

THIS IS WHAT OUR CHURCH USED TO DO:
RECONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY TO MUNICIPAL RESOURCES IN THE
MIDST AND AFTERMATH OF NATURAL DISASTER

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
Drew University in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

“This is what our church used to do: Reconnecting our community to municipal resources in the midst and aftermath of natural disaster” was birthed out of an effort to provide the members of Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kingstree, South Carolina opportunities to rekindle a desire to serve beyond its walls. The goal was to reawaken an intentional, relevant, inclusive and sustainable desire for outreach ministries. The premise of the project was predicated upon the October Flood of 2015, which brought a high level of devastation to the community in which Greater Bethel serves. Greater Bethel’s congregation, for the first time in many years, came together to address the many needs that became prevalent during this unprecedented time of peril. Utilizing the phrase, “this is what we used to do”, the Greater Bethel family garnered a new motivation to aid its community while reflecting on its storied history that was once etched in community outreach and social justice.

By creating opportunities for members to participate in a Learning Lab/Bible Study series, a Sermon Series, a Community Soup Kitchen Ministry and a Community Resource Fair, the goal of the project was to create a sustainable desire within the congregation of Greater Bethel to serve the Kingstree Community in times of well-being. Using Greater Bethel’s history as the cornerstone of the Kingstree community, the project sought to rekindle this desire and motivation by reminding the congregation that this is what we used to do.

DEDICATION

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

To my wife, Cynthia M. Williams for her love, unwavering support and genuine partnership in this ministry

To our children, Jayson and Brianna for understanding when daddy had to be away

To my parents, Fred and Linda Darby Williams-Wilson and my in-laws Bernard and Margaret Owens for their gifts of constant support and encouragement

To my late grandmother, Corine Paulin Darby Addison for your spirit watching over me during this process and throughout my life

To my late father, the Rev. Willie Williams, Jr., for teaching me to never give up

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“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this project is to facilitate opportunities for the members of Greater Bethel AME Church to rekindle their motivation to participate in meaningful ministry outreach opportunities, while reconnecting its community to available municipal resources. Utilizing the phrase, “this is what we used to do”, this project’s purpose is to rekindle a desire to serve beyond the walls of Greater Bethel while creating an intentional, relevant, inclusive and sustainable outreach ministry that is built upon the love and compassion of God. To no end, Greater Bethel’s purpose should be rooted in the precept that “by its very nature, the church ought to be a contagious place that is spreading the Christian faith to more and more outsiders.”¹

“This is what our church used to do”, was an echoing sentiment of the members of Greater Bethel AME Church as hundreds of citizens of Williamsburg County came to our make-shift distribution center to receive food, cleaning supplies, blankets, clothes, and other aid provided by the American Red Cross, FEMA and the Connectional African Methodist Episcopal Church in the aftermath of the October flood of 2015. The flood of October 2015 provided a window of opportunity for the members of Greater Bethel to become involved in a new level of community service and outreach. This opportunity also provided our faith community a chance to come together and reflect on our storied history, one that is rooted in community service, outreach and social justice. In years past, this history distinguished our church from other houses of worship as the center of the community. It also provided the opportunity for our faith community to unite together with the notion of helping those in need despite the prevalent needs within our own faith

¹ Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Church: Increasing your church’s evangelistic temperature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 18.

community. This uniting rekindled a genuine desire to reach out to a wounded community in the midst of peril. In doing so, Greater Bethel was able to connect members of our community to a variety of municipal resources whom were equipped to aid these persons in their time of peril. The members of Greater Bethel were rejuvenated spiritually and felt a renewed sense of relevancy within the community.

Despite the above-mentioned successes, there loomed several questions. What about the long-term effect for both the members of Greater Bethel and the members of our community long after the infamy of the flood had subsided? Would the members of Greater Bethel still possess the desire to serve the community with the urgency it felt during the flood even in the time of wellbeing? Would the members of the community, through this experience be more equipped to engage resources needed independently in the absence of peril? If not, could Greater Bethel serve as a community resource center in which community members could come and access the municipal resources needed for their individual situation? As a result of these unanswered questions, the project, “This is what our church used to do: Reconnecting our community to municipal resources in the midst and aftermath of natural disaster” was birthed.

CHAPTER 1

THIS IS WHAT WE USE TO DO

Connectional History/Mission

Birthed on April 11, 1816 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the African Methodist Episcopal Church came to fruition when sixteen delegates from the mid-Atlantic region of the United States met with Richard Allen to unify themselves into one corporate body. Those in attendance included Rev. Daniel Coker, pastor of Bethel Church Baltimore, who led a delegation of six and Rev. Jacob Tapisco, associate minister of Bethel and assistant to Richard Allen. The remaining delegates were from Wilmington, Delaware, Salem, New Jersey and Attleborough, Pennsylvania. The sixteen delegates represented churches from four different states that fell under the auspices of predominately White Methodist Churches. The primary purposes of this meeting were to become fully independent of the White Methodist Church, organize themselves ecclesiastically and to select an Episcopal leader. In addition, these delegates, along with Allen sought to incorporate their buildings and properties with the intent to solidify sole ownership from the White Methodist Church and to “become one body under the name and style of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.”²

The aforementioned would not have been possible if it weren't for the vision and determination of Richard Allen. Allen was born into slavery on February 14, 1760 in

² Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black founding fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 175.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. By the time he had reached age twenty, Allen was able to purchase his freedom from his slave master, Stokeley Sturgis, through a process called gradual manumission for a price tag of \$2,000.00. Soon afterwards, Allen found the Lord and became a Methodist preacher. As he grew in the faith, Allen was affiliated with the St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia where he preached to the church's black members. His popularity grew exponentially and as a result, the black portion of the congregation grew as well. Because of this growth, many white members were unable to find a seat in worship on Sunday mornings. To accommodate the whites, a new policy was instituted requiring blacks to stand around the walls of the sanctuary. In addition, the blacks were also confined to the balcony for seating. Allen immediately saw an obvious need for a separate place of worship for blacks, but he met opposition not only from white parishioners but from black parishioners as well. All of this however, came to a head one Sunday in St. George's Methodist Church, when Allen, Absalom Jones and William White were forced from their knees as they prayed at the altar in an unauthorized area of the sanctuary. The three men, along with forty-two others, walked out together in protest, providing the fuel Allen needed to plan for a place for worship for himself as well as those he advocated for.

Allen, along with Absalom Jones and other freed slaves, founded the Free African Society six months after the St. George's Methodist "walkout." Not affiliated with any particular denomination, the primary purpose of the Free African Society was "to provide assistance for the economic, educational, social, and spiritual needs of the African

community”³. Years before its time, the Free African Society proved to be the foundation for social, economic and education activism for African Americans. In his *In-Faith Traditions and the Family*, William P. DeVaux, says, “as the forerunner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Free African Society tackled social issues and emphasized family pride, self-help, dignity, and human development”⁴. In many ways the Free African Society can be viewed as a precursor to the many organizations of today that seek to ensure that all persons be socially included and integrated into a society that may not be welcoming or accepting to them. In Allen’s time, the free slave sought to be treated equally in all facets of society. Today, similar groups, to include, the LGBTG community, seek the same rights and freedoms slaves sought to secure some two hundred years ago. In Allen’s time, the church played a pivotal role in being that voice that would advocate for the marginalized and the oppressed. This is the premise our church was built upon. Consequently, social justice, social integration, economic empowerment, education, and equal access to all community resources continue to be vital pursuits for all members of our communities. These were the aspects Allen advocated for using the Free African Society as his platform. Subsequently, with the disbandment of the Free African Society, the church assumed this responsibility. The prevalent question now is this the continued mission of the church in twenty-first century America today.

The mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was derived and has evolved from the primary purpose of the Free African Society founded by Allen and the

³ The Archives of the Episcopal Church, “The Free African Society,” https://www.episcopalarchives.org/Afro-Anglican_history/exhibit/legacy/free_african_society.php (assessed June 30, 2017).

⁴ William P. DeVaux, “African Methodist Episcopal: Nurturing a sense of somebodyness,” in *Faith and Traditions and the Family*, 1st ed. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), page 75.

others. This evolving mission has proven to be the basis of the work of all African Methodist Episcopal churches throughout our connection. Consequently, our mission, which can be described as a worldwide mission, is utilized by the churches of our denomination to ensure that the physical, spiritual, economic, social and mental needs of all of God’s children are holistically met within the confines of the communities in which the churches serve. Found virtually on every possible form of social media, to include AME Church websites, as well as Facebook pages, our mission, more prominently found in the Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, simply states, “to minister to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people.”⁵ Our Bishops, in an effort to further qualify and support this mission, included a vision statement for the church as well. The vision states:

At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the AME Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and to serve the needy. It is also the duty of Church to continue to encourage all members to become involved in all aspects of church training.⁶

Our vision statement supports our mission statement and qualifies who we are from a connectional perspective. All African Methodist Episcopal Churches are interconnected with one another through the organization of episcopal districts, conferences, presiding elder districts and clusters into the larger family of the African Methodist denomination known as the connectional church. Consequently, the mission and vision statements of

⁵ Johnny Barbour, Jr., “The doctrine and discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal church,” 49th ed. (Tennessee: AMEC Union, 2012), page 15.

⁶ Ibid.

our Zion have proven to be whom the African Methodist Episcopal Church is and has been for the past two hundred years. Advocating for the underserved and disenfranchised, the African Methodist Episcopal Church continues to embrace its storied and well documented history. The mission and vision of our church continues to be relevant providing clearly and succinctly what every church in the denomination should strive and thrive to accomplish concerning ministry in their communities. Our mission is shared consistently in various modes of communication to remind us that we as Christians have a continuous purpose to serve God by ministering to His people. Our church continues to be excited about the work that God has entrusted it with and looks forward to influencing the lives of the persons whom find themselves within the confines of its walls as well as those whom are beyond those walls. It is with God's strength that we remain purposeful. We shall not be weary but will rely on the strength God will provide for us. Richard Allen expressed that "the Lord was pleased to strengthen us, and remove all fear from us, and disposed our hearts to be as useful as possible."⁷

Despite their clear-cut purpose, the mission and vision statements of our church sometimes don't align with the mission and vision statements of our leaders both from a connectional and local perspective which brings into question our usefulness to the communities our churches serve. In an environment that has been fueled by the reporting of budgets to sustain and promote the ministries of the church, as well as supporting the operating expenditures necessary to run the church, the pressures experienced by the church's local leaders (pastors) to meet what has been described as their "fiscal

⁷Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, "A narrative of the proceedings of black people during the late awful calamity in Philadelphia (1794)," in *Pamphlets of Protest: An anthology of early African American Protest Literature 1790 - 1860*, 1st ed. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Philip Lapsansky (New York: Routledge, 2001), page 33.

responsibility” have directed their attention away from the ministry of people. Consequently, the order of the day is to initiate ministries that focus on meeting the financial obligations of our Zion that are required by the upper echelon of leadership within the connectional church. With this being said, the reporting process practiced at our annual conferences, the venue in which pastors summarize the work of their perspective ministries for the past conference year, focuses on the bottom line and rarely highlights the advancement of God’s kingdom regarding souls being saved and the effect the ministry of the pastor has had on the congregation and the community. Subsequently, the pastor is held accountable more (this has been my experience) for falling short in terms of the reporting of money (budget) but less on the effectiveness of his or her ministry regarding winning more souls for Christ as well as the church’s impact in the community in which it sits. Consequently, the pastor, in developing a mission and vision statement for the church and in some cases for himself or herself, is oftentimes forced to consider the financial position of the church in terms of not financing ministry but of meeting the church’s financial responsibility. This consequently can have an adverse effect on the overall purpose, reputation and culture of the church. This aspect may jeopardize the church’s mission and vision ultimately endangering the effectiveness of the ministry of the church in the community in which it endeavors to serve.

It is important to point out as well, that the mission and vision of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, by no stretch of the imagination, was the bona fide mission and vision for all churches in our connection but to be used rather as a guide in developing the mission and vision statements for local churches. The local church’s mission and vision statements were to be predicated upon the culture and needs of the

community in which it serves ultimately becoming a place of aid, resource and information. At the founding of the Free African Society, Richard Allen felt the need to form this mutual aid society “to aid in the emancipation of slaves and to offer sustenance and spiritual support to widows, orphans, and the poor.” The Free African Society not only operated above and beyond this standard, but also served as the catalyst in addressing any issues, whether it be social, economic and natural that may have a catastrophic effect on the community at large. One such incident occurred in Philadelphia in 1793 during the yellow fever epidemic. The Free African Society played a major role in assisting with the sick, as well as burying the dead. Directing their attention to such issues as this by the lending of their meager resources spoke to the desire of the society to address serious challenges within its community and more importantly to the marginalized and disenfranchised that consequently comprised the community’s population. This is the spirit in which our church should embrace and live and thrive in. She must, with a renewed fervor and desire seek to be more useful, relevant and to expand her mission beyond her physical walls reaching out to communities whose citizens are in dire need of the necessities of life as well as those possessing a desire of hearing the gospel of the Lord.

History of Greater Bethel

Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church traces her history back to the 1870’s when a group of God-fearing men came together in prayer and fellowship to worship and praise God whom had been good to them. Services were held in the homes of J.S. Fulmore, Billy Pressley, James Cooper, R.C Cameron, W.H. Howard, S. J. Gadson and Sampson (Sambo) Richardson. As their fellowship grew in number, they

decided that it was time to seek out property to build a house of worship. They located two vacant lots in the town of Kingstree, South Carolina located at the intersection of what would eventually become two major highways in Williamsburg County. The group of men purchased the property, known then as Buzzards Roost, for six hundred and fifty dollars. J. H. Keels who at this time served as the Clerk of Court for Williamsburg County recorded the sale and filed it in the Office of Deeds of Williamsburg County. This transaction would serve as the legal and historical beginning of Greater Bethel AME Church.

Serving Kingstree and the surrounding area for over one hundred and thirty years, Greater Bethel was the lead church in the community in its day. Greater Bethel had distinguished itself as an advocate for the marginalized in the community, as well as the center of all social and political advocacy, not only for the African American population, but also for those who found themselves in situations that could be described as unfair. Under the leadership of pastor, Rev. W. H. Settle, Greater Bethel was one of the first houses of worship in the Williamsburg County area to open a youth community center. Construction of the I. H. Bonner Community Center began in June of 1959 and was completed November 1959. This center was completed during a time funds for such endeavors were slim. However, Rev. Settle and the congregation recognized the need for a place the community could utilize to educate our children as well as a house to address the social and political challenges the community faced during this era. The cost to erect the community center was \$10,500.00. The church took out a mortgage to complete the construction project and was able to pay it off in full three years later. Two of the persons whom were members of the committee to raise the money to pay the

mortgage off are still alive and active in the life of Greater Bethel today. Mothers I. B. Barr, 95 and Geneva Burgess, 92 (Appendix A) both recall the challenges the church faced in erecting the community center from the public as well as from some members of the church. However, Rev. Settle stood fast in his resolve leaning on the commitment of the many educators that comprised Greater Bethel whom too understood the need and the impact a center of this magnitude would have on the community and the lives that would benefit from it.

Community activism was just the beginning. Greater Bethel expanded its community involvement into the political arena when the leaders of Greater Bethel collaborated with Mr. Virgil Dimery, a local funeral home owner, other local businesspersons and other houses of worship in Williamsburg County to host civil rights leader, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr on May 9th, 1966. This historical event marked the first time that the civil rights leader visited South Carolina and was one of three times King spoke in South Carolina. On the heels of President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act in August of 1966, an invitation to Dr. King was extended to visit the town of Kingstree to emphasize the importance of voting. His speech became known as “the March on Ballot Boxes.” It encouraged the nearly five thousand persons in attendance to not only go out and vote, but to commit to ensuring that at least ten citizens who were not registered to vote would register to do so. The crowd that assembled at Tomlinson High School on a rainy Mothers’ Day afternoon was also encouraged by Dr. King to “exercise their right to vote as a means to pursue social and economic justice.”⁸ The Honorable James E. Clyburn, House Minority Whip and at the time an educator in

⁸ March on Ballot Boxes, “March on Ballot Boxes Speech Celebration,” <http://marchonballotboxes.com/> (assessed September 27, 2017).

the Charleston County School District recalled making the two-hour drive from Charleston to Kingstree with his wife Emily and two white couples in a pouring rain. He recalled the apprehension he felt as he stood at the edge of the field anticipating some form of violence but felt a calm as the many citizens of Kingstree showed up with umbrellas to hear what Dr. King had to say. He recalled these words stated by Dr. King during his speech, “once more we will be able to send to the Statehouse, once more we have the opportunity to send to the Congress of the United States, competent, qualified, dedicated black men and women.”⁹ At the fiftieth year celebration of Dr. King’s “March on Ballot Boxes” speech in Kingstree, Representative Clyburn stated, “If we are going to maintain the freedoms that were hard-fought starting (on this day) on these grounds in 1966, ... we must be vigilant. We must register to vote, vote and hold elected officials accountable.”¹⁰ The visit of Dr. King solidified the commitment of the leadership of Kingstree to become forerunners in social justice, political advocacy and economic equality. This commitment was built upon the shoulders of business owners, their businesses, religious leaders and their houses of worship.

Despite the aforementioned, something peculiar occurred along the way in the life of Greater Bethel Church. The congregation is not sure what happened, but they realized that Greater Bethel’s place of prominence for community activism began to decline. Some have surmised that it was the varying leadership styles that pastors exhibited as they led the church. Other members have suggested that pastors couldn’t provide the stability the church needed to continue its prominence because for a period of time,

⁹ Adam Parker, ‘We must be vigilant’ S.C. remembers MLK’s 1966 call to ‘march on ballot boxes’ http://www.postandcourier.com/features/arts_and_travel/we-must-be-vigilant-s-c-remembers-mlk-s-call/article_21549c1b-146d-5cee-9548-96cf65701484.html (assessed September 27, 2017).

¹⁰ Ibid

pastors only stayed an average of two years. In addition, many felt that since pastors were coming from other areas of the state, they were not in touch with the needs of the community. Many of these pastors were also bi-vocational, meaning they had other jobs to help support themselves and their families consequently curtailing the time that would be spent ministering in the communities where their churches sat. Others surmised that perhaps that as time progressed, like any institution, Greater Bethel had reached a place of complacency and consequently the focus of the church was no longer community outreach and advocacy that addressed the needs of the community but turned to serving its own personal interests.

Therefore, what could have been the catalyst that contributed to this decline? I believe that the erection of a new edifice proved problematic as the church found itself saddled with a 1.2 million-dollar debt in what is described as one of the poorest counties in South Carolina. The building of the new church came with much controversy as many of the members felt that a new building was not warranted, and that modification could be made to the then current structure. In addition, as the project progressed, much of the church's \$250,000.00 savings evaporated. This left many congregants angry, as there was not full disclosure about the use of this money. Membership began to decline. Members decided not to tithe or financially support the ministries of the church. Budgets to the Connectional Church were no longer paid on time or in full. There were constant discussions about how financial obligations were going to be met in light of declining financial support from congregants whom continued to worship. Pleas for financial support interrupted worship and became commonplace and a regular occurrence in the worship experience on Sundays. Eventually, a once thriving, vibrant congregation was

whittled down to a mere one hundred and twenty-five. To this day, Greater Bethel continues to struggle to make ends meet and has little to no established ministries in place to address the needs of the congregation or the community.

Considering this history, one that has inspired Greater Bethel and driven her existence for the past fifteen years, in my brief tenure as Pastor, I have discovered several stories that have contributed to the current culture. Greater Bethel is a congregation comprised of several families that have called Greater Bethel their home of worship for generations. Many of these families have traced their lineage back to the founders of Greater Bethel and many of them bare the names of Fulmore, Pressley, Cooper, Cameron, Gadson and Richardson. Consequently, each has their own story of how the church came to be and whose idea it was to initiate a fellowship among this group. Many of the stories that I have heard in meetings and informal gatherings center on controversy about the building of the new edifice. To this day, several members remain bitter that their voices were ignored, and that the new edifice was built despite their concerns. There looms a feeling that they, whoever they are, will do whatever they want despite how others may feel. Many members of Greater Bethel feel that they do not belong because of alliances that were formed by former pastors with family entities within the congregation. Other concerns that I have gleaned from conversations and eavesdropping have been about the lack of persons joining this faith family and calling it home. Concerns that have been synonymous are the lack of not only congregational/numerical growth, but spiritual and fiscal growth as well. Understanding that these attributes are intersecting characteristics in many, if not all, of the stories of each family of Greater Bethel, the one

attribute that appears to be more prominent and shared with more passion is the lack of congregational growth.

In peeling back the layers of the stories, I have found that each individual family story has characteristics that have adversely affected the story of Greater Bethel Church and its past prominence. Consequently, these stories have evolved into unresolved conflicts that have terrorized the culture and spirituality of the church resulting in an atmosphere that is not only conducive to spiritual growth but numerical growth as well. Negative attitudes and perceptions of pastors along with disagreements among and between individual families were never addressed properly and consequently have festered and have become fixed within the congregational culture. There are families who rarely interact with each other and when opportunities for fellowship are presented, nearly all have prior commitments. Having these negatives interwoven into the fabric of the faith community has proven to be detrimental to the growth and life of the church.

I think what has contributed most to the culture of Greater Bethel is the ability of the many family units of the church to formulate within their respective cultures the families' criteria for an ideal member. With this mindset holding a prominent place in the culture of Greater Bethel Church, it is possible to conclude that perhaps this is the primary issue that has hindered numerical growth. The church has become more of a fraternity or sorority whose members share the same political views, socio-economic status, educational levels and belief systems. Diana Butler-Bass, in her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, alludes to this line of thinking when she says, "...contemporary Christianity seems to be a religion about belief, a kind of spiritual club that can be joined

by agreeing to statement of faith.”¹¹ Thus, the living church (members of the congregation) can be viewed as a club, one that seeks a particular class of people who can enhance the congregation. Those who don’t fit what I like to call the profile are often ignored or not given serious consideration as members of the fold. For that matter, in some cases, those who do not fit the profile may not even be invited to come and witness a worship experience. I believe that it is necessary to remind the family units of Greater Bethel Church what the true purpose of the church is. That purpose, “...is to be a spiritual community that forms people of faith.”¹²

With this being said, the church is confined to a growth driven only by the individual family unit’s desires and motives. For me, this is alien to the purpose Jesus envisioned for the church. Confined to a line of thinking that is only self-serving, the church in this predicament is not motivated to minister, or genuine desire to grow, or vision or mission beyond its physical walls. It possesses members who are ill equipped and unwilling to embrace nontraditional methods to reach an area of the population that is unchurched.

Consequently, the church in this state is ultimately destined to a capacity that is ineffective and irrelevant in the community in which it serves. To survive, I see that a serious transformation, both spiritual and educational take place. I believe the members could be prepared to experience change with the idea that through this transformation, the congregation will be able to meet and subdue the challenges hindering perspective growth. All of this might occur if congregation members, as well as leadership, including

¹¹ Diana Butler-Bass, *Christianity for the rest of us*. (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2006), 74.

¹² Ibid.

the pastor, are willing to embrace the idea that in the end, what is done is not about them but about Jesus. Perhaps Leonard I. Sweet puts it best in his forward in *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*, “The first challenge is getting clear who Jesus is. The second challenge is clearing out spiritual deformities that dis-order the church’s structural life and disable its mission.”¹³

As I considered the aforementioned, I began to wrestle with whose story this actually is. Is it the Hampton’s story? Is it the Burgess’ story? Is it the Fulton’s story? Is it the Bufkin’s story? Is it the Williams’ story? Is it the Greater Bethel’s story? Or is it God’s story? Whose story has been certified as the true story? From my perspective, finding out this fact is vital in understanding why the culture and environment is what it is in our faith community. This story, the one that has been acknowledged as true, might be the one that has kept the past alive, while contributing to the negatives fueling the synonymous concerns of each individual family. It has, however, become one voice in the sense that each family unit seeks to see Greater Bethel grow numerically.

Reflecting on the narratives further, I have also gathered that the family units have not mentioned anything spiritual. This concerns me. There has been no voice in the narratives that address ongoing spiritual development and study of the word of God that would support the idea that they are spiritually prepared to receive new members. Perhaps, this is why membership is not sustained. The focus appears to be geared toward more of a physical connection and not a spiritual one.

The other issue that I see as prominent is the exclusivity that is prominent in the environment. Our faith community can no longer rely on obtaining growth and

¹³ Michael J. Christensen and Carl E. Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing for Ministry*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000)

maintaining it from the perspective that there is a certain criterion that needs to be embraced for someone to enter our faith community. In other words, I believe that the faith community should not be selective to the point of rejecting those who do not meet a certain criterion. This sort of exclusivity contradicts the first eight words of the Commission issued to the disciples by Jesus. Jesus instructed, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...”¹⁴ This contradiction speaks volumes about where this faith community maybe regarding genuine service to God and the community in which it serves.

Moreover, our faith community must realize that the supply of persons joining our church can no longer be drawn from the ranks of our perspective families but the search for those joining our fold should extend beyond the walls of the physical church. If our faith community seeks to serve a community that is evolving into a melting pot of varying ethnicities, beliefs, and cultures, it should embrace the idea of expanding its membership by reaching out beyond its walls and drawing upon a potential membership that exists there. In other words, our faith community can no longer be one-dimensional in its thinking but should be intentional in its ministry beyond its physical walls. With this being said, our communities are no longer homogenous ones comprised of persons representing a race, ethnicity or family, but that there is an array of individuals and groups living together in the community waiting to hear the good news. Maybe Jesus puts it best when he says, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Matthew 28: 19

¹⁵ Mark 16:15

Greater Bethel's Mission Field

Greater Bethel AME Church is in the town of Kingstree, the county seat of Williamsburg County. Kingstree is located approximately seventy-eight miles east of Columbia, the state capital of South Carolina. The nearest major city is Florence, which is located thirty-seven miles north of Kingstree.

The origin of Kingstree dates back to the 1730's. Robert Johnson, then governor of South Carolina, devised a plan that in his eyes would stimulate economic growth while providing for the protection of coastal settlers. Governor Johnson laid out a township along the Black River, which he named Williamsburg in honor of the Protestant King, William of Orange.

The original settlers of Williamsburg were from Northern Ireland and migrated there in three separate waves arriving in 1732, 1734, and 1736. They were led by John Witherspoon who later founded the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church which was named in honor of William III, Prince of Orange. Traveling up the Black River, the settlers witnessed a lone white pine tree along the banks of the Black River. The wood from the white pine tree was perfect for use as masts on ships. As a result, this tree was claimed by the King and marked with the King's royal symbol to prevent anyone from cutting it. Consequently, the tree was never cut as it became known as the "King's Tree". As more persons settled here in Williamsburg, the county retained the name Williamsburg, but the township itself became known as Kingstree.

According to the 2010 US Census, the population of the area was approximately 3,328 people. The town had a negative growth rate of 5% compared to the population recorded in the 2000 US Census. The racial breakdown is as follows: 67.2% of the

residents are black, 2.4% are Asian, 0.6% are Hispanic and 29.8% are Caucasian. In addition, 2,398 persons were over the age of 18 accounting for 72.1% of the town's population. The remaining 930 or 27.9% of the population were persons under the age of 18.

The town of Kingstree also has approximately 1,569 housing units. 85.4% of these housing units were occupied. The remaining 229 housing units or 14.6% were either on the housing market, abandoned or condemned. As of March 2011, the unemployment rate in Kingstree was 12.7%, 3.1% higher than the state of South Carolina. Of the current population in Kingstree, 70.8% of the residents earned a high school diploma, 22.8% of the population earned a bachelor's degree and 6.4% earned a graduate or professional degree. The median household income in Kingstree was \$24,191 compared to a median income for the state of South Carolina of \$42,442. The most common industries in Kingstree were in the fields of Education (36%), Retail trade (22%) and Manufacturing (10%).

In engaging and studying the results from Greater Bethel's First View Study (2015), some very important information was revealed. The results uncovered that major concerns for the population were spiritual and personal. In terms of religious preference, 90.1% of the population prefer to identify with a specific denomination or affiliation with many of these persons preferring a traditional worship style. Faith receptivity is high and as a result, a large portion of this population prefer church programs geared toward bible study, prayer services as well as spiritual retreats. Family structure was extremely non-traditional suggesting that households that have both parents in the home are not prevalent. In reflecting upon the make-up of the congregation that I pastor, there are

several single parent homes as well as homes where grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Education appears to be an issue as well. According to the results of First View, only 15.4% of the population have graduated from an institution of higher learning. High school graduates are higher at 79%, but with the world changing technologically every day, a high school diploma may not be enough for this segment to become acclimated to the higher demands that may require a higher level of technical skill especially when it comes to employment. In addition, the fastest growing population according to the report is the Native American population. Based on this information, there is a lot to be done regarding initiating relevant outreach ministry in the county Greater Bethel sits in.

Our Desire to Remain Faithful to the Past

“This is what our church used to do,” was an echoing sentiment of the members of Greater Bethel AME Church as hundreds of citizens of Williamsburg County came to our make shift distribution center to receive food, cleaning supplies, blankets, clothes, and other aid provided by the American Red Cross, FEMA and the Connectional African Methodist Episcopal Church in the aftermath of the October flood of 2015. Described by the National Weather Service as “a stalled front offshore combined with deep tropical moisture...,”¹⁶ this natural flooding event adversely impacted areas resulting in the loss of homes, businesses, churches, bridges, roads, and sadly, life. In a report compiled by Wes Tyler, it was concluded that the town of Kingstree, the county seat of Williamsburg

¹⁶ National Weather Service, “Historic Flooding-October 1-5, 2015,” <http://www.weather.gov/chs/HistoricFlooding-Oct2015> (assessed August 16, 2016).

County, alone, “recorded an October 1 – 5 rainfall amount of 22.91 inches.”¹⁷ In addition to this startling statistic, the Black River, which runs through the center of town, had reached an all-time flood stage of 22.65 feet threatening even properties located on higher ground. The devastation was massive. The cleanup would take months. The restoration of physical properties and perhaps the healing of those whom lost virtually everything that they had worked so hard for all their lives would take years.

The adverse impact that the flood of October 2015 had in and on our community provided a window of opportunity for the members of Greater Bethel to become involved in a new level of community service and outreach. Despite our own needs, there was a renewed desire to serve the community. Historically, this desire was once prominent in our church and ultimately defined our church as the center of the community for many years. For the first time in years, the issues that were the origin of division and discord within the fabric of our congregation seemed to not matter in the face of adversity. The mortgage didn’t matter. Differences within the congregation didn’t matter. Issues with one another didn’t matter. There was a coming together that initiated differences being set aside to form a united front that would work together to serve others in a time of distress. Families that had not interacted with one another on any kind of level were suddenly working together to help someone else. It was amazing, as I sat back and watched this unfold. Family units that appeared to be foreign to one another were now planning a strategy to combat an issue that had adversely affected the community in which they lived. I didn’t have to call a meeting. I didn’t have to call aside those persons

¹⁷ Wes Tyler, “October 2015 Historic Flood,” <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/climate/sco/flood2015/octFlood15narrative.pdf> (assessed August 16, 2016).

whom I knew come hell or high water were going to be there and do what needed to be done. They organized themselves. They sought resources themselves. They acted themselves. A culture that I concluded was one on the verge of collapsing both socially and spiritually appeared now to be on the verge of resurrecting itself with the purpose of making an impact on a community that was facing the aftermath of a catastrophic event that adversely affected so many lives.

In considering my thoughts in terms of what I was observing, I thought of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, who together founded the Free African Society in Philadelphia. Their organization was thrust into public view when asked by Dr. Benjamin Rush to step in and help with the yellow fever epidemic that broke out in Philadelphia in 1793. Dr. Rush, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, believed that the African American population was not as susceptible to the disease as were their white counterparts. Consequently, it was believed that if the freed blacks stepped in to help, less of the white population would succumb to the disease. Dr. Rush asked Allen and Jones to deploy their organization to aid in the effort of caring for those stricken by the disease. Understanding that their organization organized “to render service to the larger community,”¹⁸ Allen and Jones agreed to help. The members of the Free African Society served as nurses, porters and undertakers in a very dark time in the history of Philadelphia where many risked their lives to help others. In a time where freed slaves were still being viewed as not equal to whites, the Free African Society not only served blacks that were being affected by the epidemic, but too addressed the needs of

¹⁸ Anne S Butler, “The Free African Society of Philadelphia,” *African American fraternities and sororities. The legacy and the vision*, Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks and Clarendia S. Phillips (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), page 71.

whites whom found themselves having to deal with the same physical challenges that came along with having the disease. Putting themselves at risk, the Free African Society did what needed to be done to care for as many persons as they could. The color of one's skin did not matter. Allen and Jones did not exhibit any ill feeling to those they may have encountered whom played a role in them being denied the right to pray in St. Georges' Methodist Church. Political and religious views were not a concern. A community that was facing a catastrophic event was able to set aside their differences and work together to care for one another despite the political and social climates that loomed.

Likewise, the epic flood of 2015 provided the same opportunity for Greater Bethel to reach out and serve a community that faced catastrophe much like the Free African Society faced when solicited to offer aid in Philadelphia in 1793 during the Yellow fever epidemic. Despite the internal issues that Greater Bethel faced regarding its financial struggles, as well as the strained relationships that were prevalent within its faith community, the congregation was able to set aside its differences to come together to do some good for others in the face of adversity. Much like the Free African Society which faced similar issues within its organization, Greater Bethel saw a greater need in its community and as result, united together in a time of peril to become that place of hope and peace for others. Greater Bethel, in this moment, had gotten its swag back and there was a buzz around town that this house of worship that was once the center of cultural activity, social advocacy and community outreach was making a comeback. Greater Bethel was back!

As I watched this unfold, I could feel a sense that history was in the making. However, as I began to genuinely appreciate what was going on, an alarming concern

came over me. That concern was based upon the ability of the church to continue this newfound desire to serve our community when the issues our community faced were addressed. What would happen to this level of service to our community when there were no more storm wounds to be healed? What would happen when someone in our community needed help beyond the issues they experienced in the aftermath of the tragedy? Would our church be there to assist? Would our church be there to advocate? Would our church be the voice of the community? What would happen if there were a difference of opinion between members of the congregation about how something was to be done? Would the church again, be able to survive another disagreement or schism? Has it really healed from the last one? I thought of the issues that Allen and Jones had with each other as they both had differing visions for the Free African Society, which Allen eventually disassociated himself from because he felt that the organization had its values rooted too deeply in the Quaker faith. All these thoughts began running through my mind and I began to wonder if the same fate the Free African Society came to would be the same fate of Greater Bethel.

Reflecting on its ministry in the wake of the flood of October 2015, Greater Bethel continues to exhibit a sincere desire to be that place where people can look for guidance and advocacy in times of peril. The question for me is how are we, as a congregation of God's people going to continue to serve the community with the same commitment, urgency and motivation during times when there was no peril? There is no doubt in my mind that the members of Greater Bethel possess a sincere desire to help those in perilous times. However, to be relevant in a community that boasts a variety of ethnicities, persons of varying social and economic backgrounds, as well as varying

faiths, our community of faith must be available always to all who may need us. How could this “what we used to do”, be transformed into “this is what we do”? To bring Greater Bethel to that level of ministry, as well as garnering a deeper appreciation for and building upon our storied history, the project, “This is what our church used to do: Rekindling the ministry of outreach in our community” was birthed.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL BASIS

In recent years, natural disasters have plagued our nation. According to an article published in USA Today, in 2016 alone, the United States recorded ninety-one weather disasters tying it for the second most on record.¹ An alarming statistic regarding these ninety-one weather related incidences was that 19 of them were floods that not only took lives but destroyed homes, businesses, communities, roads and other components of infrastructure that are necessary for the mainstreaming of daily life. According to this article, weather related disasters increased on our continent. One hundred and sixty disasters were recorded on our continent, along with a staggering six hundred and seventy weather related disasters, being reported globally.² With this being prevalent not only in our communities but nationally and globally as well, adequate response times are vital to ensure the safety and health of citizens across the world.

From a historical perspective, disaster relief and outreach unofficially began on the local level of government incorporating community resources, faith-based groups and civic organizations. These entities weren't formally recognized as vital players in the disaster preparedness arena until 2009 when then President Barack Obama introduced the

¹ Doyle Rice. "U. S had more floods in 2016 than any year on record." "USA Today".
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2017/01/04/floods-natural-disasters-2016/96120150/>. January 4, 2017. (Assessed November 2, 2017).

² Ibid.

White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.³ The purpose of this agency was to initiate a bridge of service to families whom were victims of natural disasters connecting them to both faith-based organizations as well as government and municipal agencies whom partnered with each other to serve members of their community.

With faith-based organizations becoming more prevalent in the disaster preparedness model and more importantly exhibiting a willingness to serve their perspective communities on this level, there is an immediate need to ensure that proper training is available so that members of the faith-based community understand how to respond appropriately, effectively and swiftly in times of peril. Most importantly, faith-based organizations should not view their roles as one dimensional in terms of only providing services such as food, clothing, and other essential needs that should be met, but the community of faith serves as a place of spiritual, mental, psychological and social healing. All members of the household of faith should lend their talents to this form of outreach ministry not only offering themselves in a time of disaster but too offering their services when members of the community solicit their services in times of safety.

In contemplating the planning of this project as well as its details and initiation, my research led me to discovering that the Word of God has provided a template for all of us to follow when it comes to community outreach and helping one another whether it be in a time of peril or a time of peace. What I discovered is that our motivations for helping one another should not be predicated upon an event that occurs every one

³ Justine Brown. "Churches play a growing role in emergency management". <http://www.govtech.com/em/disaster/Churches-Playing-Growing-Role-Emergency-Management.html>. April 28, 2015. (Assessed November 2, 2017).

hundred years, or the circumstances that may have thrust these persons into their negative situation. However, there must be a genuine desire within us to serve these persons whom are going through regardless of their circumstances as well as any issue we may be experiencing as well. In addition, our serving should not be connected to any desire to receive anything from them in return materialistically but to simply glorify God as God moves in and within us to ensure His will is done.

It is my belief that our service to others is rooted in our motivation to serve as well as the Spirit of God being on and in us to fuel that motivation. The motivation to serve should not be predicated upon how we are perceived by society, but our motivation should be rooted in pleasing and glorifying God. Jesus speaks to this purpose in the following passage of scripture:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people. (Luke 4: 18-19)

Ever since I was a small boy growing up in rural South Carolina, my grandmother said that there was a call on my life. Being a sheltered child, I did not have many friends and my circle of playmates were confined to my two sisters, Alicia and Kimberly. There were times during the summer that cousins of mine matriculated to South Carolina to spend time with their grandparents and, as a result, we could mingle with them. I have fond memories of playing all day outside of our 1973 Montego Bay singlewide mobile home in the hot sun of the summer months making mud pies and occasionally playing a game of kickball.

When the heat got unbearable, my grandmother would call us inside to avoid the obvious heat stroke. We did not have much for entertainment. We had board games, but we were kids. Naturally, many of the pieces were either lost or thrown in the trash can because they fell on the floor and we did not pick them up the way we should have. As punishment, my grandmother would throw them away as a lesson to teach us that we should take better care of the things that were left to our charge. Card games were a no-no. My grandmother always said that cards, whether they were Uno cards or regular cards were the devil's tools. Do not even mention dice. We had only one television with four channels. My mom, whom worked awful hard to ensure we had the necessities of life, could not afford satellite television. There were not video game consoles in our house like Atari, which was very popular at the time. Consequently, we were left to entertain ourselves. Like most children we played games that we knew, or we simply mimicked what we saw in our everyday life. With my grandmother constantly ensuring we were in church every Sunday morning, there was nothing like a good game of church on Saturday afternoon. My sisters would be the choir and, of course, I would be the preacher. They would sing, and I would preach. After the preaching we would have the offering. We would gather up these huge acorn leaves and count them and make the announcement as to how much the offering was. My grandmother would look out of the kitchen window and just laugh at us. She always felt that there was a call on all of our lives to do great things in the kingdom of God.

My father was not a constant in my life through those years. I did have an uncle that was always around. He was a Korean War veteran who found comfort in the confines of a liquor bottle to deal with the psychological wounds of that conflict as well as a failed

marriage and an estranged daughter who till this day holds animosity toward him. Uncle Alton was a kind heart who loved the three of us dearly, but when Friday rolled around he became a violent person who had no regard for himself or others around him. It would be on this day, that he would crawl into the liquor bottle and blame the world for all that he had gone through. He would get so angry with the world and God, that he would come and want to fight my mom. My grandmother was always the referee and would often have to break them up. I remember one Saturday morning he came over and he started with what my grandmother called foolishness. Like always, Mom simply ignored him, but this enraged him to a new level this particular morning. He went toward my Mom and he took a swing at her. When he missed, my Mom picked up a two-liter soda bottle and struck him in the head. She had knocked him clean out. On that day, I thought my mother was going to jail and that I would never see her again. EMS was called, as well as the local police. My uncle was evaluated, and the police interviewed everyone. My mother wasn't charged nor my uncle. However, that day forever changed my life. I remember hearing my grandmother say to us as we tried to understand what was going on that prayer changes things.

Those words became my motto as a little boy and became the close to many a sermon I preached playing church in the front yard of my home under the acorn tree. One Saturday, we saw Uncle Alton being dropped off at his house (we lived maybe one hundred yards away). We watched him stagger into the house surely to pass out. I said to my small congregation of two, "Uncle Alton needs prayer. You remember grandma said that prayer changes things." My sister Kimberly said, "Yeah, she said things, not drunken bums!" I shared with them that we had to try something. We had this long discussion

about how Grandma was going to cut our behinds if she knew what we were doing. My sister said, "Okay, if we do this, we need some oil. You know grandma said the oil works." My other sister Alicia said, "Grandma got that locked up. We will never get to it." Then I remembered that when my grandmother got oil, she prayed over it, so I concluded that we could use anything for oil. So, I went on this scavenger hunt in the house and found a personal bottle of Jergens lotion. I prayed over it and said to my sisters that this would serve as our oil. So off we went to his house to pray for our uncle. I remember what I said, "Please, God in the name of Jesus, heal this drunken bum. Take the taste of the devil's juice away from his lips. Give him a new taste.... the taste of the living water. Please God heal this drunken bum. Break every liquor bottle in the liquor store. Please heal this drunken bum." As I was saying this, Kimberly was applying the lotion (oil) to his face and Alicia was singing, "Come over here, where the table was spread, feast of the Lord is going on. We gonna drink from the fountain that never run dry, shout hallelujah by and by." We did that to him and the crazy thing was that when he came to while we were there, he wasn't angry but was in tears because he said no one ever prayed for him. He shared this with everyone he came across. Soon we were praying for everyone whom drank. There was a cousin. Then there was Uncle Donnie, the youngest of the bunch. There was even a retired AME minister, Rev. Willie, who lived across the street from us and whom my uncle helped when he was sober. I remember one of the times after I prayed for him, he looked at me and said that one day you will make a great preacher. I wasn't hearing anything he had to say because he was a preacher retired or not and all I could smell on his breath was the scent of Budweiser. I suppose he saw the disbelief in my face and he said to me, "The spirit of the Lord is on you." I didn't

quite understand that. I wasn't reading no bible. I was just doing what I saw in church. I was just a kid trying to entertain myself and my sisters. We weren't trying to have no spirit on us. But even in what I would describe as a compromised state, he saw something in me. He saw something in all of us.

As I reflect on this, I can't help but think that in some way as a little boy, though what I perceived to be playing church, the actions of my sisters and myself brought some kind of relief to these persons whom became victim to that devil juice that perhaps in some way eased pain they were experiencing. We didn't judge them. We didn't look down on them. To us, all of them were still our elders and we respected them greatly. Perhaps, someone had passed them by. Perhaps someone gave up on them. Perhaps someone ignored them. I am not sure what their issues were, but I do know that whenever we prayed for them, it brightened their day. Perhaps this was relief work that was initiated by us inadvertently of course, to uplift their spirits in a time in which they needed it most. In some way, there is something redemptive in what we did.

When I think of Uncle Alton, Uncle Donne, and Rev. Willie and what I thought I saw was going on in their lives, I think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke writes:

³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He

went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii,^[a] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37)

In this parable, we discover that a man was victimized by robbers who stripped him, beat him and left him for dead. As time went along, we observe that several persons passed his way with the opportunity to somehow impact this man's life, but neither offered any kind of assistance to this person whom was visibly battered and undoubtedly mentally and spiritually broken. My struggle with this passage stems from the lack of compassion and concern each individual possessed for this man, whom is only identified as a man. There is no ethnic tag associated with him. There is no name given as to identify whom he may have been. There are, however, an array of persons whom could have made a difference and perhaps in some way could have identified with this man, but neither took the time to see about this man and his condition. We observe two different instances where persons whom could have helped decided not to. What disturbs me the most is that the two persons that walked past were persons who could be described as religious persons who were looked to for help in times of need. But not only did they walk by, they walked on the other side of the road conveying they didn't want to have anything to do with this man and his situation. Crazy. If you can't look to the church for help, who can you turn to?

Things however, begin to turn in favor of the victim. Luke shares with us that a Samaritan man happens along and offers his help. The Samaritan is an outcast an individual hated by Jews. Consequently, his concern in the matter of the battered Jew is unexpected. Not only does he address this man's situation immediately, but he shows a level of compassion at the outset that I think many of us wouldn't exhibit if we found ourselves facing a similar situation. We read that this Samaritan, pours oil and wine over the man's wounds and bandages them. He does this almost immediately. In addition, he places this injured man on his on animal and takes him to the nearest inn and completes his care for him. He leaves and returns the next day to pay for the injured man's stay and instructs the innkeeper to care for the man and that when he returns will reimburse the innkeeper any funds he used to care for the injured man.

As I pick apart the discourse of Jesus, I can't help but conclude that this teaching goes beyond our ability to simply love our enemies when we find them in situations in which they are struggling or having to deal with a negative situation. This is not a situation where we discover that our enemies are being regulated to be our footstools. This, however, has everything to do with our salvation and the salivation of our enemies and our ability to look beyond cultural and socio-economic differences to simply lend a helping hand to someone going through a tough time. Unpacking this, is it possible that the brutalized man represents all humanity? Like him, we are weak. We are often overpowered by the robbers which in the case of the discourse of Jesus, represents sin and the many evil forces of the world? Because of our weakened state we are left to die spiritually, socially and mentally. When we look to those that can help, in this case the priest and the Levite, there is no time to invest in our well-being. There is no motivation

on their part to help us, so they hurriedly pass us by despite our condition, conveying no concern or compassion despite our condition. Then when we arrive at that place where we feel that there is no hope for us, an unexpected person, in this case the Samaritan (Jesus) comes along and exhibits immediate compassion for us by bandaging our wounds treating them with the oil and wine which could very well represent His blood.

Ultimately, Jesus goes above and beyond what we ascertain as normal to help. The inn, metaphorically represents the church, our safe haven and we are left in the hands of one instructed by Jesus perhaps the Holy Spirit, until Jesus returns for us. But what is Jesus' motivation? What does Jesus possess that we don't possess that keeps this motivation fresh and enduring? Jesus answers this question in John 5:30b when he says, "...I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

Consequently, our motivation to serve should be rooted in the precept of doing the will of the one whom created us. This motivation should be fueled by the love we have for our creator which too, should translate to a love that we have for one another regardless of the situation we may find ourselves in. Sometimes this motivation is subdued by our lack of time or lack of compassion or in some cases fear. When I think of the priest and the Levite, travelling seventeen miles along a route that was known to be dangerous in terms of travelers being robbed or murdered, I must think that fear played a role in their passing of the battered man. In understanding the unknowns that lay along this treacherous route, I have to think that being focused on getting home safely and perhaps spending meaningful and relevant time with family after a long day of tending to temple business superseded the desire to help someone in need and both the priest and the Levite chose to ignore the battered man's plight. Perhaps the elements of time and fear

eroded their desire to help. Maybe their perseverance in terms of serving God was depleted because of fear and the lack of time. I have found that one if not all these aspects adversely affect our service as well. Oftentimes it is someone like the Samaritan that comes along and offers unexpected resources to those whom find themselves in need. What then has adversely impacted our motivation to continue to serve? What has impacted our perseverance, our saltiness? Perhaps thinking that someone else would come along and lend a helping hand. But then there is the Samaritan, the one whom comes along and offers his unlikely help. Regardless of who we are, our positions in society, or the relationships we have fostered with one another, we are all a part of this culture in which we have been placed in and as a result, we all play valuable roles in its advancement and caring for those whom comprise it.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5: 13-16)

Over the past fifteen or so years, our church has lost its fervor and zeal regarding hospitality beyond our walls. Our church has become so fixated with the debt that was initiated fifteen years ago, that the focus of the church has revolved and now is set on focusing only on the repayment of a substantial mortgage which, consequently, has led to an emphasis that has been transferred from ministry to a secular concern that ultimately

can lead to our church ceasing to exist. The urgency in this economic venue has consequently led the church to prioritize ministry as a last priority thus making our church ineffective and irrelevant in the area in which it serves. This has led to a negative presumption within the community that from a ministry perspective the church has little or nothing to offer to enhance that lives of those who are members of the community. This aspect has had an adverse impact on the current members as well, whom are constantly at odds with one another because of the lack of trust that was facilitated with the construction of the new edifice. This has affected outreach in terms of ministry and has brought our church to a place of losing its saltiness or its ability to persevere through changing times.

When I reflected on the phrase, “this is what we used to do,” my spirit brought me to Matthew 5: 13 – 16 which chronicles the teaching of Jesus to the disciples being the salt of the earth. From a modern perspective, I wanted to connect the teaching of Jesus in this parable to how we view salt today and align these aspects to what I thought happened at Greater Bethel in terms of serving the community. The physical characteristics of salt played a vital role in my summation. I first considered the color of salt. Salt is white and in many contexts suggested purity. I wanted to suggest that the whiteness of the salt spoke to our congregation’s level of purity as believers in Christ and that perhaps this purity was adversely affected at some point in our journey perhaps when the discussion of building the new edifice and its ultimate construction divided the congregation. In addition, I considered how we, in our society use salt to flavor the food that we eat. I considered suggesting that perhaps our congregation had lost its zeal to maintain and add new and fresh flavor their relationships ultimately becoming ineffective in the

community in which it served. I thought that perhaps the congregation has lost its saltiness as it related to their relationships with one another consequently adversely affecting how relationships would be formed and maintained outside of the walls of our church. I wanted to suggest that since salt stings us when applied to an opened wound, essentially acting as a cleansing agent or an antiseptic, that perhaps our congregation had lost its saltiness to condemning wrong and violations against the oppressed and marginalized in the community in which it served. I wanted to also suggest that since salt can create thirst that in some way our congregation had lost its ability, amid its saltiness, to create a thirst and desire for the living water of Jesus. All these aspects, connections and ideas swirled through my spirit and mind. However, I ultimately realized that what Jesus was teaching in this passage of scripture reached far below what I concluded in what I would describe as my superficial commentary.

It is important to note that to genuinely discern what Jesus is conveying to the disciples regarding salt, it would be necessary to understand the value of salt within the context in which Jesus uses this metaphor to instruct the disciples. Salt was a valuable commodity that was “used since ancient times, as a preservative, a disinfectant for wounds, a seasoning, for ritual ceremonies, units of exchange and even to ratify covenants.”⁴ Because of this known fact, the disciples would have been well aware of the value of salt not only in society and in the religious arena, but to them personally and economically as well. For many of them salt was a necessity from the standpoint that many of them would have to use this commodity to preserve fish that would be caught by them. Because there was no refrigeration, the fish would be packed in salt and stored for

⁴ Earl G. Grover, III, *In the eye of the hurricane: where God resides*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Westbow Press, 2016).

future use. Consequently, given this vital use of salt in the everyday life of the disciples, Jesus elects to utilize an analogy that compares the physical use of salt to the spiritual health of the disciples. The idea here is that since salt decelerates the decay of the fish, Christians whom are metaphorically compared to salt in this context by Jesus, act as the decaying agent to inhibit sin that acts as the decaying agent in the lives of God's people. As a result, Christians possess a valuable opportunity to speak life into the lives of those persons whom are constantly encountering the daily challenges in life. But what about the Christian? How does the Christian fend against losing their zeal and commitment to helping others and spreading the word of God?

Jesus addresses this by posing a question to understand what happens when the salt loses its taste and how that taste is restored. Consequently, it is a safe assumption that at some point in our perspective journeys with the Lord, we are endanger of losing our taste. We lose our motivation, our will, our desire, our dedication and our willingness to serve. Oftentimes, the culprit in these experiences stem from issues with persons we work with, our family members and our brothers and sisters with whom we worship. As a result, conflict with these groups cultivates a breeding ground of discouragement and ill feeling ultimately leading us to a place of losing our zeal and our desire to promote and operate within the kingdom of God. The result is that we lose our saltiness, our effectiveness. This is what Jesus is trying to convey in his discourse with the disciples. Once our effectiveness is lost, once our influence is lost, we are useless. Despite these potential issues that may arise that could serve as our adversary in losing this zeal, this saltiness, it is essential that our connection with God remains buoyant to not fall into the halls of discouragement. Consequently, our primary purpose as we journey with God is to forever

remain connected to God. Adam Clarke, in his commentary on this particular passage states, “Only that which is connected with the rock, the soul that is in union with Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit, can preserve its savor, and be instrumental of good to others.”⁵ Greater Bethel in many ways, experienced a break in this connection with the Lord and perhaps this was the malefactor in the demise of Greater Bethel’s vibrant outreach ministry. The break first occurred within the confines of the congregation when different factions had a difference of opinion about the building of the new edifice. Being unable to resolve their differences, the conflict was carried out beyond the walls of the church conveying to the community that the congregation was at odds with one another. Surely the disagreement about the building of the new edifice shouldn’t have adversely impacted the church’s service to the community. However, I have discovered that when a conflict arises whether it be in the church or some other organization it is often difficult to set aside the issues at hand when each side feels passionate about their positions. Consequently, even in our disagreements our goal should be to identify who Jesus is and come to a place in realizing that all we do, we do to glorify the name of Jesus. Thus, in our congregations we should strive to get clear who Jesus is and in doing so, we must, in everything we do, clearly articulate how what we endeavor to do glorifies God.

With all that history, it is important as well that Greater Bethel as a faith community understands that the purpose of this project carries no ulterior motives in terms of growing Greater Bethel for sole purpose of increasing membership numerically or financially. The purpose is to rekindle a desire to serve a community that once held

⁵ Adam Clarke. "Commentary on Matthew 5:13". "The Adam Clarke Commentary". <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/acc/matthew-5.html>. 1832. (assessed November 1, 2017).

Greater Bethel in high regard and saw Greater Bethel as a source of strength within the community to address the needs of the marginalized and address issues of social justice. It is the hope that through this process our focus or mission will begin to re-evolve into one that is ministry oriented and relevant in a community that is rapidly changing. To be successful, Greater Bethel must be willing to address two challenges that Leonard I. Sweet addresses in his forward in *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry*. Sweet states, “The first challenge is getting clear who Jesus is. The second challenge is clearing out spiritual deformities that dis-order the church’s structural life and disable its mission.”⁶

Our clarion call as members of the household of faith and as ambassadors of the gospel of Jesus is to be welcoming and hospitable. This call is rooted in a familiar passage of scripture found in Paul’s letter to the Hebrews. Paul writes, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2). In addition, our call to be hospitable to strangers beyond the walls of our church and community is further qualified in the following passage of scripture found in the twenty – fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew verses 34 – 36. It states:

...for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked, and you gave me clothing, I was sick, and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

This passage supports our call to serve and requires us, as members of the household of faith, to reach out beyond the walls of our physical sanctuaries to address the needs of the

⁶ Michael J. Christensen and Carl E. Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing for Ministry*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000)

hungry and provide for them. This provision is not limited by food, but too expands our call to clothe them, to care for them when they are ill and to visit them when they are incarcerated. In addition, it is my position that in the modern times in which we live, this call also expands into the many areas that have adversely affected the people of God who are daily oppressed and marginalized by the government, employers, colleagues, double standards physical, mental and sexual abuse as well as those persons whom are classified as being disabled. Adhering to this call provides for those who can be described as the least of these. This positions us as the servants of God to be blessed. Because of our obedience, God will reward us.

Consequently, our roles as members of the household of faith is to welcome, embrace, love and connect people to the church. Accordingly, our spiritual modus operandi should be to meet the needs of the people unselfishly and with the purpose of magnifying the name of the Lord. With this being said, our purpose is to model the ministry of Jesus and in doing so, our hope is to become “a community in which people are made one in Jesus in spite of their different classes, religious backgrounds, genders, races, and ethnic groups.”⁷

Getting clear who Jesus is vital to the success of this project. We often frame who Jesus is in terms of who he is to us individually and what Jesus means to us collectively. Our belief of who Jesus is should be predicated upon the dual role that Jesus played when Jesus initiated and fulfilled Jesus’ earthly ministry here on earth. Henry G. Britton qualifies this dual role by stating, “Jesus plays a dual role in any experience of Christian

⁷ Letty M. Russell, *Just hospitality: God’s welcome in a world of difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 20.

hospitality – he is both our host and our potential guest.”⁸ Consequently, we must understand that Jesus was both a stranger in the context in which Jesus served entering the lives of those who were oppressed and marginalized by the society in which they lived. Jesus identified with these people in that Jesus didn’t come with money, fancy clothes, an Ivy league education nor with the best that life had to offer but Jesus too had no home. Jesus possessed a sincere desire to meet them at the point of their needs. Jesus’ own condition can be viewed as a motivation to help those whom found themselves in similar situations and conditions. This too, should be our way of being – to meet those at the point of their needs unselfishly and with the purpose of magnifying the name of the Lord.

Our motivation then should not be conditioned on a natural disaster or some major event that brings society together for a specified period. We should be positioned always to serve those who are in need with the understanding that fame or fortune is not our ultimate goal, but our goal is to bless someone in need.

Greater Bethel must realize that the Spirit of the Lord is upon them. For one hundred and thirty-six years, Greater Bethel has been the cornerstone of the town of Kingstree. Greater Bethel, with its longevity, can prove that as a faith community it can serve as the salt of its community by simply spreading the word of God to the marginalized and oppressed meeting their needs physical, spiritually and socially. Consequently, Greater Bethel’s willingness to serve cannot be limited but must reach beyond its walls. If Greater Bethel is to be successful in its endeavors, our congregation

⁸ Henry G. Brinton, *The welcoming congregation: Roots and fruits of Christian hospitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 9.

must, as a faith community, be reminded of its storied past and hold on to its words that facilitated the initiation of this project, “this is what we used to do.”

CHAPTER 3

THE PROJECT

Introduction

Scripture has recorded several examples of the people of God preparing for disasters as well as responding to and rebuilding after them. Noah, in chapters six through nine of the book of Genesis prepares for and responds to the great flood by the building of the ark. At the end of the construction, Noah, under the direction of God, loads the ark with a pair of each animal on the earth. Noah, his wife and their sons and wives eventually board the ark themselves seeking refuge from the floods on board in perhaps the largest lifeboat that was ever built. According to Genesis 7: 24, the flood, which consumed the earth, destroying all that was created by God, lasted one hundred and fifty days. At the receding of the water, God instructs Noah and his sons in Genesis 9: 7 to “be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.” In addition, the destruction of Jerusalem caused Nehemiah immeasurable grief and, as a result, Nehemiah sought to rebuild the city. Rallying the people of God by simply stating, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace.” (Nehemiah 2: 17). Believing that God was with Nehemiah the people of God respond, “Let us start building!” (Nehemiah 2: 18). Securing funding from King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah was able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem within fifty-two days. Nehemiah ultimately became governor. His time in

power as governor was highlighted by the returning of the exiles, rebuilding of the temple and the establishment of community religious life.

Like our biblical predecessors, the Black Church celebrates a storied history that has been chronicled through its response to disaster relief. I can't help but mention again, how the Free African Society offered its services in immobilizing itself to aid the thousands of persons whom were adversely affected in Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. Many freed slaves served as nurses and undertakers. This speaks to the resiliency our predecessors had. Despite the unresolved social issues that were prevalent during this time, freed slaves were still able to operate effectively in hostile environments to aid not only their people whom were in need but others as well.

Benjamin Brawley states, "a determining factor in the Negro's social progress was the service that he was able to render to any community in which he found himself as well as to his own people."¹ Consequently, we too, given the history of our predecessors, should embrace the same mindset of serving our communities regardless of the situations or our own motivations.

Given the array of disasters that have affected our communities over the past ten years, it is my assertion that before any natural disaster occurs, the church should have a disaster plan in place to aid its members as well as members of the community in which it sits. This effort should already be organized and conveyed to the members of the church as well as community leaders and first responders. This disaster plan should complement the disaster plans that have been authored by community leaders and government agencies and should work in concert with one another once a natural disaster has

¹ Brawley, Benjamin. *A social history of the American Negro*. (New York, New York: Dover Publications, 2001), p73.

impacted the community. While we all understand and embrace the fact that government agencies will play a pertinent role in disaster relief and in many cases take the lead in initiating the aid many will need, it too, is important to understand that long after those agencies have vacated the community, the church will still be available to address any extended issues that may be prevalent for those in need.

The purpose of this project is to position the members of Greater Bethel to address the needs of not only members of her own congregation, but also the needs of members of our community in the times of disaster and peril. The well-documented history of Greater Bethel alludes to a time where the church was instrumental in providing guidance in not only times of peril but times of peace as well. Consequently, as time progressed, Greater Bethel fell into a period where community outreach was no longer a priority. However, the October Flood of 2015, thrust Greater Bethel into a position of transforming its campus into a distribution and resource center to aid the victims of this natural disaster. The echoing sentiment “this is what we use to do” stirred up a newfound desire and excitement to embrace a past that distinguished Greater Bethel from other houses of worship through its community outreach. Reflecting upon the response Nehemiah received from the people of God when Nehemiah sought to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, I sought to use the phrase “this is what we use to do” as a primary motivator to initiate the project, “Operation Faithful to the Past.” The project’s purpose was to recapture some of the excitement and willingness that the Greater Bethel of yesteryear possessed and displayed through its social and political advocacy ministries. The work of these ministries resulted in the erection of a community center for the young people of Kingstree and surrounding areas as well as the role church leadership played in

securing the visitation of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the Kingstree community. Consequently, the primary purpose of this project is to rekindle this desire to conduct community outreach with the hope that the effect would be an endearing one not prompted by a natural disaster. To achieve the culminating activity of Operation Faithful to the Past was to sponsor a community resources fair at Greater Bethel. The purpose of this event would be to educate the members of the community about the resources that would be available to them in the event a natural disaster was imminent. The ultimate desire for Greater Bethel would be to initiate a community resource center at the church with the hope that it would serve the community by providing services to those who are in need in either times of peril or wellbeing.

The Planning Phase

When I started the Doctor of Ministry Program at Drew University Theological School, I shared with the congregation that at some point during my studies I would be initiating a project to culminate the program and that their participation would be appreciated. As I approached this stage of the program, I was intentional in selecting members of my LAC because I realized that their guidance and influence would be vital in terms of getting members of the congregation involved and encouraging them to be committed to seeing the project through. I also embraced the fact that my circle had to be small but influential enough to motivate others outside of this circle to participate and not to see this undertaking as only an opportunity for me to advance, but to embrace the project as an opportunity to elevate the spiritual awareness of the congregation, while heightening their standards in terms of missional service. The project then had to be constructed to involve many members of the congregation so that the various talents of

the people of God could be utilized and provide enough opportunities for the members of the congregation to participate in the process. Numerous opportunities in my opinion had to be offered because I understood that perhaps members couldn't or wouldn't participate in all phases of the project. As a result, there were at least four opportunities that were presented to them to participate in the project voluntarily. These opportunities were:

- The Learning Lab (Bible Study)
- The Soup Kitchen
- The Sermon Series
- The Community Resources Fair

I informed the congregation of the upcoming project the summer prior to the Drew DMin Fall Colloquium. I didn't give specifics as the project itself was still in the development phase and I was not sure where I needed to go in terms of facilitating an outcome. I did share with them that it would involve activities focused on mission and outreach. I shared with them that I wanted to pursue a project focused on the mission and outreach because of the congregation's call to action in the aftermath of the One Thousand Year Flood and Hurricane Matthew and the impact these two events had on our community. After completing the methods class and confirming that outreach and mission would be the subject of the project, I again went to the congregation and solicited the help of persons to serve on the LAC. After getting little to no response and a brief time in prayer for guidance, I personally asked six persons to participate and they graciously accepted the challenge. The persons whom comprised my LAC were persons not related to one another. They represented the Steward and Trustee Boards of the Church. One of the members of the LAC served as the church's disaster relief

coordinator. In addition, an at large member, Rev. Dr. Herbert Jenkins served on the committee as well. I emailed each of them a copy of the prospectus, so they could become familiar with the project's scope and purpose along with the proposed date of our first meeting. Once I confirmed the initial meeting date of January 21, 2017. I began planning the meeting.

Our initial meeting, was held on January 21, 2017. It centered around everyone's individual understanding of the prospectus. We discussed the prospectus and I answered any questions asked by the members of the LAC. I also shared with them how my research would be conducted and shared with them how the privacy of those persons participating would be handled during the research. We also discussed the roles that each of us would play. I shared with them that my wife would serve as the LAC chairperson and that other roles regarding their potential involvement in the process would be determined based upon their talents and interests. In addition, a projected timeline was discussed.

The second meeting involved sharing the goals of the project and designing the various phases of the project to include the project's implementation and recruiting of the persons other than the LAC who would be involved. I shared the various phases of the project which included the dissemination of the Community Needs Survey, Soup Kitchen Phase, Bible Study – Learning Labs Phase, Sermon Series Phase, and the culminating activity, the Community Services Fair. Many of the LAC members thought we were trying to do too much but I felt that we had enough time if we would have gotten approval of the project proposal by the middle of January. Approval didn't come until

March 1st. As a result, subsequent meetings had to be done rather quickly to ensure the project got going.

Our third meeting was held on March 4. We discussed the bible study curriculum that was being used and laid out the bible study schedule, the sermon series schedule, the soup kitchen schedule, as well as laying the ground work for the planning of the Community Resources Fair. The project was to proceed as follows:

- Bible Study (Learning Labs)/Sermon Series – March 2017 through April 2017
- Soup Kitchen – April 2017
- Community Resources Fair – May 2017
- Site Visit/Project Evaluation – May 2017 through June 2017

The fourth meeting was held on March 18. During this meeting, I fielded concerns about the soup kitchen regarding whom was to be served. There was some confusion here. In addition, we talked about the bible study (learning lab) attendance as well as the sermon series used to supplement the information gleaned during the learning labs. One concern that arose in this meeting was the attendance. I encouraged the LAC to call members and remind them of the purpose of the bible study and why it was so important. In addition, I encouraged them to share notes that they had jotted down with persons they thought would be interested. We also discussed the Community Resources Fair in this meeting. I shared with them that this needed to be done no later than the last Saturday in April (April 29) with a site visit soon to follow per an email conversation I had with Dr. Miller on March 9. It was then that I learned in the meeting that a similar initiative had been facilitated by the county and we may not be able to get the agencies

requested via the Community Needs Questionnaire due to their participation in the county initiative, but the LAC thought they would be able to make it happen.

Our fifth meeting was held on April 8. It became apparent to the LAC and me that the Community Services Fair would have to be cancelled due to the Williamsburg County Initiative Operation – To – Go. This program was initiated by E – 911, the Emergency Management Division of Williamsburg County. The initiative was to educate the citizens of the community on four areas regarding disaster relief. Those areas are: Mitigation, Planning, Response and Recovery. All county resources, to include the fire department, the American Red Cross, DSS and so on are engaged in educating the community in disaster preparedness by visiting each community within the county. The county’s initiative began on May 1 and was scheduled to conclude on July 18. Because many of the resources we sought to be a part of our fair were engaged three to four times a week in various communities, we didn’t receive the response we needed to put on a fair that would be meaningful and helpful. We sought to do a four-hour event. By the time our event was scheduled, much of our target population would have already received the information we sought to disseminate through the designated community resources. Because of this and the fact that an event was scheduled the same day our event was scheduled, we elected to cancel ours. The following Sunday, we shared this information with the congregation and encouraged them to participate in the E – 911 meetings as they came to their communities. We shared the upcoming dates and times with the congregation as well.

Our final meeting was held on April 29, 2017. We discussed the project and how it went and the long-term impact that the project could have on our church. We also

discussed the upcoming site review. We adjourned our meeting with a great sense of accomplishment.

The Project Implementation Phase

The Learning Lab/Sermon Series Phase

The Learning Lab/Sermon Phase (Appendix B) began on Wednesday, March 8 and concluded on Sunday, April 2, 2017. The purpose of this phase was to engage the outreach team's perception and understanding of the term mission as well as to introduce them to the term missional. From there the hope was for them to make a determination as whether doing mission or being missional was conducive to the context in which we were serving. Consequently, the idea was to frame this in such a way to align what they have learned to the mission and vision of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The following lessons were taught during this phase:

Session One: All Places are Mission Fields

Text: Matthew 22: 36-40, 28: 18-29

John 20: 19-23

Ephesians 1: 2-23

Session Two: Reach Your Community

Text: Psalm 24: 1-2

Isaiah 58: 1-10

Matthew 12: 9-14

1 Corinthians 10: 23-30

Session Three: Reach Out to Different Cultures and Ages

Text: Isaiah 58: 1-11

Matthew 25: 31-46

Acts 17: 16-34

1 Corinthians 9: 19-23

Session Four: Touch Broken Lives

Text: Matthew 9: 9-13

Luke 7: 18-23

John 11: 1-37

The Learning Lab Series was adopted from a six-part series entitled, “Missional Evangelism: How do we share the gospel where we live?” The series was reduced to four parts to address what I felt was the most important tenets the congregation of Greater Bethel needed to address regarding the project. Prior to the beginning of each session, every attendee was given a pre-assessment to assess their prior knowledge on the material to be covered. At the end of each session, all attendees were given a post assessment to evaluate knowledge gained (Appendix C). I found and purchased this small group study at the following website: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/m/missional-evangelism-6-session-study.html>.

The sermon series that preceded each lesson were based on the lessons that were taught the previous Wednesday night. Learning lab attendees were able to reinforce what was learned and gleaned during the learning labs through the spoken word on the following Sunday worship experience.

The Soup Kitchen Phase

The Soup Kitchen Phase of Operation Outreach began on April 1, 2017 and was held every week with the activity culminating on April 22. During this activity our

outreach team was able to distribute a total of four hundred and twenty-eight bowls of soup. On average, approximately one hundred and six persons were served on a weekly basis. Those persons included members of the community whom were not members of our church as well as several elderly parishioners whom are members of Greater Bethel. Additionally, there were three occasions our outreach team went out and distributed soup to members of the community. Going out and touching the lives of virtual strangers proved to be a blessing to us as well as those whom benefited from our giving. We did have members of our community on a few occasions come in to our fellowship hall and have soup with us.

Our soup kitchen was advertised on the church marquee as well as electronically by way of a flyer (Appendix D) that was posted on our church's Facebook page. The LAC and I found that the advertising of the soup kitchen proved to be beneficial via Facebook. This mode of promotion provided another platform to effectively and efficiently disseminate information about this event through social media. With four hundred and sixty-five followers, our church was able to share information about our soup kitchen to a population of persons who would not have otherwise been reached through conventional means. We found that our Facebook posts highlighting the soup kitchen were also shared at times on the personal pages of our followers reaching more people. The only drawback to our advertising was that some of our followers live out of the immediate area of Greater Bethel. Consequently, the information shared wasn't useful to them in their current location. The flyer used to promote our soup kitchen can be found at the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/Greater-Bethel-AME-Kingstree-SC-1440619849534277/> .

The Community Resources Fair Phase

During this phase, a culminating activity, a Community Resources Fair, was to be planned. The purpose of the event was to have a variety of municipal agencies available at our church on a specified date to share with the community the mission and purposes of their agencies in times of peril. The purposes here were to educate and empower members of our community in the many resources that are available to them prior to an experience of peril, while providing another opportunity for the members of our congregation to engage in an inclusive, relevant and intentional opportunity to participate in an act of missional evangelism. The selection of the agencies to participate in the event was based upon the results of a community needs survey (Appendix E) that was distributed to area churches prior to the initiation of the project. A review of the results concluded that citizens felt that the American Red Cross, FEMA, the Salvation Army, Williamsburg County Sheriff's Department, Kingstree Area Fire Department and the local police department would be agencies that they would like to engage in this type of setting. All the agencies played vital roles during the October flood of 2015 ensuring that our residents were kept safe during the event as well as providing for them the necessities needed in its aftermath.

Challenges

Several challenges became apparent as the project progressed. One of the questions that was raised centered on the financing of the Soup Kitchen Phase of the project. Some members of the LAC felt that because the project was being facilitated as an outreach ministry in the name of Greater Bethel, that the church bore some responsibility, if not all, in financing this portion of the project. There were questions

about cost to include supplies and the ingredients needed to make the soup and cornbread. Consequently, the LAC felt that I was enabling the congregation by financing the project myself and not coming to the congregation for aid. Some of them felt that this enabling didn't provide the proper opportunity for the congregation to own this portion of the project. I shared with them that the project was not about what is mine and yours, but about two parties coming together to initiate an outreach opportunity that would be beneficial to both parties in terms of shared mission and vision. By funding the soup kitchen portion of the project, my wife and I wanted to show "the congregation that we were equally invested in the congregation's life and mission"² and to convey that "we are in a mutual relationship, seeking God's will together, asking what God wants to do through our church for the community."³ I shared with them that I viewed this entire process as a partnership and that I believed God would provide for us as the soup kitchen progressed. I was reminded of a very familiar passage of scripture that came to mind and I shared it with the LAC. The scripture is found in Philippians 4:19. Paul writes, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (New International Version).

During our fourth meeting, which was held on March 18, members of the LAC made me aware of a concern that was shared with them regarding the distribution of the soup. There were some members of the church who felt that those persons who were elderly, sick and shut-in members of Greater Bethel should have been the first to benefit from the soup distribution. Although I had no problem with elderly members or sick and

² Marcia Barnes Bailey, *Choosing partnership, sharing ministry: A vision for new spiritual community* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2007), 25.

³ Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson *That their work will be joy: Understanding and coping with the challenges of pastoral ministry* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 82.

shut-in members receiving the soup, I reminded the LAC that this population of our congregation was not included as one identified in the scope and purpose of the project. As a rebuttal to their concern, I simply quoted to them this passage of scripture in my explanation to them: “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5: 8, NIV). I utilized this passage to suggest that our caring of the elderly members, as well as the sick and shut-in, should be something that we as a congregation should engage in always and not so much within the confines of the scope of this project whose explicit purpose is to reach those beyond our walls. As the project progressed, I did decide to allow the elderly, sick and shut-in members be served as well. What I found was that it wasn’t to whom the soup was being distributed, but the conversations that resulted from the visitations and how our members whom are homebound because of sickness were in a way reconnected to our church through this form of fellowship with persons whom may not have been normally the ones to stop by and visit.

I also fielded a question about the learning lab attendance. Members of the LAC thought that attendance could be better, and I agreed. When I initially considered implementing this phase of the project, I knew that the current culture didn’t support a weekly bible study. When this phase started, our attendance average about seven persons and three of them were my wife, daughter and myself. So, I struggled with this and to some degree was pleased that members of the LAC shared the same concern without me having to share it with them. We decided to continue to promote the learning lab with weekly announcements as well as placing this information on the weekly bulletin. In addition, I encouraged the LAC to call members and remind them of the purpose of the

bible study and why it was so important. I also encouraged them to share notes that they had jotted down with persons they thought would be interested.

Another issue that I experienced in this project was its approval. The IRB process was not efficient. I didn't receive an email regarding project approval until March 1, which jeopardized projected implementation and its completion. In addition, I initiated all communication regarding approval and the timeframe. Because of this, I missed out on a valuable opportunity to partner with Williamsburg County to stage the Community Resources Fair. The County began an initiative to educate the citizens of Williamsburg County regarding services that are available to them in the event of a natural disaster. Greater Bethel could have been one of the several sites selected by the county. However, by the time I received approval for the project, sites had already been selected and the process had already begun. Many of the agencies were already obligated and couldn't or wouldn't participate in what I had proposed to do at Greater Bethel. I would like to point out that the process leading to the submission of the project proposal went smoothly. I followed all instructions provided to me by my mentor, Rev. Dr. Kevin Miller and I am thankful to him for his guidance when I hadn't received the answers needed to begin the project.

The final challenge that became prevalent was the actual initiation of the project. Members of the LAC from the onset felt what I wanted to do regarding the project was too daunting a task given the various phases I outlined in our initial meetings. However, I was able to convince them that this could be done given their talents and at the time their current motivation level. However, I found myself having the challenging task of rejuvenating that motivation when the project itself was not approved until March 1

instead of the projected mid-January to late January date I anticipated. Too much time had elapsed and except for me, many of the members had to be reminded about the project, its scope and purpose. Training had to be done as well as advertisement of the Soup Kitchen and the Bible Study (Learning Labs). Getting the LAC back on board with the revised timeline was a difficult task. Again, I had to address the issue of the project being too challenging and this time around with the fact that we had a shorter timeframe to work with. This was a struggle for me because careful consideration was given to the schedules of the members of the LAC as well as the church. Consideration was too, given to the calendar of the presiding elder, the bishop and connectional church as I would have to attend those meetings as well. So, there was a genuine concern as to whether the project could have been completed given the new timeline.

As I consider the many challenges and the nature of this portion of the project, I can't help but think about our focus. This portion of the project was only a part of the overall purpose of what was hoped to be accomplished and that was to reignite a desire to serve God's people. I saw a new energy during this phase, but I am not sure if it translated to a sustaining desire to serve the people of God. For the most part what I have learned as well as the members of the LAC and some members of Greater Bethel, is that oftentimes what we have focused on has been events that the church plans and hosts annually, with the idea of helping a select group of people. Consequently, the events become repetitive with no genuine enthusiasm or motivation exhibited by the congregation because the events have become customary. For example, we have a back to school rally at the beginning of the school year targeting our young people and the young people of the community. Because the event is held the same time every year, the

excitement level has dwindled. This event has become stale. Thus, from a long-term viewpoint, the questions become have we, as a congregation, had a profound impact on these young persons or do we simply view what we do at this time of the year as routine? Sure, we have accomplished the giving piece and perhaps in this sense we have accomplished what we set out to do within the confines of the project, but has the giving had a profound impact on those whom have received? The same can be said about the soup kitchen. The question becomes have we really impacted that group from a spiritual perspective? Have we become just that place where we give school supplies and distribute soup during those times of the year that have been designated on our church calendar? What has been the genuine impact of our efforts? Have we as a congregation, been able to approach our outreach efforts with a sustained level of passion and enthusiasm? There are still a lot of unanswered questions.

CHAPTER 4

OUR REVELATIONS

As a Congregation

Operation Faithful to the Past revealed much about Greater Bethel as a congregation as well as myself as a leader. The LAC, along with me, was able to confirm that there is a genuine desire to serve the people of God, a genuine thirst for the word of God in terms of it being taught and preached and that there is a genuine desire for all of us to serve God to the best of our ability. We, as a congregation, share the same sentiments in terms of growing our church numerically but for different reasons. Many feels that there is strength in numbers and that the more of us that are in place the more that we can accomplish. While that may be true, oftentimes more necessitates a breeding ground for confusion and discord, ultimately resulting in very little being done for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Some feel that more translates into increased financial security. Again, I must argue that this may not be the case and as a result, those members of the congregation should not view this as a solution to our growth problems about our facilitating and maintaining ministry in our context. I discovered that this line of thinking evolved after the new edifice was erected. In the beginning, it was believed that those in leadership were making sure that the mortgage was being paid in a timely manner. However, it was discovered that this was not the case and consequently pleas were being made during worship service (during the ministry of giving) for extra funds to address what the congregation had perceived to be the day to day operations of the

church. Things came to head when one Sunday the musician was asked to forgo his salary for that Sunday. Of course, he refused, and a verbal altercation ensued between him and the pastor at that time. The exchange became physical and the pastor was assaulted. No charges were pressed but the pastor was reassigned two weeks later. Because of this, two families that were faithful tithers took their membership elsewhere resulting in Greater Bethel losing approximately forty-five thousand dollars in tithes and offering. From a financial perspective, this had adversely affected the church and for the most part, the members have targeted this event as the primary precursor to its struggles. However, I beg to differ. From my vantage point, I would suggest that the struggles of Greater Bethel have not only stemmed from the incident described above, but the incident carried a social element that conveyed a negative persona of the church to the community as well. It suggested that a community of faith, had to resort to physical means to otherwise settle an issue that wasn't all that serious. Ultimately, the incident was framed as a misunderstanding even though the pastor was reassigned despite having grown up in the community of Kingstree. With this understanding, I would have to say that Greater Bethel not only has a growth problem, but a social problem as well. The road to reversing this social problem is one that cannot and will not be done overnight. Consequently, it will take time to convey a more positive persona and I am not sure if this can be done through community outreach.

In reflecting upon the initiation of the project and the expectations that everyone had, I think one of the outcomes many felt would result was that engaging the community in outreach would translate into numerical growth. This false notion was predicated upon the idea that if we were initiating positive ministry, that if we simply opened the doors,

they would come. This “field of dreams” mentality is one that needs to be dispelled. I think that we as a group learned quickly that this didn’t turn out to be a field of dreams experience and that a sincere level of commitment and hard work needed to be factored into the equation for numerical growth to happen. Growth doesn’t come overnight. Most importantly, I think we learned that evangelism is work and in order for it to be relevant and meaningful we would have to be willing to engage members of our community beyond the walls of our church much the same way Jesus mandated the disciples to do so when Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19a NRSV). With this being said, we as people of God must understand that our desires for numerical growth in our congregations should not be predicated upon our selfish personal desires to grow where we are but to grow the kingdom of God as whole. Consequently, our outreach efforts should not be viewed as opportunities to grow our perspective houses of worship but should be viewed as opportunities to grow the kingdom of God with the understanding that the church can be viewed as one of few organizations that exist solely for non-members. Thus, it is the church’s responsibility to engage these non-members through relevant and effective outreach efforts.

Our outreach efforts should be primarily focused on addressing the everyday needs of those we wish to evangelize. The simplicity of this idea can be qualified with scripture. In the sixth chapter of the gospel according to John in the fifth verse, John records a question posed to Phillip by Jesus. Jesus asks, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” We can infer a couple of realities here from this basic question. First, Jesus and the disciples did not have a wealth of financial resources to ensure that this multitude of people would be properly fed at this time. Secondly, the question that

was posed to Phillip in this instance was designed to test his faith in this matter.

Naturally, Phillip doesn't see a solution to the question posed to him by Jesus. This speaks to how easy it is for us as members of the household of faith to become so easily discouraged when we are faced with a lack of resources to address the needs of a community of people whom may be in need. In the Soup Kitchen phase of Operation Faithful to the Past, we faced similar challenges in terms of how this phase was going to be financed and how we would be able to sustain it for the period proposed. Even in ensuring the LAC that money used would not come from any funds of the church, there was still a concern about how we would appropriately move forward and properly serve the community with meager resources. There were some members of the congregation who suggested that we abandon this idea and perhaps do something different to address this need. This indirect form of negative voice can be defined as subtle cynicism.

According to an article written by CM Joyner, subtle cynicism is the "overly critical nature of our culture."¹ Joyner goes on to say that this form of criticism is more damaging to the culture of the church because we as members don't realize we are doing it.²

Agreeing that the soup kitchen is a good idea, but suggesting abandoning the idea because of a lack of resources speaks to the very core of what subtle cynicism is. This type of negative voice also brings the church to a place of being content in its present state in terms of its service. Consequently, the spiritual and numerical growth of the church is inhibited. This notion speaks specifically to an issue that R.A. Vernon addresses

¹ CM Joyner, "The most damaging attitude in our churches: Why subtle cynicism doesn't look like Jesus," <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/church/most-damaging-attitude-our-churches> (assessed January 16, 2018).

² Ibid.

in his book *Size does matter: Moving your ministry from micro to mega*. He states. “many churches are content ignoring the needs of the masses because of what they perceive to be a lack of resources.”³ Though this may be the case in many churches, we must lean on the faith of God to provide for our ministries. Sometimes everything we need is among us.

As we revisit the question Jesus poses to Phillip, we discover that everything that they needed was in the crowd. Jesus uses two fishes and five loaves of bread to feed the multitude. Consequently, in the case of our soup kitchen all we needed was among us. As we began to share our soup kitchen flyer with the congregation, our sister churches, our local government and throughout the community, the church began to receive calls from members of our congregation as well as civic organizations wanting to donate items to prepare the soup as well as cornbread. In addition, there were members of the community that offered their help in preparing and delivering the soup as well. As we all reflected on the soup kitchen phase of the project, we realized how much God moved and provided for us during our doubt. This revelation helped us to understand and embrace even more what Jesus taught in Matthew 17: 20 when he said, “...For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

The congregation really embraced this project and appreciated the opportunity to serve in a capacity that was predicated upon sharing. For the most part many of the congregants appreciated the idea that the church was active in an activity that had a positive impact on both the congregation and community. We learned much of this from

³ R. A. Vernon, *Size does matter Moving your ministry from micro to mega* (Cleveland: Victory Media and Publishing Company, 2011).

our Soup Kitchen ministry. Being able to give something to someone in need rekindled their desire to do more. However, perhaps more importantly, the opportunity gave the congregation a newfound appreciation as it related to becoming a missional congregation versus just being a congregation participating in missions. Understanding that mission was “something the church does as a part of its life and programs”⁴ prior to this project, Greater Bethel was now challenged to become a more missional congregation by being a community of faith that is “powerfully shaped by the incarnation and the Holy Trinity and exists to be Christ’s mission, not simply to support mission.”⁵

With the aforementioned being gleaned, we learned that our purpose goes beyond giving with the expectation of receiving membership in return. It is more about building relationships with persons and being a part of the spiritual transformation that may ensue when we engaged them sincerely. Consequently, persons who are unfamiliar with our church, first need to feel comfortable with us, understanding that we are not seeking anything in return. Rufus Bradley Sr., writes in *From Death to Life: Discovering Life through Failure & Pain*, that “...eighty-five percent of church growth comes out of hospitality or how we make people feel.”⁶ This doesn’t mean that what we are seeking in terms of hospitality is to be exclusive by any means. It is however, a drive, a purpose that is rooted in the precept of welcoming all persons regardless of socio economic status to a faith community that is not judgmental but simply seeking to fulfil the purpose of the

⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, why it matters, how to become one* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2009), 29.

⁵ John H. Armstrong, *Your church is too small: Why unity in Christ’s mission is vital to the future of the church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 154.

⁶ Rufus Bradley, Sr., *From Death to Life: Discovering Life Through Failure and Pain* (Bloomington: WestBow, 2013), 153.

church and that purpose “...is to be a spiritual community that forms people of faith.”⁷

This too, speaks to the role of the missional leader and his or her congregation in “cultivating an environment within which God’s people can discern God’s directions and activities in them and for their communities in which they find themselves.”⁸

In addition, one valuable lesson that I think is very important to note is that our outreach ministry should not be solely event focused. What this means is that we as a congregation cannot get so caught up in the details that surround the planning and eventual sponsoring of an activity without considering its holistic purpose. This purpose should be rooted in not only addressing a need but also establishing or reestablishing relationships. The relationships I speak of in this context are ones that are formed with those persons whom served as the target for the activity and involved those persons facilitating the activity. I found this to be true in the two activities that we facilitated regarding the soup kitchen which I spoke to previously and the learning labs which I will speak to in more depth later. In both instances, however, there was observed in each case a move of God that facilitated fellowship through the sharing of experiences that blessed everyone involved. According to Culpepper, this experiential sharing “helps people to understand the gospel and to see the relevance of it to their own lives and problems.”⁹

As I reflect on the project revelations, I have discovered that there is a sincere desire to learn. I discovered this through our four-week learning lab. There was a concern on the outset, because attendance was awfully low. However, as members began to share

⁷ Diana Butler-Bass, *Christianity for the rest of us*. (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2006), 77.

⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional leader: Equipping your church to reach a changing world* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006), 17.

⁹ Raymond E. Culpepper, *The great commission connection* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 2011), 117.

what was being discussed and how that was impacting them from a spiritual perspective, an awareness was raised, and the attendance of this group doubled in the four-week period. We dealt with mission from the perspective of being missional and empowering those around us to be advocates considering their situation. Mission then goes beyond the giving aspect but embraces an approach where we as ambassadors of Christ seek to transform the lives of those we encounter. This is where we become missional and intentional with our purpose and our message. Being missional is a lifestyle, a way of life.

In one learning lab, I distinctly remember recalling to the group the discourse that occurred between Peter and the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. It was here that the lame man expected to receive alms. He was at a place in his life where he felt he could do no better. However, through Peter's discourse Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." It was here that this lame man was transformed not only physically but spiritually as well. This really opened the eyes of the persons whom attended the learning labs regarding being missional and not simply participating in missions. I have had many of them say that if the spirit leads them, they share their stories with the hope of empowering those in need of spiritual encouragement. I can recall when one of the members shared their personal experience with another member of the church while delivering soup. She shared with the learning lab group that when she arrived, she was invited in and both sat down. A conversation ensued about how God had blessed the member in dealing with a physical situation that the member had been going through. The member that went to deliver the soup didn't know that this member was dealing with anything physically nor spiritually

but was provided the opportunity to witness to this person about how God had brought them through some physical issues as well. The spirit moved, and the member described the experience as having church beyond the walls of Sunday morning. This opportunity to fellowship and share some food rejuvenated the spirit of someone whom had been going through. For me, this is the center point of outreach. Though I am pleased that through our soup kitchen distribution a new line of communication was developed or perhaps renewed with this population of our church and the active members, I am disturbed that it took this event for this to occur. We should be actively involved with all our members and be aware of their situations and conditions and engaged with them both physically and spiritually. This is certainly an issue that should be and will be addressed about our outreach efforts.

One of the most striking and perhaps most prevalent aspects that has been gleaned with the implementation, progress and completion of Operation Faithful to the Past was the fact that Greater Bethel has no clear contextual mission nor vision statement that defines the church's purpose within the confines of the community in which Greater Bethel serves. We have discovered that only using the mission and vision statements of the Connectional AME Church is perhaps too broad for our contextual purpose and focus then should be geared toward specific needs within our community context. Recognizing this very vital aspect will prove to be a major step in the right direction in defining who we are as a church as well defining our purpose in our community when it comes to the ministry of outreach.

As Pastor

This journey in pursuing my Doctor of Ministry degree in Congregational Growth and Development and initiating and completing my professional project has provided me the opportunity to gather some vital insights about my journey as a pastor and my personal mission statement. Throughout my experience in pastoring two separate congregations, I have struggled trying to find the balance between focusing on the administrative functions of the church as well as facilitating and maintaining relevant ministry within the context of the church. With my inability to find the balance between the two, I have found myself in situations where I have done everything administratively and from a ministerial perspective. This project has taught me that I must arrive at a place of trusting the church staff with the responsibilities of carrying out the essential functions of the church. In addition, I found during this project that I could not convey a clear purpose as to what we were doing and why we were doing it. One primary example of this was the initiation of the Soup Kitchen. There was discussion after that phase was initiated as to who the target audience would be and why we were targeting this audience. However, members of the LAC and the church felt that members of the church would benefit as well. Though I had reservations of allowing church members to be a part of this group, I eventually allowed them to participate. As I reflected on this phase of the project, I realized that perhaps I wasn't as clear as I thought I was in communicating to the LAC and the congregation the intent and purpose of that phase. In addition, this too can perhaps be attributed to my not properly communicating the scope and purpose of the project to the LAC and congregation.

The project process brought me to a place of understanding that personally, I have struggled with conveying and incorporating to others my personal mission statement. As the pastoral and administrative leader of Greater Bethel, it is essential that the congregation understands how I perceive and embrace ministry through my personal experience and walk with God and how this mission intertwines with the mission and vision of the church. I think that this ineptness on my part has hindered my effectiveness as a pastoral leader because it is something that I have not shared with the congregation or the church's leadership consistently. The progression of my personal mission statement continues to evolve. Consequently, I think that to be an effective pastoral leader, this statement must be flexible enough to satisfy me as its precipitator and meet the needs of the persons that I pastor. Based on the viable desire to help people be better, my pastoral mission statement is based on a passage of scripture found in the book of James the twenty-ninth chapter and eleventh verse. It states, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29: 11, NRSV). Gleaned from this passage of scripture, I have developed this personal mission statement: To **ELEVATE** all people within the congregation and community in which I serve. Out of the mission statement, the vision for my ministry is to **Engage-Liberate-Empower-Value-Teach-Advocate-Encourage (ELEVATE)** the church and unchurched by helping them to identify and realize their full potential in Christ Jesus.

To elevate the people of the community, one must be willing to **engage** or contact all persons within the community the church is located. One of the most profound things that I have learned and gleaned not only from this course, but the previous one as well, is

that we live in a society where our mission field is no longer in a land unfamiliar to us. The mission field, for that matter, isn't even in a neighboring state or town, but is prevalent in the communities in which our churches are situated. Recognizing this obvious reality, we too, must understand that the communities our churches are in are no longer ones that are characterized with one prominent ethnicity, but is representative of several ethnicities and cultures striving to live together in harmony. Understanding this, our churches must be willing to engage all persons living within its demographical area, considering the differences that may be prevalent among them in terms of values, belief systems and ideals. In doing so, the church must be flexible and intentional in how it ministers and worships to and within a community that is comprised of a melting pot of different cultures understanding that the major aim is to propagate the gospel of Jesus.

To elevate the people of the community, one must first feel and be **liberated**. Being liberated involves more than being freed from some physical entity that is keeping one in bondage. It is my position that liberation necessitates a great deal more. Liberation instigates a spiritual awakening that brings the people of God into communion with whom they are and most importantly, aligns them with the purposes that God has set aside for them. We live in a culture where tradition has shaped our way of thinking, thus bringing us to a place of not being free to consider how God wishes to utilize us in the larger landscape of life. We shape ourselves based upon the perceptions and suggestions of others without consulting God whom created us with a specific purpose in mind. Consequently, many of God's children will never realize their full potential regarding how God desires to use them to his glory because a lot of what we become is a result of relationships that we are engaged in. Liberating the captives to spiritual freedom brings

those captives to a place of realizing that there is a more specific purpose that they must serve in life. I qualify this by pointing to the jailhouse incident Luke records in the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul and Silas were praying and singing unto the Lord when what was described as a great quake occurred losing all the shackles of the captives. When the jailer whom is responsible to ensure that everyone remained in their cells realized that the shackles had fallen off, he instantly decided to commit suicide. Recognizing what was about to occur, Paul cries out to the jailer to do no harm to himself because all of them were still there. A physical release framed in this manner would necessitate a mass stampede out of the jail, but they all remained. This suggests something more than a release from physical bondage but an awakening that brought the captives to realizing a new freedom. This is liberation at its best.

To elevate the people of the community, one must be **empowered**. Liberation and empowerment goes hand and hand. One cannot be empowered unless he or she is liberated to do so. In the example involving Paul and Silas, the jailers, as well as those confined to the prison were empowered. This was the result of Paul and Silas' undying commitment to serving and praising God despite their current situation. It was through these examples of serving and praising that God through physical confinement, recognized the praises of Paul and Silas, and initiated a move of the Holy Spirit. This move of the Spirit, in the form of an earthquake, resulted in a release from physical captivity, but demonstrated an authority rooted in spiritual freedom that lends to the opportunity to speak to our present condition. Paul and Silas would not have been able to do this unless they were empowered. Empowerment comes when we are genuine to our

witness. Consequently, conveying this authenticity will bring others to a zeal of experiencing what we have experienced through Christ Jesus. By empowering these persons with the words of Jesus and living the example that Jesus lived even in the most difficult of times, it is the hope of Greater Bethel that not only lives will be saved, but that through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, a transformation will launch a move of God that will add to His kingdom spiritually and exponentially.

To elevate the people of the community, one must possess a sense of value (self-worth). The demographical area which I currently serve is one of the largest impoverished areas in the state of South Carolina. Because of this fact, it can be concluded that the people of Williamsburg County embrace a sense of low self-worth or value. Understanding that there is too much emphasis in our society regarding value and how value is based upon what other people may perceive about us, our value should not be predicated upon what people think about us. Our aim at Greater Bethel is to approach value from the perspective that the one and only true authority that can attest to our value is that of our creator. Psalm 139 reminds us that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (NRSV). Consequently, the focus should not be on the assessment of others in terms of our value, but the focus should be based upon how God sees us. Because we are the creation of God, and because God gave up life in the person of his son, Jesus, we must be able to discern and embrace the divine value in the love God has exhibited for His creation. Thus, Greater Bethel’s hope is to instill a sense of self-worth into all the community that lacks it with the underlying premise that in the eyes of God, because we are his creation, because God sacrificed on our behalf, we possess a worth in His eyes that entirely supersedes human consideration.

To elevate the people of the community, one must be able to **advocate** for themselves as well as others. From a biblical perspective, to advocate means having someone to act as an intercessor or plead the case of another individual or group whom may not be able to do so for themselves. Ideally, when we think of an advocate for our salvation, we naturally think of Jesus coming to our aid when we commit sin and advocating for us on our behalf. Jesus stands by us, pleading our cases to God as we confess those sins. Thus, Jesus acts as an advocate for us before God. To make this precept relevant and practical, we can utilize the story of Onesimus and Philemon found in a letter written by Paul to Philemon. Paul in this case is operating as an advocate for Onesimus, a former slave of Philemon. Onesimus has committed some crime against his former slave owner and flees to Rome. While there, Onesimus meets Paul and is converted through Paul's preaching of Christ. Paul encourages Onesimus to return back to Philemon, sending with him a letter encouraging Philemon to accept Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother because of Onesimus' conversion. Paul acts as the advocate for Onesimus pleading the case of Onesimus to Philemon. In this instance, we clearly observe the message of Jesus being disseminated across socio economic lines (Paul – the Apostle, Onesimus – the former slave and Philemon – the slave owner) further qualifying that the preaching of the gospel leads to salvation for all who listen and receive with open hearts and the willingness to accept Jesus. It is this gospel that connects us all together. We at Greater Bethel will endeavor to advocate as Jesus and Paul did, with the purpose of advocating for those who do not know the gospel of Jesus with the hope that through our advocating, salvation will be imparted on their lives.

To elevate the people of the community, we must **teach** them how to embrace the idea that knowledge is the foundation to all success. Jesus, in the Great Commission, explicitly states in verse 20 of the 28th Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew "...and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (NRSV). Jesus recognizing that teaching is a vital piece to obtaining and maintaining salvation, sought to encourage the teaching of the scriptures as a means of revealing and initiating a freedom that would prove to be necessary to the livelihood of the people of God whom undoubtedly would face many trials, temptations and tribulations on their perspective journeys. Jesus' assignment to the disciples to teach those who have been converted entails more than instructing them in the basics of the Gospel. This teaching piece requires the disciples to teach new converts everything that they were taught by Jesus. Consequently, this teaching would progress into the nurturing of the new convert who because of the nurturing would become a genuine Disciple of Christ. Teaching then is important in all facets of life.

Likewise, my mission too, is greatly dependent upon the aspect of teaching as a means of nurturing those persons in our communities we endeavor to reach. This nurturing through teaching will ultimately lead to sustaining the salvation that has been imparted upon those whom have been discipled. Consequently, we would like to see this process duplicated among those whom have been recipients of the teaching that they would be able to engage others whom have not been introduced to the gospel of Jesus. The expected result would be exponential growth spiritually and physically.

To elevate the people of the community, one must be able to **encourage** them when things do not pan out the way it was anticipated. It is important to learn that amid

adversity, one must remain confident that things will work out regardless of how bad the situation may be. This encouragement must be rooted in the precept that God is in control of all things. Consequently, the aim of the encouragement piece of this mission statement is to help those we seek to embrace and to develop a genuine trust in God. This trust will be the foundation that all of them will look to when they find themselves struggling and dealing with issues that may bring them to a place of losing their faith and questioning their trust in God. Thus, it is Greater Bethel's intent to encourage all persons from a biblical perspective with the hope that in these kinds of situations, these persons will look to God first for comfort and encouragement.

Unity will be paramount in ensuring that **ELEVATE** will be effective within the context in which I pastor. The primary factor in properly implementing this ministry/mission concept, is to ensure that the mindset of the church leadership is focused on mission and growing the kingdom of God. My experience with the congregations that I have pastored has been to institute missions /ministries programs from the aspect of gaining new members to the church and not being focused on winning souls for Christ. Consequently, there are many who are members of the church, but have not experienced salvation, therefore they cannot proclaim that they understand what it is to have a relationship with Jesus from a personal perspective. Though I believe that many possess a desire to pastor churches that grow in number, I also affirm that God's ultimate purpose is for us to win as many souls as we possibly can while here on earth. Thus, our purpose as members of the household of faith must be framed in what Jesus said to His disciples in the gospel according to Matthew 28:19-20, "go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (NSRV).

In bringing this vision to fruition, it is paramount that I, as the visionary leader, communicate properly the enthusiasm that is necessary to encourage those in my ministerial contextual space that what has been revealed to me by God is genuine. I must be forthcoming with my intentions and convey that there are no ulterior motives regarding any personal aspirations other than glorifying God. Consequently, there must be a buy-in on behalf of the leadership and congregation of the church with the idea that this is the church that we want to become. They too, must possess the same mindset. Furthermore, it must be explicitly expressed that the idea that all that we are doing in the name of Jesus may not be received positively by all. There will be situations where our motives will be questioned, our intentions examined, and our service scrutinized. In deflecting the negatives that will be prevalent, we must hold on to what Jesus said to the disciples about the purpose Jesus served here on earth. Our purpose must be rooted in the same and that is we are here to serve and not to be served. With the buy in of the church leadership and the congregation and their taking ownership of the mission, it is the hope that a culture will be created that is conducive for the mission to be cultivated and most importantly enduring even after the pastor has moved on.

With all this being said, it is the hope that with prayer, purpose and persistence, our church will become a spiritual beacon within the community. This beacon is a product of its spiritual leader, whom has properly conveyed, prepared, and dispatched the members of the congregation to fulfill the tenets of **ELEVATE** within the community. This obedience and sincere desire to win souls for Christ will convey to those being

discipled, that our motives are genuine and of God. Consequently, our mission to Engage our communities with the precept that we must Liberate community members to reach a place of being Empowered to appreciate the Value that God has placed upon life, understanding that once we realize these things, we must Advocate for others while Teaching them to Encourage one another on our perspective journeys of life. This will not become a mission etched in words tucked away in some obscure place in our church but the mission, if properly embraced and implemented, will ultimately become who we are in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER 5

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Initially, the desired result of Operation Faithful to the Past was to spur a new motivation among the members of Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to serve the community in times of not only peril but in times of peace as well. The catalyst in laying the groundwork for the former would be for Greater Bethel to host a community resources service fair. This culminating activity would bring together many of the county's community and municipal agencies together in a forum that would provide the community valuable information about the services each would offer in times of peril as well as peace. The accomplishing of the former would eventually lay the groundwork to initiate a community resources center at Greater Bethel AME Church. Though this is still the intent, what we learned from the project has at least put this endeavor on hold for a while. The fact that Greater Bethel doesn't have a bona fide mission statement or vision statement to undergird the ministry that it desires to pursue endangers any future ministry that Greater Bethel wishes to initiate regarding serving the community in which it sits. Greater Bethel must be mission minded and most importantly mission intentional if Greater Bethel is going to influence the community in the way that it did in the middle 1950's to mid-1960's.

With our community being substantially different now when compared to the 50's and 60's when Greater Bethel focused on issues that adversely affected the African American community, the church now has a new-found responsibility to not look at our

community only from the local perspective but from the global perspective as well. The term coined and utilized by Stetzel and Putman is glocal.¹ Glocal communities are comprised of characteristics that are both local and global and when intertwined with one another form cultures that comprise our localities that encompass persons whom have varying religious preferences, educational levels, learning styles and races. According to Greater Bethel's First View Study (2015) done prior to the launch of Operation Faithful to the Past, it was discovered that 90.1% of the population prefer to identify with a specific denomination or affiliation with many of these persons preferring a traditional worship style. A large portion of this population also prefer church programs geared toward bible study, prayer services as well as spiritual retreats. Consequently, a major concern for the population is spiritual/personal. Faith receptivity is high as well as diversity. Family structure was extremely non-traditional suggesting that households that have both parents in the home are not prevalent. In reflecting upon the make-up of the congregation that I pastor, there are several single parent homes as well as homes where grandparents are raising their grandchildren. In addition, the fastest growing population according to the report was the Native American population.

Education appears to be an issue as well. In a survey compiled by the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce and titled, *Community Profile: Williamsburg County*, 40.2% of the county's population were high school graduates, while 17.75% of the population had some college courses. Additionally, 7.63% earned associate degrees and another 7.63% had earned a bachelor's degree, while 4.58% of the population had earned a graduate degree. Furthermore, 12.09% of the population

¹ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your church can become a missionary in your community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006)

completed high school without earning a high school diploma and another 10.30% of the population had less than a ninth-grade education.² Consequently, it is important to note that Kingstree is the home of Williamsburg Technical College. According to the institution's website, 200 degrees and certificates were conferred in May of this past year.³ Based on the educational statistics, a high school diploma, associate degree or certificate, may not be enough for this segment to become acclimated to the higher demands that may require a higher level of technical skill especially when it comes to employment.

Understanding all of this, Greater Bethel has the dubious task of addressing the issues of a community that is now blended with varying characteristics. Accordingly, when the church endeavors to initiate and maintain a mission program or ministry, careful consideration must be given to the relevancy of that mission based on the population of that community as well as the church's mission and vision. This has been the case at Greater Bethel. Our church attempted to apply our connectional mission and vision to our local ministry outreach efforts. However, we discovered that perhaps this was a bit too broad in our effort to facilitate outreach in our community. This resulted in a struggle in our outreach efforts as well as identifying who our church was in a community that was socially and economically different.

In addition, our leadership should be careful not to convey their personal or corporate preferences regarding the mission. Stetzel and Putman (2006) qualify this by

² S.C. Department of Employment & Workforce – Business Intelligence Department, "Community profile: Williamsburg County", <https://lmi.dew.sc.gov/lmi%20site/Documents/CommunityProfiles/04000089.pdf> (assessed February 14, 2018).

³ WTC Happenings, "WTC graduates 200", <http://www.wiltech.edu/college-news.html> (assessed February 14, 2018).

stating, “Our churches often struggle because we put our preference over our call – our preferences over our mission.”⁴ Sometimes, in our context, we prefer to initiate ministries we may only feel comfortable with or we may think are safe. It is easy to say we are going to cook some food and feed some people we perceive to be in need. However, it may be more difficult to initiate a ministry where we endeavor to initiate a dialogue to address race relations in our communities or a ministry to address domestic violence in our communities. Both examples force us out of our comfort zones to address issues that present genuine passions among the masses. Why is this so difficult? The former forces us to spend time talking and getting to know people regarding their belief systems. The former forces us to address issues that will stir strong feelings. The former forces us to address our conflicts head on. In situations like this, or in any situation where we are engaging the people of God, we must remember to place God at the center of everything that we do with the hope that the ministry will become a sustaining one that will develop into a transforming one. Ensuring that God is at the center will help us to properly deal with the element of conflict and most importantly keep us focused on our purpose with the hope to win souls for Jesus and additionally build the faith of newly won souls so that they too can reciprocate their experience to others. The church must realize that its purpose, “...is to be a spiritual community that forms people of faith.”⁵ It is vital then, that the church embraces the realization that it must be a spiritual community forming people of faith and not one that seeks to impose any denominational beliefs to advance its own agenda. In addition, those whom comprise our community of

⁴ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your church can become a missionary in your community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006), 36.

⁵ Diana Butler-Bass, *Christianity for the rest of us*. (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2006), 42.

faith must understand that we should not use the church to advance our personal and political agendas. We should, however, embrace the idea that our purpose is predicated on the “work of drawing lost people back into relationship with Him – a community called to be a sign and foretaste of what life looks like when God is acknowledged as King.”⁶

Another piece concerning the glocal community that is worth mentioning is the tenant that the local church must embrace the idea of being missionaries within the confines of its community. It has been noted that missionary work in and of itself is confined only to acts that are engaged abroad. Referred to as “foreign” mission, this form of missions is defined as “those efforts to spread Protestant Christianity from North America to cultures and contexts outside its borders.”⁷ Thus, my understanding of mission was built upon this premise. However, given the fact that our communities are comprised more now of persons of differing cultures and ethnicities, congregations must embrace the idea that the mission field is no longer confined to the global world but exists here in the communities in which we live and where our churches are located. As a result, our churches must realize that it must go out into the community to disciple potential members much the same way Jesus commanded the disciples to do when he solicited them to engage in the Great Commission.

To accomplish the this, our church must become mission-intentional. As the term suggests, ministries within this scope are intentional which simply means they are deliberate, planned and are with purpose. With this being said, mission intentional

⁶ Ian Parkinson, *Reignite: Seeing God rekindle life and purpose in your church.* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2015), 28.

⁷ D.G. Hart and Harry S. Stout, *New directions in American religious history.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 364.

ministries are products of congregations and pastoral leadership with a well-defined and relevant mission that is not only synonymous with the congregation but addresses issues that are prominent within the community in which the church serves. When a church has reached this place in its existence, it has not only solidified its position as a house of worship but as a house of empowerment, refuge and impartiality.

How then, does a church reach this position in its ministerial and community context? How does a church refute the varying opinions in terms of which direction the church should go? What should direct its focus given a plethora of ideas and opinions that may contradict one another among the church leadership as well as the congregation? All these questions can be answered understanding the focus of the church. I have discovered that in ministry with a well-defined mission that is relevant, purposeful and impactful for all parties involved is vital if all goals defined by that ministry are to be achieved. What it does, is give all parties involved a stake in the process and the desired result while providing them ownership of their ministry. Consequently, the ministry isn't geared to any one individual's ideas or agendas but is rooted in the precept that whatever is to be accomplished must glorify God and God's love. In addition, it is vital to note that in every case where churches have grown numerically and spiritually, that the primary focus has been on how the church, in its current context, can impact not only the congregation which inhabits it, but how the church can impact the local community as well. This can be an arduous task but can be realized with the proper leadership and employment of the mission and vision.

One of the realities that became apparent about mission-intentional ministries was uncovered in the book, *“Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a*

Missionary in Your Community” (Stetzel and Putman, 2006). The book explored relevant issues that challenged today’s church in its ineffectiveness when it came to church growth and missions. It was their position that the church, if it is to be relevant and develop sustaining ministries, must consider its context in which it endeavors to serve. The church can no longer be one-dimensional and be only concerned with issues that impact the church in and of itself locally. The church must reach out to the world within its local context understanding that our locales today are made of persons from different cultures and ethnicities living together in the community. With this being said, our communities are no longer homogenous ones comprised of persons representing a race or ethnicity, but that there is an array of individuals and groups living together in the community working to get along with one another.

Effective ministry, in my opinion, is birthed out of a sincere desire to serve God to the best of one’s ability. Oftentimes, one’s ability to serve is hampered by external factors that are beyond the control of the pastoral leader. However, it is my belief that effective ministry should not fall victim to these factors and are contingent upon the pastoral leader’s attitude and relationship to self. This relationship is framed by the attitudes the pastoral leader has fostered over a period of time. More specifically, the leader’s spiritual growth and relationship with God, ultimately impact the individual’s progress. This experience, if positive, brings the leader to a profound revelation or new awakening where he or she see things more from a spiritual perspective. Ultimately, this takes the leader to a place of wanting others in the space that they occupy to experience the same revelation. The result would be sharing this experience with the hope of winning souls for Christ.

In addition to becoming mission minded and intentional in what we endeavor to do, Greater Bethel, as a congregation must be willing to take a long look at themselves. Some of the evils that have plagued our church in terms of growth and accessibility stems from the attitude of our members and the issues that they have with each other. Many of these issues have festered and have become so deeply rooted within the individual family units at Greater Bethel, that anyone who wishes to join the fold are met with conversations with who to associate with and who not to. Clearly this has created a negative vibe in the very fabric of the church and has ultimately in many ways stunted the growth both spiritually and numerically of Greater Bethel. Persons not affiliated with a church but wishing to do so, aren't willing to be a part of a community of faith that is broken and disconnected with one another and with God as well. Despite the brokenness that is prevalent, a fortified connection regarding love and compassion and concern for not only one another but those whom are beyond the walls of our church must be initiated.

For this to happen, a concerted effort must be started by the leadership to foster meaningful and enduring relationships among the members. Consequently, the church cannot depend on a natural disaster to bring the membership together with the notion that meaningful relationships will be fostered and maintained this way. As I write this, I cannot help but reflect upon the learning labs that were conducted during the implementation of the project. The Learning Lab experience started out to be rather discouraging because of the number of persons involved but as the four-week experience progressed, we saw a steady increase in attendance. Attendance, however, was not the aspect that was the most prominent. What was profound to me was that a dialogue was

being forged among members of the congregation that was not prevalent in years past. People were sharing their opinions and beliefs, and no one was being judgmental about one's position.

I saw a group of people, through this small group model, getting to know one another on a spiritual level and in many cases a personal one as well. Communication became relevant on a different plateau and was not confined to opinions about an issue that the church was confronted with. The communication that I was witnessing among this small group was more about what we could do together versus what we were willing to do individually and how God would provide if they dared to believe. The communication focused on God and how God provided for them in their times of need. I remember one member of the group quoting Philippians 4:29, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." To me, this represented a sign of spiritual growth in that this group had reached a place of freely engaging in conversation about God and what God had done for them without being prompted. This also spoke to personal growth among the group in that they were willing to share their individual stories with one another. Consequently, if Greater Bethel is to recapture its prominence in the Kingstree community with the hope of helping those in need, a clear line of communication must be established for Greater Bethel to ensure that the relationships within her own core is conducive to do ministry. Members must be willing to get to know and embrace one another to include our talents and our varying opinions and ideas. We must be willing to sacrifice and convey the love of God and allow that love to fuel our purpose and our mission in our community.

I don't think that Greater Bethel is at this point. The current climate and culture must change. When I say this, I am not talking about the physical aspects but the spiritual aspects regarding their personal relationships with God and with each other. Until this can be accomplished, we must work on ourselves to work toward becoming the house of worship that God needs us to be in our community. Our work must begin by becoming a spiritually committed and engaged congregation. This can be accomplished by transforming our minds and our lives to live the lives conducive to that of Jesus. Consequently, we will become effective and relevant in our community as a community of faith. In addition, through this transformation Greater Bethel will be able to realize a mission and vision that is community-focused, and one all our congregants can embrace and support. From here we will be able to effectively host a Community Resources Fair and ultimately lay the groundwork in initiating a Community Resource Center housed on our property. How do we get there? The talents and gifts of the congregation whom have been gifted by God will need to be an integral part in this effort.

According to Tom Frank, a congregation is “a people of God called together and gifted for ministry in a place.”⁸ Greater Bethel's place is Kingstree and to be effective and intentional about outreach and to fit the definition of a congregation as stated by Frank, Greater Bethel must become a spiritually committed and an engaged congregation. Given the findings of Operation Faithful to the Past, I would have to conclude at this point in the life of Greater Bethel, it is safe to conclude that our church is not spiritually committed nor is Greater Bethel engaged. I think that before we endeavor to initiate any kind of ministry, there is so much that we as a congregation must do in terms of

⁸ Thomas Frank, “Soul of the Congregation,” (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2000), P. 12

strengthening our spiritual health. We must initiate healing among our community before we can think about healing a community that is broken and oftentimes looks to the church for peace.

So, what is a spiritually committed and engaged congregation? According to Winesman, “spiritual commitment reflects a personal depth of spirituality. It is individual in nature and is seen in both behaviors and attitudes.”⁹ Spiritual commitment then speaks to an individual. These individuals make up the congregation and the more a church has of them, the more spiritually committed the congregation is. Winesman further describes this individual as one whom doesn’t compromise their faith. They don’t compartmentalize their commitment. As a result of this aspect, “the spiritually committed cannot separate their faith from any other part of their lives, and their faith informs all that they think, say or do.”¹⁰ Consequently, an engaged person is one whom “use the language of family when they talk about their churches.”¹¹ These members’ concerns go beyond meeting financial obligations but have a desire to use their talents to advance the ministry of the congregational community. In addition, they have a desire to know that within the confines of the community that they are valued. As I reflect on the culture of Greater Bethel, I can say that we have a sense of family. However, the term family is restricted only to the individual families that comprise Greater Bethel. The term family is not holistically used to comprise the entire congregation. As I stressed in the Greater Bethel history portion of chapter 1, a lot of the wounded feelings remain due to the new edifice being built. What I have gleaned has been that opinions during the process

⁹ Albert L. Winesman, “Growing an Engaged Church”, (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2007) P. 50.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 53.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 67.

weren't seriously considered speaking to the value factor described previously about engagement. The idea that the congregation considers themselves a family in holistic terms is absent. This too, speaks to the spiritually committed piece discussed earlier.

There must be a transformation in relationships at Greater Bethel. Those persons whom are spiritually committed and engaged often ask the question, "What is wrong with these people?" Though this number regarding those whom appear not spiritually engaged or committed is small, in the same way as the pastor, I do have to recognize their passion for what they perceive the direction of the church should be. So, the question is how do I as a leader bring the congregation together to refocus what I perceive to be negative energy? My spirit continues to take me back to the learning lab phase of this project. During that four-week study on missions, there was a wide representation of the congregation of Greater Bethel present. As I noted before, this group, which started out small in the beginning grew, but in the coming weeks doubled. For many members of the study group, the term family was being used to refer to the church. There was a genuine concern regarding the sharing of opinions where no one was cut off or disrespected but a sincere effort was forged to comprehend each person's point of view conveying the idea that everyone's view mattered. For me I felt that I was witnessing a transformation among this group in the making.

With these strides having been made in our Learning labs, I must embrace the idea that maintaining the transformation should begin on the small group level. This training will begin with the leadership of the church and will include all auxiliary heads as well as class leaders. The training will focus on the spiritual disciplines. As leaders, I embrace the precept that we as a group must lead by example. If the example that is being

exhibited is faulty, then the followship will be faulty. The purpose of engaging the spiritual disciplines is to help us realize that “we are all a mess” (Miller, 2015).

Consequently, we reach that realization, then we can be honest with ourselves as leaders and take seriously, to a higher plain, our relationship with Jesus. In addition, engaging and understanding the spiritual disciplines, as well as the lack there of, can be insightful in that it is the hope that it can be revealed how impactful both positively and adversely the spiritual disciplines have in our walk with Jesus. It is my hope that at the end of this training the leadership can begin to dialogue about their passions and talents and how and where in the mission field that has been framed as our very own community can be utilized to win souls for Christ.

If this is accomplished effectively, then we can initiate the strategies necessary to gauge relevant ministry. I think that first and foremost we would need to capitalize on our new-found motivation that was gleaned during Operation Faithful to the Past. A strategy or model that could be used would be the Motivation for Ministry Model. The model, outlined by Christensen and Savage (2006) in their book, “Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing Laity for Ministry” identifies the needs of the community utilizing small groups of four or more organized by their common interests and gifts. In the context in which I serve, I think that this strategy would work in that it provides a genuine opportunity for persons within the congregation the opportunity to work to together with one another to initiate and facilitate a ministry that they can lay claim to and own.

Throughout this process, I have discovered that communication or the lack there of has been the root of many misunderstandings of Greater Bethel throughout the years. A lot of the time, much of what is experienced in a negative light could have been

avoided only if everyone was clear on what was going on. Thus, another strategy that would be effective within our context would be facilitating a clearness committee. I would utilize the same model as outlined by Christensen and Savage, but I would adjust the model so that issues that are of concern by the focus person would be addressed. A group of no more than four persons would be selected by the focus person along with a facilitator to investigate the concern of the focus person. The group's function will not involve giving advice or to offer solutions to the potential problem of the focus person but to ask open questions of the focus person. Coupled with periods of prayer, silence and a time of reflection, it is the hope that the focus person would be able to identify the issue themselves. The issue in this case would be that of miscommunication. The facilitator would ensure that the process is followed properly but ultimately the result in ascertaining what the problem genuinely is would be established by the focus person. Naturally, this is a process that could be used to identify other issues that could be prevalent within the context of our community of faith. I think this would be effective in my context in that everyone, to some degree, would be given a voice and would ultimately have their issues heard consequently letting them know that their voice does matter.

The most effective strategy or model that could be initiated at this juncture would be the concept of the meta-church. Based on the premise of change, this model embraces the concept of adapting to times to ensure that “fundamental spiritual and emotional support centers never become obsolete.”¹² In regard to change, within the context I serve, change is a constant occurrence when it comes to pastors. We are only assigned for a year

¹² Michael J. Christensen and Carl E. Savage, *Equipping the Saints: Mobilizing for Ministry*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2000), 56.

at a time but could be reassigned to the same church. While I sincerely believe that this strategy would be effective and successful, because of the uncertainty that is involved regarding pastoral leadership and reassignment, it would be difficult to effect change when there could be a potential leader adjustment every few years. This would not only be difficult for the congregation but of the incoming pastor as well.

Given the ministerial context in which I serve, the possibility of employing an effective mission-intentional ministry is a very sustainable undertaking. Prior to the project phase of this doctoral program and the initiation of Operation Faithful to the Past, a leadership audit survey (Appendix F) was given to ten members of the leadership of Greater Bethel Church. Based on the results of this survey, it was concluded that there is a sincere desire to initiate relevant, effective and sustaining outreach ministries. Seventy percent of those surveyed felt that Greater Bethel is a welcoming and warm place and that at one time was a “working” church, having specified and published hours during the day. It was during these hours that the church addressed the needs of not only its members but community members as well. Eighty percent of those surveyed felt that the community viewed Greater Bethel as a “beacon” of the community since it is one of the oldest churches in the area as well as holding the distinction of being the largest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the county. Thirty percent of the leadership (those surveyed) revealed no knowledge of any effective outreach programs but suggested that at one time “when we had money” there were several programs in place that helped members of the community to pay utility bills, purchase medicines and refer those whom needed assistance to county and state agencies. In addition, the leadership felt that Greater Bethel has lost its standing within the community as being the “lead” church due

to the struggles our faith community has experienced over the past fifteen years. The leadership does feel that the potential is there to recapture the successes of the past. The tools are in place to make a concerted effort to develop an effective and sustaining ministry and outreach program that would transform lives in our community.

Moving forward, my aim is to ensure that a genuine and concerted effort is initiated to begin this process of recapturing the successes of Greater Bethel's rich and storied history. It is important to be reminded that this cannot be accomplished with an attitude that we can do this all by ourselves. We must realize that this task will take a unified effort that includes not only our congregation, but our local government, community leaders, civic organizations and other houses of worship. To initiate this undertaking, the GBAME Community Task Force will be organized in August of this year. The purpose of this task force will be to form partnerships with community organizations with the hope of combining resources to better engage and serve our community. Additionally, this task force will work with the aforesaid community entities to aid the community in times of peril and wellbeing. It is my hope that this task force will be the catalyst to generate and maintain the urgency needed to begin Greater Bethel's journey to sustaining and maintaining a relevant and meaningful community outreach ministry.

Given all that I have learned in the Doctor of Ministry Program here at Drew University, I am better equipped to address the needs of the community in which our church serves. Operation Faithful to the Past has laid the groundwork for Greater Bethel to begin her journey to establishing relevant, effective and sustaining ministry in our community with the premise of remaining Faithful to the Past.

APPENDIX A
CHURCH MOTHERS

Dedicated Mothers of Greater Bethel, who are still alive and active, that were instrumental in raising funds to pay off the mortgage of the church's community center.



Mother IcaBelle Barr, 95

Mother Geneva Burgess, 92



APPENDIX B

LEARNING LAB SERIES

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LEADER'S GUIDE - STUDY 1
All Places Are Mission Fields

All believers are missionaries; all places are mission fields.

Though the word *missional* has been in use for more than a century, church leaders have recently begun spending more time thinking and talking about what it means. The sending and support of missionaries to unreached people outside one's national borders remains part of the idea, but only a part. At the heart of the modern redefinition of missionality lies a focus on the mission of *God* throughout history, rather than just the mission of the church and her missionaries.

How do we understand the mission of God, and what does this mean for the local church? What does it mean for our families? What is the biblical support for this seemingly new missional emphasis? This study will examine these questions in light of Scripture and the provocative examples of believers who have truly embraced a missional lifestyle.

Lesson #1

Scripture:

Matthew 22:36–40; 28:18–20; John 20:19–23; Ephesians 1:3–23

Based on:

“New Ownership,” by Eric Reed, LEADERSHIP JOURNAL, Winter 2007, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, Page 19



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the article “New Ownership” from LEADERSHIP Journal, included at the end of this study.



Some theologians and church historians have suggested that Christianity as we know it today, especially in America, reflects the DNA inherited from hundreds of years of European Christendom. When church and state became one in key European states, all the citizenry were thought to be “Christian,” regardless of any proclamation of faith or obedience. One became a Christian by virtue of merely living in a Christian empire ruled by leaders blessed, anointed, and ordained by the church. This unified church/state culture led to a view of missions as something the church did for unbelievers living *outside* of Christendom. Thus, in order to fulfill the Great Commission, the church appointed, funded, and sent missionaries beyond its borders to the far reaches of the globe. In contrast to the biblical model of the Great Commission (where the good news spread in waves from a central starting point), these missions leapfrogged “Jerusalem and Judea” entirely, aiming straight for the “uttermost parts of the Earth.” Missions became a global enterprise, ignoring the local need. Rather than sending its members as missionaries into the community, the local church instead became a “magnet” where believers came for edification, and seekers, if any, came to be evangelized.

In recent years, however, a shift has been taking place. While denominations still send missionaries beyond national borders, we now see “home missions” and stateside missionary support structures. Further, parachurch ministries have begun to fill the gaps not addressed by denominational agencies, enabling greater cooperation between disparate sending groups, often addressing needs locally as well as globally.

Lately, the missional movement has begun influencing the local church’s view of missions so that individual churches are now funding and sending missionaries themselves, sometimes forming cooperative networks with nearby churches—even across denominational lines.

Finally, the new missional approach to faith has compelled families and individual believers to embrace a missionary worldview and lifestyle within their own communities. Rather than seeing missions as a program to give money to, these missional believers are seeing missions as something every believer is commissioned to do at work, at home, and in their neighborhood.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What do you think is the primary difference between “doing missions” versus “being missional”?

[Q] The author notes that missions is now coming full-circle: “Individual Christians in local congregations are taking new ownership of the mission. We are becoming missional.” What do you think?

- Does simply “taking ownership of the mission” truly bring the church’s responsibility full circle? If not, what might be missing from truly going “full circle”?
 - How would you describe the early church’s view of missions and the believer’s responsibility for missions work?
- [Q] What do you think is the proper relationship between the “Great Commandment” (Matthew 22:36–40) and the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18–20)? How should the Great Commandment color our view of the Great Commission?
- [Q] As you read this article and saw the example of believers fully embracing a missional lifestyle, how were you challenged?
- [Q] Do you think living a missional lifestyle is realistic for everybody in your church? Why, or why not?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To be missional starts with knowing God’s mission from the very beginning.

The words *missions* and *missional* share a common ancestor: *mission*, which comes to us from a Latin word meaning “to send off.” When Jesus gave us the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), he sent his followers off on a specific mission with four essential tasks: “Go ... make disciples ... baptizing them ... and teaching them to obey.”

Throughout history, the church has done well in focusing on these tasks. We volunteer and are appointed to go as missionaries. We teach well, often setting up translation programs and Bible colleges to train converts. We baptize, teach, and mentor, and have done it so effectively that our mission fields now send missionaries back to America to evangelize us.

Focusing on the task, however, produces missionaries sent to a mission field. However, in John 20:19–23, Jesus welded the heart of missions with the heart of God when he said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Christ the Lord is telling his followers—you and me included—that he is sending us to others for exactly the same reason and purpose as he was sent.

Focusing on God’s mission produces believers who are being sent *wherever they are* and *wherever they go*. This is missionality at its core: God has a purpose; God sent Jesus to fulfill that purpose, and the Holy Spirit to empower that purpose. Christ has placed that mantle of mission on every believer who follows him. Every believer individually and the church collectively embody the presence of Jesus in this world—we are his hands and feet.

We are called to do more than the work of missions: we are called to do God's work, commissioned by Jesus, empowered by the Spirit.

[Q] Read Ephesians 1:3–23. What does Paul have to say in this passage about God's mission, goal, or purpose?

Leader's Note: *Key phrases to look for in this discussion include verse 4, "to be holy and blameless in his sight," verse 10, "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ," verse 12, "in order that we ... might be for the praise of his glory."*

[Q] How does a family moving out of their suburban home into a cramped apartment help fulfill these goals?

➤ How do tutoring, feeding the hungry, or going overseas to do missions work fulfill these goals?

Leader's Note: *God's mission is not to make Christians or missionaries, but to bring all of Creation into his kingdom. As Christ was sent to realize and announce the arrival of God's kingdom (Luke 4:43; Matthew 4:17, 23; Luke 17:20b–21), we are to carry on that work (Luke 10:8–9).*

Thus, you might discuss how true godliness involves obeying the command to love your neighbor as yourself, or that true godliness involves caring for widows and orphans, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. Discuss how certain lifestyles help bring "all things in heaven and on earth" under Christ's lordship. For example, as Adam was given responsibility to care for the earth and its creatures, our responsibility to do the same remains. You could further discuss how our humility and selflessness, our integrity, generosity, and hospitality, all reflect Christ in ways that bring glory to God.

One pillar of missional thought points to the nature of God as Trinity. Before the world existed, before man was created, even before time began, God existed as a loving, giving, relating member of a community. Being truly missional, therefore, means we must reflect these eternal qualities of God: we must love. First, we love God as a natural response to the Creator who moved heaven and earth to bring us into his kingdom. And we must love others because he also loves them, and they are made in his image.

[Q] What is love, and how is this part of God's mission?

[Q] What are some practical ways your church could actively express love in your community?

[Q] Looking back on the Ephesians passage, how do love and fellowship God's way help fulfill God's purposes?

[Q] Perhaps you have heard this expression: "Show me your checkbook, and I'll show you where your heart is." How is giving money for missions different than being personally involved in missions?

➤ If God's purpose is to bring all things under the authority of Jesus Christ, what does this mean for your finances and spending?

- If God’s purpose is to bring all things under the authority of Jesus Christ, what does this mean for your free time and leisure time?

Teaching point two: Being missional requires unity.

In his article, Eric Reed noted that many missional churches work with other churches across institutional and denominational boundaries. These missional churches don’t focus on whether they align on every point of doctrine and practice. Instead, they focus on forming a community that is active in their local neighborhood. It is worth noting that in Acts 1:1–9, Jesus spent his last few days on earth getting everybody on the same page: “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” This message must have been utterly important for his followers and disciples, for it’s the only major topic Luke records for that time. The apostle Paul also pleads frequently in his epistles for believers to be of one mind, to be unified, to work together, not to argue, not to be divisive.

Perhaps you’ve never heard terms from the article such as “shared parish” or “supra-denominational,” but as Eric Reed notes, anyone who’s ever seen a Billy Graham crusade has already seen this kind of unity in action. When the shared goal is the manifestation, revelation, and expression of the love, kingdom, and lordship of Christ, secondary issues dim in importance.

[Q] What do you think are the greatest barriers to church unity?

- Why is it so difficult for churches to work across denominational boundaries?

[Q] What are the greatest barriers to unity within just one church community? Many churches have split or are threatening to split over matters of policy, practice, or philosophy. What do you think are the primary causes of this intra-church disunity, and how do you think it should be addressed?

[Q] Even if your church or community doesn’t have an outreach partnership or a “shared parish,” what are some ways you could unite with other believers missionally?

[Q] What are the most visible needs in your church’s community that could only be addressed by uniting churches together?

[Q] What would a truly missional church look or feel like?

- Would you feel comfortable attending a missional church?

Teaching point three: To become missional be generous and hospitable.

In 1991, when Faith Popcorn wrote *The Popcorn Report: The Future of Your Company, Your World, Your Life*, she described a new trend she called “cocooning”: individuals becoming increasingly more insulated from society via their homes, cars, and cubicles. In an already individualistic society, wired Americans have only become more and more socially remote from each other. Food can be delivered to your door, entertainment piped onto your screen, calls made and e-mails exchanged, all without leaving the comfort of one’s cozy den.

But the Scriptures teach us to do anything but cocoon ourselves away from society. Jesus prayed for our protection while we live “in the world,” even without being “of it” (John 17:1–26). Throughout the Scriptures, we are encouraged to lay hands on one another, to greet each other, to fellowship, to gather together, to exercise hospitality, to be generous, and to share.

The families featured in Eric Reed’s article are anything but cocooned. They attend “churches without borders” and enjoy families without walls. Doors are opened, time is freely spent, and lifetime friendships are formed.

[Q] Thinking about the “Great Commandment” (Matthew 22:36–40) and the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18–20), how does America’s trend toward more and more “cocooning” interfere with these commands?

[Q] What do you think motivates people to live isolated and insulated lives? For example, how do you account for the following behaviors?

1) Some will spend half an hour composing an e-mail when a five-minute phone call or a walk down the hall might accomplish more in less time.

2) Some choose to “tune out” of church, and “tune in” to televangelists instead.

3) Few people in the church actually confess their sins to each other.

4) The moment the car leaves the church parking lot, Christian drivers are indistinguishable from other drivers, save for their bumper stickers.

[Q] What are some simple and practical ways families could exercise more generosity and hospitality in their neighborhoods?

[Q] Dallas Willard has defined a spiritual discipline as “any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” Like the physical disciplines of lifting weights to gradually increase our strength, spiritual disciplines are activities that increase our spiritual strength. What activities would you recommend to help believers strengthen their ability to exercise generosity and hospitality?

[Q] Many might be generous or hospitable when given the opportunity to do so, but because they have been “cocooned” they rarely get the opportunity to exercise these muscles. What would you do differently at your church to make it easier for members to practice generosity and hospitality?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

It’s far too easy to get caught up in “doing church” and assuming that the work of missions is done by special people called to a special ministry somewhere “out there.” But what the specially appointed missionaries do is really no different from what you and I are called to do: be the presence of Jesus in the midst of people who do not know him.

As Christ's representatives, we are ambassadors of the kingdom of God. Following Christ is less about being in the pew whenever the doors are open and more about carrying the life-changing power of the gospel outside the church walls.

Jesus got in a lot of hot water over the types of people he hung around. We would do well to follow his example by opening our own homes to our neighbors, performing acts of kindness and generosity, and being genuinely concerned when listening. We don't have to fix every problem, ease every struggle, and heal every wound—we just need to be sure that we are faithfully representing the ultimate healer, Jesus Christ, and making introductions.

Action Points:

- What are your strongest gifts and greatest strengths as a missional believer? Are you naturally generous? Are you naturally hospitable? Are you a natural teacher and mentor? Are you adept at giving comfort? Play to your strengths and try to identify one thing you could do in your church community or in your neighborhood to be more missional.
- Who in your church is missionally minded? If you can identify at least one other missional friend, consider approaching them to partner on a project.
- If you were thoroughly missional, fully embracing this lifestyle, how would your prayers change?
- There are people in your church right now going through struggles; you could help them, even if it's just by offering a willing shoulder to lean on. Try to identify one need that you can personally make yourself available for over the next two months. If you don't know of any needs, find someone on staff who could alert you to needs you could help with.

LEADER'S GUIDE - STUDY 2

Reach Your Community

Making a difference in your community will require getting outside the church walls.

New Life Church in British Columbia places a premium on caring for the needy and celebrating the often-unappreciated people who serve their community. Whether they are providing backpacks full of school supplies for children of single mothers or hosting a cookout for the police, they are involved in reaching out to people outside the church. Their influence is felt because of their commitment to work as a redemptive force in the world.

These successful efforts may stir up a desire to reach out where we live. If so, it will involve some careful evaluation and intentional action. However, if we are willing to make some changes, God can transform us into people and churches that reach our communities.

Lesson #2

Scripture:

Psalm 24:1–2; Isaiah 58:1–10; Matthew 12:9–14; 1 Corinthians 10:23–30

Based on:

“Wreck the Roof,” by Mark Buchanan, LEADERSHIP JOURNAL, Winter 2007



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each with “Wreck the Roof” from LEADERSHIP Journal (included end of this study).

Dan Kimball recently wrote a book called *They Like Jesus Not the Church*. Increasingly, both statistics and anecdotal evidence suggest that many people in our culture agree. are some who are actively antagonistic toward the church, larger number of people are ambivalent—they hardly even it’s there. In many instances, local churches are irrelevant to their communities because they are not making any effort to reach out to them.



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When a church exists primarily for its members, one of the unintentional outcomes is that people outside the church believe that Christians don’t care about anyone but themselves. No one sees the transforming power of Jesus at work because it is hidden inside the walls of the church. Even worse, people may look at the Christians they see on television or hear on the radio and think that Christianity is just about rules and morality. Morals are important, but following Christ is about so much more. It’s about new life—the life we were meant to live, a life reconciled to God and in relationship with him. We are called to be the light of the world, but the light will not make a difference in our world if we don’t let anyone see it.

This is not a good place for a church to be. Individually and collectively, followers of Christ are called to be a blessing to the world—to care for the needy, to celebrate the underappreciated, and to seek justice for the oppressed. How will we be faithful to this in the places where we live?

Discussion starters:

- [Q] In what ways have you seen the church succeed in impacting the community?
 - How have you seen it fail?
- [Q] What kind of impact should the church have on the community around it?
- [Q] What kind of opinion would you like your community to have about your church?
 - How would such an opinion promote the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- [Q] If your church disappeared overnight, would the surrounding community care or even notice? Why or why not?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Evaluate what you are protecting in your current way of doing things.

When God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, he gave them laws to guide them (including the Ten Commandments). God promised to bless them if they obeyed his commands and discipline them if they disobeyed. In the following centuries, the Israelites disobeyed many times and spent many years in exile, far away from the land God had given them. These times of exile and other consequences from God convinced the religious leaders of Israel that they needed to find a way to make people obey God's laws. Over time they developed a "fence" around the laws God had given them. They did this by making a huge number of laws to define each law from God. They thought that by doing this, people would be obedient to God's laws and God would bless them.

For example, one of the Ten Commandments says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). To make sure people obeyed, the religious leaders put restrictions on what a person could do on the Sabbath. They decided that many things, including baking, building, and making two loops, were all forbidden. By the time of Jesus these additional laws had become the focal point for many of the religious leaders, called Pharisees. A list of 39 activities that are unlawful on the Sabbath can found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/39_categories_of_activity_prohibited_on_Shabbat

Read Matthew 12:9–14.

Rather than rejoicing in this man's healing, the Pharisees were angry that Jesus "worked" on the Sabbath. They became so obsessed with their traditions that the traditions turned into an idol. They confused the laws they had created with the Law of God. They blinded themselves with unnecessary restrictions and missed out on what was truly important to God.

We may not add laws to our faith as obviously as the Pharisees did, but that doesn't mean we don't do the same thing. We develop our own way of doing things and begin to view it as the way things should be done. If someone questions our way of operating, we get defensive and refuse to consider the validity of other perspectives. Our traditions can become idols just like the extra laws were for the Pharisees.

We exist to carry out the mission of God in the world, not to uphold our traditions. This doesn't mean that all traditions are bad, but they should be readily dispensed if they have become idols that keep us from fulfilling our role as the people of God. It is important to identify these things and decide how to break away from them.

[Q] Have you added things to the gospel, like the Pharisees did to the Law, that you see as non-negotiable?

[Q] What practices or programs are beyond questioning in your church?

➤ Who do these practices and programs benefit?

- What would happen if you discontinued those practices or programs?
- What would replace them?

Teaching point two: Consider reaching out to the needy.

When someone asks how we are doing spiritually, we are likely to respond by focusing on the frequency of our prayer and Bible study, the ways our lives are being transformed, or how close we feel to God. Few of us would respond by evaluating our sacrificial efforts to serve the needy. We may believe that serving the needy is good, but it doesn't take a prominent place in our conception of being a Christian. However, this is one of the ways in which God judges his people's faithfulness.

Read Isaiah 58:1–10.

The Bible references the poor more than 170 times. These passages refer primarily to those who are physically poor. Despite all our studying of the Bible, we often fail to comprehend God's heart for the needy. There are many aspects to the Christian life, and caring for the needy is an essential one that often gets relegated to the back burner. Spiritual disciplines, study, and worship will not please God if we are hardhearted toward those in need.

Reaching out to the needy is not as difficult as you might think. In most towns and cities, there are numerous organizations that provide assistance for the needy and need volunteers. There are needy people in our churches and neighborhoods. We may miss people in need because we're not really looking. Caring for the needy can mean a sacrifice of time, money, and energy, and there may be a part of us that doesn't want to sacrifice. However, if we open ourselves to being used by God to provide for the needy, and observe the people around us, we will find ample opportunities to participate in this important part of our faith.

Serving the needy will increase and strengthen our faith in ways we might not expect. If you've ever been on a short-term mission trip or participated in a service project, it probably changed you more than you changed the people you were serving. Service has a way of giving us a different perspective and showing us what is important to God. As we respond to God's call to serve the needy, it will bring us closer to him.

[Q] Have you been a part of a church or heard of a church that is good at reaching out to the needy in their community? What did they do? How did they make this a priority?

[Q] What are some organizations in your community that provide for the needy?

[Q] What keeps you from being more aware of the needy?

***Leader's Note:** We often insulate ourselves from the needy. One idea to help make ourselves aware of the needy is to go where they go—visit resale shops, discount food places, or simply walk through neighborhoods where the needy live.*

[Q] Are there certain groups of people in your church who are in need? In your community? If so, what might you do to help?

Teaching point three: Look for the ways God is already at work in your community and join him.

Read Psalm 24:1–2.

The Bible affirms many times in many ways that the whole earth is the Lord's. It is easy to agree with this, but how does it apply to life? One of the applications is learning to see how God is working everywhere, not just in places that are "Christian." We must avoid the misconception that Christians can only please God by participating in church activities and avoiding "secular" things. God is at work in ways we might not expect.

1 Corinthians 10:23–30.

In this passage, Paul uses the example of meat offered to an idol. He gives reasons why Christians might want to avoid eating meat if they know it has been sacrificed to idols, but he concludes that the determining factor in this situation is a Christian's attitude toward God in the midst of eating the meat. Because the whole earth is the Lord's, anything we do in his name can bring glory and praise to him.

When someone told pastor and author Rob Bell that they were going to take God to the world, he told them they'd get tired because God is really heavy. The point of his satirical comment was that we don't have to take God anywhere. God is already at work everywhere. One of the most important things we can do as individuals and churches is to be aware of the ways God is already at work in our communities and to join in his work wherever we see it happening. To do this, we will have to ask God for discernment to see what he is doing. It may not look the way we expect it to.

[Q] Do you agree that we can join secular organizations in the work of God?

- What about organizations from other churches?
- What about organizations from other religions?

[Q] Is it better for churches to start their own programs to make an impact in their communities, or to join organizations that are already doing things? Are there certain situations in which each approach might be better?

[Q] What secular organizations in your community are doing good things?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Serving others, individually and collectively, is a choice. It will not be easy, but it will be rewarding, because it will place us in God's will for us as a people. It may just take the courage to break some roof tiles.

Action Points:

What are some reasons or excuses you have given in the past for not serving people in your community? How can you find ways around these things?

Would your Bible study group be willing to serve together in this way? Discuss a way to make this happen.

Having completed this study, do you have any big ideas for how you could reach out to the needy and underappreciated in your community? Share your ideas with the group.

—Trevor Lee is a husband, father, and founding member of Infuse, a missional community.

LEADER'S GUIDE - STUDY 3

Reach Out to Different Cultures and Ages

How can I reach out to younger unbelievers and welcome those from different ethnic backgrounds?

Jesus ministered to a wide swath of people of various ages, ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic statuses. Unfortunately, we often struggle to interact positively with those who do not look, talk, think, act, or dress like we do. It's not necessarily because we don't want to try; it may seem like a daunting task to share God's love with those who seem so different.

In this study, we'll look at ways to creatively address this challenge. We will examine how to engage unbelievers through acts of social service; how to communicate in relevant ways, especially to younger people; and how to find ways to be more multicultural.

Lesson #3

Scripture:

Isaiah 58:1–11; Matthew 25:31–46; Mark 4:1–20; John 17:20–23; Acts 17:16–34; 22:1–21; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23; Galatians 3:26–29;
Ephesians 2:8–10

Based on:

“Reaching the Post-Christian,” by Daniel Hill, LEADERSHIP JOURNAL, copyright 2004



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Prior to the class, distribute “Reaching the Post-Christian” from LEADERSHIP JOURNAL to each participant, included at the end of this study.



In our post-Christian, postmodern world, the chances are high of encountering unbelievers who are disillusioned with Christianity or highly suspicious of organized religion in general. Some may feel betrayed by their church-going parents who, nevertheless, got a divorce; others may have gotten fed up with apparently hypocritical church members. Still others may have indirect knowledge that's distasteful enough, through media stories of Christians who have said hateful things or leaders who have fallen from grace. More generally, relativism rules the day in our culture. Truth claims can be dismissed as personal choices that do or do not work for different people.

Given this state of affairs, many traditional approaches to evangelism will be unsuccessful at best and repugnant or ridiculous at worst. Simply laying out an overly tidy presentation of the gospel will probably not persuade the modern unbeliever. People long to see the gospel truth lived out in life-transforming action, and if we're honest with ourselves, so do we.

Discussion Starters

- [Q] Are your non-Christian friends interested in talking about Christ? Why or why not?
- [Q] Were you interested in talking about Christ before you became a Christian? Explain.
- How did you come to faith in Christ?
- [Q] Share a time when you felt like you shared your faith well with an unbeliever.
- [Q] Give an example of a time when you or someone you know had a less than positive “evangelistic experience.”
- [Q] How does God call us to interact with those who do not yet know him?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Look for ways to engage in social service.

Considering that over 75 passages in both the Old and New Testaments reveal God's concern for the poor and oppressed, issues of social justice should be important to

believers as well. Historically, Christians have played major roles in addressing the injustices of the time—consider British abolitionist William Wilberforce or Bono’s One campaign.

Sometimes God’s people need a wake-up call. To that end, theologian Marva Dawn provides some startling statistics in *Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society*: “Basic health and nutrition needs of the world’s poorest people could be met for an estimated \$13 billion more a year. U.S.ers and Europeans spend more than that on pet food yearly (United Nations Development Program).”

Read Isaiah 58:1–11.

Leader’s Note: *This later portion of Isaiah’s prophecy to the nation of Judah follows their Babylonian captivity. While the community of believers faced economic challenges in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, God called them to create a new city free from violence and terror. In this passage, Isaiah’s prophecy challenges the people’s hypocrisy and complacency, especially with regard to oppressing the poor.*

[Q] What definition of fasting does God give in the passage?

➤ How does this definition expand the traditional definition of fasting?

[Q] What connection does this passage make between spiritual disciplines and practicing justice?

➤ Is this connection emphasized today? Why or why not?

[Q] What reward is promised for acting justly?

[Q] What are some practical ways that we can respond to God’s call for justice today?

Optional Activity: *Research several local mission-based and/or humanitarian organizations. Choose one and coordinate an event with them and invite unbelievers to come: e.g. build a house with Habitat for Humanity or listen to a speaker from World Relief talk about the needs of the immigrant communities in your area.*

In a memorable scene from the musical *Godspell*, Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats is acted out by his disciples, complete with all the accompanying animal noises. While the scene is entertaining, the truth behind the scene is serious.

Read Matthew 25:31–46.

[Q] Why do you think that Jesus chose sheep and goats to illustrate his point?

[Q] By helping the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned, who are we really serving, and how does this truth motivate you to attend to the less fortunate?

[Q] Read Ephesians 2:8–10. Paul clearly states that we are saved by faith through grace, not by works so that no one can boast. If that is so, what did Jesus mean by this parable? Is social justice related to eternal life or eternal punishment?

Leader’s Note: The Quest Study Bible says, “True faith is more than just claiming to have faith. Genuine love for God will be expressed through service to others (1 John 3:16–18)—not to earn salvation, but because a heart that truly loves God will be filled with compassion for others.”

[Q] In the “soup kitchen” model of service, those in need must come to be served. How can believers invert this model and go to serve the less fortunate right where they are?

- What effect might such acts of service have on our unbelieving friends?

Teaching point two: Look for what communicates to younger people.

The remarkable success of Donald Miller’s collection of spiritual essays, *Blue Like Jazz*, reveals what resonates in today’s culture. Patton Dodd notes in his *Christianity Today* article “A Better Storyteller,” “[Miller] asks just enough questions, with just enough gravity to attract readers who have similar reservations about their faith culture.”

Asking the right questions has always been a good method to get to the root of the issue (thank you, Socrates), but this approach is especially helpful today, as younger people’s defenses are quick to spring up if they sense a whiff of overconfident proselytizing.

Additionally, as the title of the article suggests, telling stories is a popular and effective method to reveal the truth of the gospel. An individual’s experience is more powerful than dry propositions. Unbelievers generally perceive sharing an experience as non-threatening, as it need not imply “I’m right and you’re wrong.”

Read the parable of the sower in Mark 4:1–20.

[Q] Why did Jesus frequently speak in parables? What effect did they have on his listeners?

[Q] What effect does this story have on you?

- How do you feel after Jesus’ clarification of what the story means?

[Q] What was Jesus trying to communicate to the people?

- To the disciples?

[Q] This parable is an example of an allegory, where elements in the story have a one-to-one relationship with things outside the story. Not all of Jesus’ parables come with such a complete explanation; why do you think he chose to explain this one?

Read Acts 17:16–34.

Leader’s Note: *Areopagus* was a rocky hill near the Acropolis and Agora in Athens, named after the Greek god of war (it is also known as Mars Hill, after the Roman god of war). During the Roman era, a council met here that was responsible for various educational and philosophical/religious concerns, as well as legal matters.

- [Q] What do the verses in this passage indicate about Paul’s knowledge of his surrounding culture?
- What does this suggest about the importance of being informed about culture today?
- [Q] Paul was unafraid to debate with some of the most thoughtful and learned unbelievers of his time. What fears might keep you from engaging in such discussions?
- [Q] How does Paul begin his speech to those gathered at the Areopagus?
- What do his words indicate about his attitude toward his audience?
- [Q] Early on we learn that Paul was “greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” How does Paul skillfully address this concern?
- [Q] What religious paradigms was Paul willing to shatter?
- [Q] How does Paul conclude his speech? What call to action does he give?
- Is it important to conclude a spiritual talk with a call to action? Why or why not?

Read Acts 22:1–21.

- [Q] What is compelling about Paul’s testimony? What elements strike you as particularly significant?
- [Q] What can you incorporate from his approach as you share about your own faith journey?

Teaching point three: Look for ways to be multicultural.

Take it from a brother who knows what he’s talking about. In his winsome new book *Reconciliation Blues*, black journalist Edward Gilbreath explains that while the church in America—as well as the culture at large—has made significant progress in racial reconciliation, it’s still “business as usual” in a startling number of cases.

Some of these cases may be examples of institutional racism, such as the quality of education in primarily black inner-city schools or charging higher interest rates on loans to blacks or Latinos. But some cases stem directly from the white majority’s lack of awareness that to be both a minority and an evangelical is a distinctly difficult experience.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

- [Q] Why does Paul try to “become all things to all men”? What does this mean?
- [Q] Why is it critical to understand the experience of those with whom we want to share the gospel?
- [Q] How can you practically gain more knowledge and experience about people from cultures different than your own?

Read John 17:20–23.

[Q] What is Jesus' heartfelt desire in this prayer?

➤ Is this your heartfelt desire? Why or why not?

[Q] What are some practical ways that you can work toward this ideal of unity with your brothers and sisters from different cultures?

➤ Read Galatians 3:26–29.

[Q] Given this text, what is our motive for seeking racial reconciliation?

[Q] How does this passage offer hope in the face of what may seem like a monumental task?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Reaching out to unbelievers and living out an authentic Christian life can take many forms, as this study suggests. But before making an action plan, it's wise to first consider the "state of the union." Honestly evaluate yourself and your church by answering the following questions:

[Q] How active is your church in social justice work?

➤ How active are you individually?

[Q] How effectively is your church reaching the younger generation?

➤ Are you reaching out to younger folks yourself?

[Q] How diverse is your congregation?

➤ How many friends do you have that are of a different race?

Now that you have considered where you are, take some time to consider where you want to go and how you'd like to address each area of outreach.

Action Point: Make a goal for yourself in each outreach area and share your goals with at least one other person for the sake of accountability. Make some goals for your church and begin to work with other church members to accomplish these goals.

—*Study prepared by Adrianna Wright, who works as a publicist and freelance writer and plays by riding her pony and doing improv comedy.*

LEADER'S GUIDE - STUDY 6
Touch Broken Lives

Jesus reached out to a cynical generation, and he teaches us how to do the same.

We live in a generation marked by distrust. Stable, lifelong marriages can no longer be taken for granted. Governments, which once symbolized justice, are now targets for cynicism. Churches have suffered too—their credibility brought down by scandals, hypocrisy, and silence in the face of injustice.

This distrust stirs many questions. And churches that speak to the suspicions of non-believers are seeing a great return on their work. Following the experiences of a pastor who encountered those suspicions first hand, this study asks, *How do we reach out to a cynical generation?*

Lesson #6

Scripture:

Matthew 9:9–13; Luke 7:18–23; John 11:1–37

Based on:

“Starbucks Spirituality,” by Brett Lawrence, LEADERSHIP, Fall 2002



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Prior to the class, provide for each person article “Starbucks Spirituality” from LEADERSHIP Journal (included at the end of this study).

Dashed hopes and disappointments are nothing new. Today’s in all shapes and sizes: if your parents are still married, and successfully navigated the maze of drugs and alcohol that pervade youth culture, then you still face the limits of debt economy that rewards skills, not loyalty. Survive all these, as manage to do, and you will still face the timeless trials of life—friendships and relationships that are unhealthy and let you down, and doubts about purpose and significance.



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Jesus’ generation faced doubts and disappointments too, although of a different shape and size. Jesus lived 400 years after Israel’s last prophet. Those centuries were, in essence, a period of divine silence—for a nation whose very identity was in God. This was particularly hard to bear given the crushing economic burden and military occupation the Romans imposed on the Jews. To these disappointments, add the dashed hopes placed on several men who claimed to be the Messiah and promised to restore honor and power to Israel. Most of those men were executed by the Romans.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What can you learn about a society by understanding its disappointments?
- What are some disappointments of our society?
- [Q] What is the relationship between disappointment and cynicism? Give an example.
- [Q] What would you say that you are cynical about? Why?
- [Q] When you feel let down by something or someone, what helps you recover?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Jesus proved that he was trustworthy by being fully present during the difficulties of life.

Read John 11:1–37. Mary and Martha experienced one of the greatest disappointments of their lives. Their brother, whom they loved, and the person legally responsible to care for them and their affairs, suddenly took ill and died. This was a traumatic loss. With the death of Lazarus, their future took the shape of a question mark.

Facing this profound loss, they began to ask: Why does God allow unjust suffering? If he is good, how can God stand idly by in the face of evil? Why didn't Jesus, who has power to heal, come when we sent for him?

Compare the disappointment and loss in John 11 with that which was risked when Debbie, the mother from the article, took her first shift at her local Starbucks. When she met Daniel Hill, a pastor who works part time at Starbucks, she blurted, "Three years ago my 16-year-old daughter was raped and murdered. Tell me, what kind of God would let that happen? I believe in God. I just have a real problem with him."

- [Q] What are the similarities between Debbie's loss and Mary and Martha's loss? What emotions do they share?
- [Q] Explain how Debbie's (or even Mary and Martha's) loss could turn into anger and cynicism.
- [Q] Look again at John 11:33–36. What is significant about Jesus' response to Mary's grief?
 - How can those lessons translate into a situation like the one Hill faced with Debbie?
- [Q] How would you answer if someone asked you why God allows unjust suffering?

Teaching point two: Jesus answered the important questions of his day, but not necessarily within the categories of his contemporaries.

In his part-time job at Starbucks, Hill observes that most of the people he's around live with a "whatever works for you" mindset. "I've never been able to persuade someone intellectually to abandon the relativistic mindset," he says. "What's more likely to happen is that they'll see the power of a transformed life in another Christ follower and be transformed."

Jesus, before Hill, chose transformed lives as a sign of his message. Relativism was not something Jesus fought; rather he faced suspicion regarding whether or not he was, in fact, the Messiah, and therefore worth following. Read his response when John the Baptist's disciples asked him who he really was, in Luke 7:18–23.

- [Q] Do Christians lose something when their apologetics consist only of intellectual arguments, not real-life examples of transformation? Why or why not?
- [Q] How would an early Christian likely have answered the question, "How do you know Jesus is the only way?"
- [Q] How did Jesus approach the important questions of his day without giving in to his society's search for someone who would bring political strength?
 - How are his followers called to do the same, and what does that mean for outreach efforts? (Compare John 6:14–15 with Luke 6:17–26.)

Teaching point three: Jesus reached out to his generation by addressing relevant topics in a way that only he could speak to them.

Jesus' generation vehemently debated the hot topics of religion, politics, and worldview. The New Testament records, for example, questions about how to interpret Old Testament laws about work (Matt. 12:1–13); questions about ritual cleanliness (Matt. 15:1–2); questions about the true definition of marriage (Matt. 19:1–12); and debates loaded with political significance (Matt 22:15–22).

It is remarkable that Jesus—a person who was fully God and fully human, and who was on a mission to redeem humanity from its enslavement to sin—had the time and energy to enter into debates about passing issues with nameless people. Yet his willingness to speak about himself and his father *in the midst of a particular generation* was central to his ministry. As the early church grew, it adapted a similar strategy for spreading the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

- [Q] How are these principles embodied in Katy, the Washington, D.C. consultant who volunteered as an inner-city mentor and went on to become the full-time caretaker for two girls who had lost their mother?
- [Q] What are the issues or struggles that affect the day-to-day lives of the normal (“nameless”) people that we encounter? Make a list of some of these issues, and then consider how Jesus gave us an example of how to address each situation.
- [Q] What is our core message about God?
 - How does it alter our approach to hot-button issues if we enter conversations with our view of God at the center?

Teaching point four: Jesus reached beyond issues, debates, and surface-level conversations by showing love to all people.

Daniel Hill, when asked how to reach people who are suspicious and cynical, and who direct much of their cynicism at the church, responded, “Be intentional and authentic in your friendship.” Rather than entering into friendships and then letting them go if the person doesn’t convert, Hill suggests patiently entering into a journey of faith with non-believers, extending them a hand of grace.

Read Matthew 9:9–13. Notice how Jesus laid the foundation for this paradigm with his disciple Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector, a title that in some contexts was interchangeable with “robber.” Not only did Matthew symbolize the oppression and idolatry of the Roman government, he was likely dishonest, given to bribes and extortion.

Matthew follows Jesus’ call, but Jesus surprises the crowds when he agrees to a public banquet with tax collectors and a host of other “sinners.”

- [Q] What kind of people would compose a group of tax collectors and “sinners” in our society?

- [Q] What impact does Jesus' quotation of Hosea 6:6 ("I desire mercy, not sacrifice") have on how we approach outreach, especially to people who have been disappointed by the events of life?
- [Q] What kind of statement does it make about a church if it is willing to allow a non-believer to describe her struggles with God before a room of other seekers, as Hill's church did?
- [Q] What is one disappointment, dashed hope, or struggle in your life that you long to see God at work in?
- What does Matthew 9:9–13 teach about your situation?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The points above show Jesus as fully present in his generation and involved in the issues, debates, and disappointments of his day. Jesus knew the sorrows of loss; better than anyone, he knew the consequences of sin. Yet he himself never gave in to the cynicism and discouragement of his day. Instead, he transformed lives, restored dignity and hope, and fully communicated to us something at the core of God: God is love.

- [Q] What do the points and examples above teach us about the true nature of reaching out?
- [Q] How does God's love—the kind that transforms, restores, and fellowships—break down cynicism and suspicion in your life or the lives of people you know?

Action Point: What is one situation where you will try to put some of these examples to work in the next week?

—*Study prepared by Chris Blumhofer, assistant editor of BuildingChurchLeaders.com.*

APPENDIX C

LEARNING LAB PRE/POST QUESTIONS

Session 1: All Places are Mission Fields
Pre/Post Assessment
Greater Bethel AME Church
Rev. Brian L. Williams, Instructor

1. What do you think is the primary difference between “doing missions” versus “being missional”?
2. What do you think is the proper relationship between the “Great Commandment” (Matthew 22:36–40) and the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18–20)? How should the Great Commandment color our view of the Great Commission?
3. Do you think living a missional lifestyle is realistic for everybody in your church? Why, or why not?
4. What are the most visible needs in your church’s community that could only be addressed by uniting churches together?
5. What are some simple and practical ways families could exercise more generosity and hospitality in their neighborhoods?

APPENDIX D

SOUP KITCHEN FLYER

**Greater Bethel AME Church
presents**

Community Soup Kitchen

Come enjoy A Bowl of Soup and Corn Bread!!!
Served/Distributed 11am – 12:30pm
on the following Saturdays:

April 1, 2017	Chicken Noodle
April 8, 2017	Beef Vegetable
April 15, 2017	Potato
April 22, 2017	Vegetable with Turkey



Dine in or carry out.

**For more information,
Please contact:**

Mrs. Cynthia Williams
(843)312-██████

or

Rev. Brian Williams
(843)312-██████

APPENDIX E

COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY

Greater Bethel AME Church Community Needs Questionnaire

Complete this anonymous questionnaire to get the most accurate, personalized list of possible assistance. The following questions are directly related to disaster assistance. Please answer them to the best of your ability or skip if not applicable. After you answer these questions, you may return to this tab to change your responses if needed.

1. As a result of this disaster, do you need assistance in any of the following categories? (select all that apply)
 - A. Financial
 - B. Food
 - C. Housing
 - D. Employment
 - E. Legal
 - F. Medical

2. What describes your housing/living situation prior to the disaster? (select all that apply)
 - A. Rent
 - B. Own
 - C. Rural

3. Has your home flooded as a result of this disaster?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Unknown

4. Have you or a member of your household experienced life-changing events as a result of this disaster? (select all that apply)
 - A. Permanent disability
 - B. Death of a current spouse/partner, parent or child
 - C. Death of a former spouse/partner
 - D. Death of a disabled spouse/partner
 - E. Relocation that resulted in a change of mailing address

5. Are you or a member of your household a: (select all that apply)
 - A. Business owner
 - B. Current or former member of the military
 - C. Farmer
 - D. Federal retiree
 - E. Person over 50 years of age
 - F. Survivor of a public safety officer who died in the line of duty
 - G. Retiree
 - H. Student or recipient of a federal student loan
 - I. Widow(er)
 - J. World War II veteran

6. Are you or a member of your household receiving government assistance or benefits (for example, Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) assistance, Social Security benefits, etc.)?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Unknown

7. Are you or one of your direct dependents a U.S. citizen or a non-citizen with eligible immigration status?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Unknown

8. Are you or a member of your household enrolled in a federally recognized American Indian Tribe or Alaska Native Tribe?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Unknown

9. At the time of the disaster, of what state, territory or tribal land were you a primary, legal resident?

10. At the time of the disaster, were there any pets living in your household?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

11. At the time of the disaster, were there any people living with you who were: (Check all that apply)
 - A. Under the age of 3
 - B. 3 to 7 years old
 - C. 8 to 12 years old
 - D. 3 to 17 years old
 - E. 18 to 64 years old
 - F. 65 or over
 - G. Individuals with disabilities or other access or functional needs

12. Which of the following apply to the people living in your household right before the disaster? (Check all that apply)
 - A. White
 - B. Black or African American
 - C. Asian
 - D. Hispanic
 - E. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - F. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - G. Other, please describe

APPENDIX F
LEADERSHIP AUDIT SURVEY

Greater Bethel AME Church
Leadership Audit Survey

1. What is our church / ministry known for in the community?

2. How many people have you invited to worship in the last three months?

3. How would you describe our church or ministry to someone not familiar with us?

4. What are your dreams for the church or ministry?

5. What kind of new ministry do you feel we need to start at the church?

6. What is our most effective outreach ministry? Why?

7. What is our least effective outreach ministry? Why?

8. What do you believe the community needs or expects from the church or ministry? Why?

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