language Learners/ Special Education in difference schools.**

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