

***Community Backyard Relationship-Building: A Partnership
between The Church, Government, and Local Stakeholders***

by

James Larkin Pahl, Jr.

A project thesis

submitted to the faculty of


The Virginia Theological Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

October 27, 2017



Rev. David T. Gortner, Ph.D., Advisor



The Very Rev. Ian Markham, Ph.D., Reader



Rev. E. Ross Kane, Ph.D., Reader

A special thank you is given to Joe Tartamella for his collaborative work with the church, as he represented Granville County Department of Social Services and assisted in the development of this project ministry.

For Susie, Henry, Jonah, Caroline, and Eliza – for the love, time, and space given to complete this work and earn the degree.

And for Mom and Dad (Larkin and Alice), Sherry, and all the wonderful people of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, who made this project and ministry a reality.

The Table of Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	5
Chapter One - Context and Problem	11
Chapter Two - Thesis and Prediction	37
Chapter Three - Act of Ministry	55
Chapter Four - Theological and Social Science Theory Reflection	84
Chapter Five - Analysis	123
Conclusion	136
Appendices	139
Bibliography	161

Preface

*Come dance with the west wind and touch on the mountain tops.
Sail o'er the canyons and up to the stars.
And reach for the heavens and hope for the future
and all that we can be, and not what we are.*

John Denver – “The Eagle and the Hawk”, *Aerie*, 1971

Introduction

It happened about six years ago, as I was standing in the ABC store (Alcohol Beverage Control) in Oxford, North Carolina. It was Friday, my day off and I was unshaven, wearing jeans and an old t-shirt, present in the store to purchase bourbon for a dinner party later that day. I didn't particularly want to be seen, as I was on a mission and had chores that needed to be done. However, as is usually the case, the store was packed with customers as they were preparing for the weekend. As I moved into the store making my way to the very spot I intended to go, passing through the line of people waiting at the register, all of a sudden, an African American woman pointing her finger directly at me exclaims in a loud voice before the whole store, "Pastor Jamie! It's you! How are you?" She called me out before everyone!

There I was, a local pastor present in the ABC store, standing amongst my neighbors, holding a large bottle of bourbon with my hands up as though I had been called out by the authorities. I will admit I was surprised and a little embarrassed in the moment, but I stood there and spoke with the woman, hoping everyone else would move along. She proceeded to talk to me about her presence at the shared service between St. Stephen's and St. Cyprian's, the African American Episcopal Church in town. She really enjoyed our last service and hoped that we would continue the good work. She then began to tell me all about the death of her husband and how difficult things had been in recent months and making ends meet. There was no question, but that she had been abusing alcohol and was searching for something, perhaps hope and peace. What a place to have this conversation! But then again, why not in the ABC store!

This particular store is located in the heart of the neighborhood, behind St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, serving as a potential beacon of trouble for so many. I always thought it was interesting that the county and city chose this location for such an enterprise, as it was placed on the edge of one the more challenged neighborhoods in town. Interestingly, I used to feel uncomfortable visiting the ABC store, because many of the folks in my neighborhood would inevitably be there. And the truth is many of them had no business being near alcohol. I have always been keenly aware of what my role as an ordained Episcopal priest communicates in the way of my presence and behavior. In recent years, I have become more comfortable just being authentic and letting my presence be true to who I am; and that means not worrying about what someone may think about me stepping into the ABC store. Nevertheless, there I was immersed in the neighborhood, surrounded by my neighbors who were also looking for something more. In the years to follow, I have developed friendships with some of the employees there, and have even had one man request a visit to talk with me about end of life issues.

I resonate with the folks from the neighborhood walking through the doors at the church or the ABC store, as they reach forth, crying for help in their own ways. This is the cry of the Israelites exiled in Babylon, and the Lord sends them there to learn and grow deeper into their true vocations. "The way of the cross, the journey into exile, is the beginning of new life and new hope."¹ I empathize with the people on one level, because this is me. I typically do not share my own personal struggles with those I assist, but as I have pastorally assisted hundreds of individuals with monetary issues, my wife, children

¹ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6.

and I face a similar scenario. Yes, we are their neighbors and we graciously live in a big, beautiful house owned by the church, just one block away. On the outside, from all appearances we have it all – nice cars, nice yard, toys, extras, and many blessings. Yet, like our neighbors, we find it difficult at times to pay our bills, as we are barely able to live month-to-month, hoping to make ends meet with the rise in the cost of living, supporting a large family on a small, fixed budget, and medical expenses in an increasingly expensive, out of control healthcare system.

Who am I to be giving advice to my neighbor in need? Am I any different? No, I am not. I want my neighbor to understand that I empathize with them. I know what it feels like to be in a desperate situation where at times hope seems distant, if present at all. These are the same people who see me walking through the neighborhood, patronizing the same grocery stores, popping into the ABC store on occasion; and they know me as “Pastor Jamie”, the Episcopal priest at the church on the corner who lives next door and cares about them. And yet, most of the people I serve and lead in the congregation are unaware of my details. More importantly, many have lived within and about such serious disparity among their neighbors around the church and their homes that a sort of paralysis has set-in, and reality is difficult to see and experience. Anthony Gittins prophesies in [A Presence That Disturbs](#) the fear of what could be at St. Stephen’s and its own demise if the reality of neighbor and parity are not taken to heart:

When a people no longer have the courage to undergo the pain required to choose the future over the past, then their institutions are compromised and their civilization is on its last leg... and it makes a very important point: every present generation must make a commitment to the future and to people, or risk contributing to the demise of the society of which it forms a part.²

² Anthony Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2002), 69.

In 1999, President George W. Bush delivered a major campaign speech in which he began to unveil his vision for a new approach to the war on poverty in the United States. His words began a renewed interest in the arena of faith-based work, and the value of the local faith community; its leaders and people combining efforts to work together across the fabric of society to achieve the common good. The focus of this transformative work is rooted in the simplicity of local partnerships and relationships. For it to be effective and sustainable it must begin locally – in the heart.

For many people, this other society of addiction and abandonment and stolen childhood is a distant land, another world. But it is America. And these are not strangers, they are citizens, Americans, our brothers and sisters. In their hopes, we find our duties. In their hardships, we must find our calling, to serve others, relying on the goodness of America and the boundless grace of God... In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to help people, we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives... We will rally the armies of compassion in our communities to fight a very different war against poverty and hopelessness, a daily battle waged house to house and heart by heart.³

Finally, the reality struck me even more one morning as I was walking from class to the Refectory at Virginia Seminary. I received a text message and picture from my wife and children which said, “Look, these are our new neighbors and their bus!” The picture revealed a bright yellow school bus parked in front of a house, just three lots down from us. When I called home later that day, my children told me that one-by-one, Latino farm-workers and their families stepped off the bus and entered this house, not to be seen again until early morning when the bus would pick them up for another day’s work. This is the reality of my neighborhood, these are my neighbors!

³ George W. Bush, “Duty of Hope,” speech delivered in Indianapolis, Indiana, July 22, 1999.

What do I do about this reality, and how should I live within it? So many of my neighbors frequent Social Services and come by the church seeking financial assistance. These perpetual quests result in temporary band-aids that will never fix or solve the real problems. As a Christian believer and leader of St. Stephen's Church, my heart breaks for those who feel trapped in a system of poverty; and for many of them it feels like they are drowning. How can we as a faith community help them break free? Perhaps we can attempt to live into the re-emergence of the faith-based initiatives by partnering with secular groups, such as local government and stakeholders to address the issues that jointly affect us all.

In the pages to follow, I will further outline the problem the community of Oxford and others like it face in today's society. I will present a simple thesis statement which calls for a bottom-up approach to societal restoration. I contend that by building deepening relationships with our neighbors, one-by-one, real transformation manifests itself in hearts and minds. In so doing, there is a common good which the local government, community stakeholders, and the faith community hold in trust. We are called to partner and live into this parity, seeking the welfare of all citizens. To do this work and forge the proper partnerships, there are several methods that are engaged in this particular ministry. As will be touched upon in chapter two, the partners identified overlapping areas of interest in their daily work and encounters. At the same time, some of the overlapping areas required some wrestling and engagement before agreement and action was taken. And the truth is, these conversations and relationships have been developing for a few years. In the end, the hope is that a generative spirit will be present

in this work to guide the younger generations. In supporting the thesis, I will cite numerous authors, theologians, and social science experts, so as to give an understanding of the challenges we face and the opportunities to better understand where God is present in it all.

Chapter One – Context and Problem

On the Ground in Oxford, North Carolina

It never fails, day-by-day, week-by-week, people visit the church office asking for “Pastor Jamie”. Rarely do they need to speak to me concerning spiritual matters, except for an occasional prayer if I have given them what they really want, and of course, that is money – a temporary fix or “band-aid”. Typically, the reason people are coming to see me is because they want money. It is widely known that St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church is a well-to-do Caucasian congregation, centrally located in a predominantly African American, poverty-stricken, rural town and neighborhood. Living in the midst of it all (the good, bad, and ugly), I have come to know first-hand the destructive ways of money and little understanding of the value of a dollar bill. The people are often imprisoned within a perpetual state of need, and their real problems are never addressed, let alone solved.

Matthew Jones is a thirty-something, African American who symbolizes the masses visiting the church for assistance day-in and day-out. He walks through the church office doors on the coattails of several similar visits that morning and asks me to help him pay his utility bill. He says, “It is only \$583.17.” “Now Matthew”, I said, “you know I have helped you over the years, but I can only do so much before you must help yourself. I don’t have that kind of money. Have you been to *Area Congregations in Ministry* (ACIM)?”⁴ “Yes”, he said “but they want me to take a budget class and I don’t

⁴ ACIM is the local, non-profit food bank which is supported by many congregations.

have no budget problem!" "Really", I thought to myself as he walked out the door.⁵

These folks are my neighbors and they all seem to be plagued by a persistent problem.

It never fails, week-after-week countless others flow through the church doors seeking the same help as Matthew, and my heart breaks for them on one level as they often have no place to turn except the church, or God-forbid, the street. On another level, many of the same people abuse the assistance offered in the community and seemingly never do anything to help themselves, or even simply begin by addressing the source of their problems in the first place.

In the case of Matthew, several years back his four-year-old son Emmanuel died of Leukemia. He often sought financial assistance for Emmanuel's medications. On one occasion, Matthew used poor judgment when he shop-lifted "Pepto Bismol" for Emmanuel. He was experiencing side-effects from the cancer treatment, and supposedly did not have the money to pay for it. He was caught in the act, but the store manager did not file charges. When Emmanuel died shortly thereafter, it was the most difficult thing to see; that hopeful, promising, young four-year-old lying in a small coffin. St. Stephen's and a member of the parish helped Matthew with the funeral costs.

It was heart-breaking, and one would assume this sort of personal loss, the loss of a child would work on Matthew in one of two ways - he would either get his act together to move his life forward in memory of his son, or things would spiral downward. Unfortunately, downward was the direction. Within weeks Matthew was back at my door asking for assistance, and it was not too long after that I realized he might well be a product of the very system which has imprisoned so many. He was seemingly

⁵ Matthew Jones, conversation with author, Jamie Pahl in the church office, Oxford, NC, 2010.

unmotivated to exit this horrible cycle and solve his own problems. And Matthew had an advantage; he could work and make a living unlike many individuals who truly need the assistance and are unable to help themselves. He was looking for hand-outs and band-aids, as though we and all of society owed it to him. This became evident when he received disability funding through the government, and yet, he continued asking for money.

The truth is Matthew worked a service job at the fast-food restaurant chain, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen. Just a few days into his new job, he supposedly slipped on some cooking oil that was accidentally dropped on the kitchen floor and hurt his back. He quit his job, visited a doctor, and immediately filed for disability. I know this because days after, he came to my office for assistance, explaining he could no longer work because of his injury. Just a few months later, the same pattern occurred again as he found a job at the Revlon plant, where he was to assist in the loading of cargo trucks. Just days later, he quit due to health reasons and re-applied for disability.

Matthew is still around Oxford today, trying to convince other churches and local organizations to give him financial assistance. The problem he now faces is that if he seeks a new job he will have to forego the disability; easy money, which requires little labor. To complicate matters further, Matthew is unable to pass an employer's drug test. He epitomizes the thousands upon thousands of people in both rural and urban settings who are unable to exit the vicious cycle of dependency and hopelessness. And so many of these people have children, who, unless something changes, will most likely follow their parents and remain prisoners within the same perpetual state of decline.

In his soul-searching book, Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help – And How to Reverse It, Robert Lupton poignantly frames the problem that exists in the United States, and most notably in the towns and cities across America, like Oxford, North Carolina. He says, “In the United States, there’s a growing scandal that we both refuse to see and actively perpetuate. What Americans avoid facing is that while we are very generous in charitable giving; much of that money is either wasted or actually harms the people it is targeted to help.”⁶ This scandal is understandable. Many of us want to do good deeds in the name of something holy and feel good about them and the difference we hopefully make.

Giving money is one of the easiest and non-committal actions found in charity, as it does not require a lot of “us” personally. Yet the reality is that nine times out of ten the recipients are unable to handle the power of the gift, the power found in the simple dollar bill. In other words, the use of my discretionary funds to repeatedly assist Matthew was only hurting and preventing him from moving out of the grips of lethargy and poverty. He did not have the skill to understand its proper use, and we givers increasingly fail in our proper stewardship of such funds. Lupton goes on to say,

For all our efforts to eliminate poverty – our entitlements, our programs, our charities – we have succeeded only in creating a permanent underclass, dismantling their family structures, and eroding their ethic of work. And our poor continue to become poorer... And religiously motivated charity is often the most irresponsible. Our free food and clothing distribution encourages ever-growing handout lines, diminishing the dignity of the poor while increasing their dependency... Giving to those in need what they could be gaining from their own initiative may well be the kindest way to destroy people.⁷

⁶ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help – And How to Reverse It* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, “For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish...”⁸ This is a reminder that as hard as we try, good-intentioned people will never completely eradicate poverty; but rather we can find new ways to address the symptoms that perpetuate a downward system and entrap the future lives of individuals in our communities. We live in a society today where giving a hand-out and money is the easiest and most secure way of reaching-out, and it makes us feel good. This method of charity is the safest, non-binding, and non-self-challenging action we can take because it does not require a change or movement within us. There is no need for a relationship or knowledge of the other - it is sterile. And this speaks to the two-fold problem this thesis attempts to address: the contemporary challenges found in breaking old patterns of dependency in the poor neighborhoods in towns like Oxford, and the lack of relationship-building which often obstructs individual and corporate transformation. Lupton says,

There is nothing that brings me more joy than seeing people transitioned out of poverty, or neighborhoods change from being described as “dangerous” and “blighted” to being called “thriving” and even “successful”... Americans believe that it is important to be personally involved in supporting a cause we believe in... And Americans are working hard to hand down this value to the next generation.⁹

Therefore, it is vitally important that in the context of these problems, right here in Oxford, we reach forth in a spirit of collaboration, walking alongside the other in a mutually open and sharing way; seeking to break the chains of dependency together. It all begins by simply knowing our neighbor. But it becomes more and more clear that we

⁸ NRSV, Mark 14:7.

⁹ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 1-2.

must have understanding that these problems are part of a complicated web, void of easy, straight-forward solutions.

The Holy Experience of Neighborly Immersion

In the summer of 2009, our beloved retriever-mix dog, Clifford, died of cancer. It was painful for us; especially the children. In an effort to soothe the grieving process, I set-out each morning on a slow jog through the neighborhood to clear my mind and get some exercise - the same areas we walk the dogs. Inevitably, I would find myself running through some of the poorest sections of downtown Oxford. Every morning I ran right past a dilapidated home – windows covered in clear plastic instead of glass, the foundation crumbling and supported by loose bricks, the wood-siding and deck rotting, and chairs and junk scattered across the outside of the home. A multi-generational, African American family was always gathered on the front porch sitting together.

As I passed by this home on foot each morning I would wave, and with every wave there was a morning greeting exchanged. With the passage of weeks and months, day-in and day-out, jogging past this home, the people of the residence became friendlier and we were all the more aware of the others' presence. A sort of distant relationship and bond was forming. As I dealt with the sadness of Clifford's death, I found myself discovering a new reality - these folks are my neighbors and we have a lot more in common than what the eye sees on the outside. They had no idea what I was feeling within as I passed by their home; nor did I know what they had on their hearts.

One could say this was the real beginning of my community presence and work in Oxford. Before these transformative encounters, I was akin to the thoughts of author and theologian Parker Palmer in Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation:

“I was trying to take people to a place where I had never been myself – a place called community. If I wanted to do community related work with integrity, I needed a deeper immersion in community than I had experienced to that point.”¹⁰ And Palmer goes on to affirm my own inner struggles at the time: “... we must withdraw the negative projections we make on people and situations – projections that serve mainly to mask our fears and ourselves – and acknowledge and embrace our own liabilities and limits.”¹¹

I share this new reality because this is a story about transformation; transformation in the lives of many individuals, but most importantly transformation in my life. I have become more and more aware of myself, my neighbors, my understanding of those who are seemingly different, the problems that face Oxford, my theology that informs it all, and the solutions that will work. Fast-forward eight years. I continue to traverse the neighborhoods by foot and vehicle, seeing the problems and seeking the solutions. Of the many partnerships and efforts addressing our issues, I have found passion and Christ-like compassion for the children who just like my children, have hopes and dreams of a life well-lived. Yet the walls of dependency and realization of hopelessness within their grandparents, parents, and guardians quiet the flames of promise.

My heart aches to see children who, created in the image of God just like mine, slowly and surely accept the supposed realities that have so often set-in within the hearts and minds of their parents. This reality continues to bring me closer to who I am and what I need to be in my community. I did not grow-up this way - I was privileged.

¹⁰ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

Lupton says, “For me it was fatherless boys growing up on city streets with little chance of escaping the deadly undertow. So strong was that force within me that it caused me to leave a budding business career, depart secure surroundings, and move with my family into the inner city.”¹²

On one level, it is quite natural to have contempt for the mother and father who do nothing to change their reality; especially when a child is often a casualty of such inaction. Why won't the father seek a job to help support his family? Why won't the mother seek some sort of work as well, even if it is part-time in nature, so she can be present as much as possible with her child? Too often it is the dependency upon the support and assistance of the government (food stamps, disability, hand-outs), churches, and other local agencies which prevents an individual from helping himself.

However, on another level, I hear the stories all the time and my heart breaks for the parents who are trying, but just cannot get ahead. Living, supporting, and finding hope amid despair is in fact a complicated web, where there are no easy answers and solutions. As an example, I met with Kasha at the local Boys and Girls Club (BGC) one day in early December 2016. Kasha is a thirty-something, African American woman raising her six-year-old daughter. She told me about all the difficulties and complications that she faces in transforming her life; these challenges are wide-spread among many in the Oxford community. She said,

For me personally, it's hard for me. I'm a single parent, currently not working, so – still looking but I haven't got anything yet so it's a little harder for me – I'm feeling frustrated by the divorce. I didn't want a divorce, but it came to that, so you know... I find myself being frustrated because there's a lot of things I want to buy for her, do for her that I can't do because I'm not working.¹³

¹² Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 40.

¹³ Kasha, The Boys and Girls Club (BGC), interviewed by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, December 5, 2016.

What is the solution for someone like Kasha? She had a job with Frontier Communications for thirteen years, that paid her twenty-one dollars an hour, but she was laid-off and then she went through a divorce.¹⁴ She is alone, raising her child without a job to support her. Therefore, she must rely upon the assistance of Social Services and the generosity of individuals, churches, and local agencies. On one hand, it would be easy for any of us to say to Kasha, “Get a job, any job so you can provide for yourself and your daughter”. But that is not so simple to do. Perhaps a hopeful beginning in helping herself can be found in the building of life-giving relationships that ground and anchor her in the holy purpose of living in the first place; building a relationship with someone like me – her Oxford neighbor. And just maybe we could search for solutions together.

To further highlight the seriousness of the problems and deep spinning of the web of despair the Oxford community and church face, I share with you the tragedy of Mrs. Anna Green and her family. While writing this chapter, a tragedy unfolded on my street, just doors down from me. She was my neighbor. Every day - morning, noon, and evening, Mrs. Green, a seventy-five-year-old petite, formally-dressed African American woman, walked past the rectory and the church on the way to the grocery store and local market. She would always make the three-mile, roundtrip journey on foot because she and her family did not own a vehicle. They lived at the end of my street in a dilapidated wooden structure set back in the woods. It would barely qualify as a home, rather a large shack. Mr. Green died several years ago, but she had her daughter, son, granddaughter, and son-in-law living with her. And for years, my family and I developed a distant

¹⁴ Ibid.

friendship with Mrs. Green, frequently exchanging pleasantries and recognizing the other's presence on Rectory Street.

On Sunday, May 28, 2017 at approximately 3:00 AM Mrs. Anna Green, her son, her daughter, and her granddaughter were all murdered by the son-in-law, who then doused the home with an accelerant and burned it to the ground. It was a horrible scene and situation for all the neighbors and my heart breaks, because I will no longer experience the presence of Mrs. Green walking past our home and church. But what really speaks to the problem my thesis attempts to address is the information I learned, following the deaths of Mrs. Green and her family. In a confidential conversation with Vanessa Henman, a neighbor who has known Mrs. Green for over thirty years, I learned the granddaughter had been sexually assaulted by her father when she was a minor. Vanessa is a case worker with Social Services and was instrumental in removing the granddaughter from the home, placing her in foster care until she was adopted by a family in North Carolina.

However, when the granddaughter turned eighteen she moved back into the same perpetual system of hopelessness and poverty – she moved back-in with her grandmother, uncle, mother, and father. Why would she move from a position of hope back into the grips of poverty and despair? And in this case, it led to her untimely death. Mrs. Henman stated during our conversation:

Jamie, it is so sad. I have been the lead Social Worker on their case for years. DSS and the city worked together to help them clean up their home and start fresh years ago. I can tell you this confidential information since you are a priest, but as their Social Worker I had the granddaughter removed from the home and she was eventually adopted. You know, the girl was sexually assaulted by the father and he spent time in prison. She was placed with a nice family, but just in the past year or so she chose to return to that home with her grandmother, mother, uncle,

and the father who was in and out. Jamie, why would she return to that pattern of living and despair?¹⁵

I want to know the answer to that question as well. Why would someone return to a place of hopelessness? Was it intentional, cultural, or perhaps simply a dedication to her mother, grandmother, and uncle? We may never know the answer. By the fact that she died at the hands of her father in this fire, knowing the history, this case speaks to the tragedy and encumbering web which entraps so many of the younger generations in poverty and all the trappings that surround it.

There is no question of the importance in hearing and knowing the individual – “on the ground stories”. This is what sheds light on the real problems, and at the same time is integral to the process of transformation, because the Lord of Life is present in them all. But perhaps we should also have a clearer picture of the problems as a whole, and what we are addressing in these sorts of behaviors in order to have a better understanding from a broader view. As Richard Osmer says in his book, Practical

Theology:

The concept of the web of life extends... insights and proves helpful to our understanding of practical theological interpretation... it reminds us that focusing exclusively on individuals is too limited. We must think in terms of interconnections, relationships, and systems... the web of life in which ministry takes place.¹⁶

Robert Lupton makes a good point in how we compassionately respond and its motivation. "Compassion is a dangerous thing. It can open a person to all manner of risks. It causes reasonable people to make extravagant heart decisions... Compassion is a

¹⁵ Vanessa Henman, Neighbor and Case Worker for DSS, interviewed by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, May 28, 2017.

¹⁶ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 17.

powerful force, a stamp of the divine nature within our spirits."¹⁷ And these risks are taken, and consequences happen all too often in how the Church responds and reacts to the realities of the poverty and need that surrounds us. It is a call and reminder for prudence and perhaps parity in how we choose to respond to the heart-breaking, tragic realities we live through with our neighbors.

One of the risks that so often manifests itself is in the inequality of the “power relationship”. This certainly is a risk we are taking in Oxford in how we respond to those in need. The last thing this community needs is another church group or organization offering hand-outs and programs to solve issues. Too often the giver unintentionally establishes an unhealthy position of power which can ultimately diminish the worth of the receiver. This power differential can work against real change and transformation in a person's life, as they can be held back from seeing new realities and possibilities; and it too often establishes dependency. The truth is parity is real charity.

Harnessing the power of compassion, we must work to build mutual relationships that promote equal opportunity. Lupton calls this "holistic compassion":

For three decades now I have experimented, both in the living laboratory of my urban community and in Third-World settings, with methods to minimize the toxins and foster health in relationships between the haves and have-lesses. It is delicate work, I have found, establishing authentic parity between people of unequal power. But relationships built on reciprocal exchange (what I call holistic compassion) make this possible... there is equity of power. And parity is the higher form of charity.¹⁸

Or as he correctly states, the very risk and problem our compassion faces, "... I observed, too, how quickly recipients' response to charity devolved from gratitude to expectation to

¹⁷ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

entitlement... Doing *for* rather than doing *with* those in need is the norm. Add to it the combination of patronizing pity and unintended superiority, and charity becomes toxic."¹⁹

To further stretch the risks our generosity presents when addressing the problems of poverty, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo attempt to break-down the challenges we face, in what may at times seem impossible to solve. In Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty they say,

Our first instinct is to be generous, especially when facing an imperiled seven-year-old girl... our second thought is often that there is really no point: Our contribution would be a drop in the bucket, and the bucket probably leaks... think again... away from the feeling that the fight against poverty is too overwhelming, and to start to think of the challenge as a set of concrete problems that, once properly identified and understood, can be solved one at a time.²⁰

However, Banerjee and Duflo soften the sharper edges of Lupton's views that can rub some people the wrong way. There are many situations where "poverty traps" are unavoidable and the "doing for" - direct charity - is required. They ask important questions: "Do they [the poor] just live like everyone else, except with less money, or is there something fundamentally different about life under extreme poverty? And if it is something special, is it something that could keep the poor trapped in poverty?"²¹ I believe the latter is true for some in Oxford, and many other towns and cities like it in America.

It is clear that no one program or plan is going to be the effective answer. We must be open to new ways, because it is possible to envision a city, nation, and world more united against poverty, living into true parity. As Banerjee and Duflo say, "... the

¹⁹ Ibid., 34-35.

²⁰ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (New York, New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 2-3.

²¹ Ibid., 8-9.

best anyone can do is to understand deeply the specific problems that afflict the poor and to try to identify the most effective ways to intervene... It is the body of knowledge that grows out of each specific answer and the understanding that goes into those answers that give us the best shot at, one day, ending poverty.”²² Despite the diverse opinions and answers given when looking at the problems in our particular contexts, there is never one simple, straight-forward answer that works. There are too many spokes in the wheel; and to begin to unravel it we must immerse ourselves locally, fostering one relationship at a time.

Oxford Demographics, Dilemmas, and Hopes

I am the Rector of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, and my family and I reside in the church rectory one block away. The neighborhood surrounding the church and rectory is perpetually mired in a declining socio-economic state. As a resident of the neighborhood, I know first-hand the reality of the issues facing many, and I experience them myself. As previously stated, there are families and individuals from the neighborhood who stop by the church seeking financial assistance for utility bills, often exceeding three hundred dollars. It is painfully clear that they have serious living issues, and their priorities are misaligned; often due to internal and external variables. Most of my parishioners are affluent. Whether they live nearby, on the other side of town, or on the outskirts of the county away from the reality of the neighborhood and its continued decline, many choose to ignore the dilemma.

²² Ibid., 15.

Oxford, North Carolina is a historic, rural town, just north of Raleigh/Durham. As of 2016, the population within a three-mile radius of the church was 10,671.²³ Serving as the seat of Granville County since 1811, Oxford played an important part in the tobacco industry. In recent decades, the town and county have seen a steady increase in the poverty rate among all ethnic identities; but especially among the African American community. And unfortunately, Oxford has a storied past concerning racial unrest.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church was established in 1823, and is located in the historic district of Oxford. A pastoral-sized congregation with an average Sunday attendance (ASA) of ninety, St. Stephen's is a predominantly White/Caucasian church, located in what over decades has become a majority African American community.

In taking a closer look at the 2016 census information as revealed in *The New ExecutiveInsite Report*, a three-mile radius around St. Stephen's reveals some interesting data and projections.²⁴ According to the report, in 2015 fifty-one percent of the population were Black/African Americans, forty-one percent constituted the White/Caucasian population, with only six percent Hispanic/Latino, one percent Asian, and two percent all others. In an eleven-year projection, from 2010 to 2021, the Black/African American population is expected to decrease slightly by 0.99 percent, the White/Caucasian population is expected to increase slightly by 0.98 percent, and the Hispanic/Latino population is expected to minimally increase by 0.12 percent.²⁵ All other

²³ "The New ExecutiveInsite Report", US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite, August 16, 2016, accessed May 18, 2017, <http://pr.dfms.org/study/StaticPDFs/7/7854-6587.pdf>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

populations would either decrease or represent no change. These projections point toward stability - a status quo in this little city.

A major concern is the declining state of education among our children, as it relates to their home environment. Based on official school by school progress reports and demographics released in 2013 by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education, students attending schools in the three-mile radius of St. Stephen's are well below state averages. Many are not reading at grade level. This information is highlighted by the fact that African American and Hispanic students across elementary, middle, and high school are performing at a slightly lower percentage than all other ethnic groups in comparison with state averages.

However, to highlight the problem across all ethnicities, the average of the five public schools within the three-mile radius of St. Stephen's is 18.5 percent below the state average.²⁶ All of this said, the '2013 Poverty Rate Data' provides startling statistics, which serve as an indicator of the negative trend directly affecting the potential progress and success of our youth and their families within the three-mile radius.²⁷ In the community around the church, the percentage of children living below the poverty level is ten percent higher than the state average.²⁸

Understanding the problems and societal decline that faces Oxford and many towns like ours, we have a choice to make. We can choose to engage and partner with the

²⁶ "Education First – NC School Report Cards", State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, 2012-2013 School year, accessed April 14, 2016, <http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/search.jsp?pYear=2012-2013&pList=1&pListVal=390%3AGranville+County+Schools>

²⁷ "Oxford North Carolina (NC) Poverty Rate Data", Advameg, Inc., 2016, accessed April 14, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Oxford-North-Carolina.html>

²⁸ Children below poverty level: 34.4 percent in Oxford and 24.9 percent state average, accessed April 14, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Oxford-North-Carolina.html>

community to address the issues that affect us all, or we can turn a blind-eye to the children and their parents like, so many have and continue to do. St. Stephen's is a community-focused congregation, and therefore, we have no choice but to assist in the transformation of our surrounding community. We have a Christian mandate to transform our proverbial “backyard”, and to assist the younger generations by helping their parents and guardians discover sustainable ways to exit the perpetual trap of decline and stagnation. And perhaps, because of our action, the wider faith community will join us and partner with local government and stakeholders as transformation agents for improving home environments for the children and families in our community.

Many of St. Stephen’s parishioners live in Oxford proper, within the reach of the historic district. Two of the main avenues that run through town are College and Main Streets. Both are historic in the sense that they have been main passage-ways since the early nineteenth century. Large and beautiful historic homes line both streets, and many of them have been kept to period. If a visitor happens to drive down the streets and see only these homes, they would perhaps think they have stepped back in time, a slice of "Mayberry" and southern charm – the old south. And yet, for many residents, just behind their homes, measuring no more than one lot (and this includes the St. Stephen’s Rectory) are crumbling, unattended homes. These are much smaller and in all shapes and sizes. In some cases, you have beautiful mansions with dilapidated structures buttressing their backyards - citizens sitting on their back-decks peering into yards filled with junk, clothes hanging on the line, and other indications of poverty.

Once, my family and I held a yard-sale in the driveway of the rectory, and many folks from the neighborhood paid a visit. A man living down the street, just a block from

the rectory, purchased an old television from us. I agreed to personally deliver it, and I was dumbfounded at the living conditions within his home as I carried the television inside. The interior was small, filthy, and falling apart. I remember thinking to myself this is “third-world living” and how could someone live in these conditions. And it struck me that just one long block away, I lived on the corner of College and Rectory Streets in a spacious, well-maintained home, along with other citizens of Oxford and members of the church. Most of the people living in the neighborhood backing up to College and Main Streets are African American, and many of them are poor. Just like Mrs. Anna Green, they walk past church members’ homes every day, often crossing paths on the sidewalks and in the grocery stores. Many St. Stephen’s parishioners live on the edge of the historic district in homogenous neighborhoods protected by trees and nature. Often, it is not until they step into the grocery store or walk downtown where they cross paths with their “other neighbors”.

One of my parishioners lives on Raleigh Street, which is also lined with beautiful homes; but they quickly regress into the poverty-stricken nature I am describing. Violence and drugs are ever present there. Recently, his awareness was raised again due to a murder just one block from his home. And it is in these devastated neighborhoods, lined with the veneer of beautiful, historic mansions, where a good number of the citizens of Oxford-proper live - and where a majority of the BGC children reside. When living amongst these conditions for so long, it is perhaps too easy to become comfortable with the way things are, and not see the realities that are glaring before the eyes. And yet, in the midst of it all, right there on College Street sits the beautiful, historic St. Stephen’s sanctuary.

Considering our Christian calling and the condition of our location, St. Stephen's and its parishioners can engage and assist in the transformation of the surrounding community. This can simply be done by building relationships with our neighbors, partnering with local agencies, stakeholders, and government that are already attempting to help. Ironically, this is the work of the Church as it first unfolded in its early days and ingratiated itself into the fabric of the Roman Empire; transforming lives – even their own.

In many ways, society has lost sight of the Church's role and power in a community and nation. What is it that the Church, the faith community of Oxford can offer to the wider population of the town? What commodity do we possess that will positively address the myriad of social issues that plague us? The faith-based author and researcher, Lew Daly shares the words of H.K. Carroll, who gathered religious information for the 1890 census. Carroll's words speak to the value and commodity the faith community brings to the table in addressing social issues:

It is devoted to the temporal and eternal interests of mankind. Every cornerstone it lays, it lays for humanity; every temple it opens, it opens to the world; every altar it establishes, it establishes for the salvation of souls. Its spires are fingers pointing heavenward; its ministers are messengers of good tidings, ambassadors of hope, and angels of mercy. What is there among men to compare with the church in its power to educate, elevate, and civilize mankind.²⁹

The Church and its faithful bring hope of a new day, a new reality that is found in our Lord Jesus Christ. As I listed in the Preface of this Thesis, the words of the singer/songwriter, John Denver have supported my vision and approach for this work, as they speak to this reality and to the commodity of hope and engagement the faith

²⁹ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 32.

community brings to towns and cities like Oxford: “*Come dance with the west wind and touch on the mountain tops. Sail o'er the canyons and up to the stars. And reach for the heavens and hope for the future and all that we can be, and not what we are.*”³⁰ In other words, we are so much more than we are, and the hopeful, eternal hearts of the faithful want to leave a lasting legacy of promise. And as I quoted earlier, Robert Lupton believes based on his research: “... Americans are working hard to hand down this value to the next generation.”³¹

New Partnerships in Response to our Problems

The Church was unable to be the sole savior of social-ills in its early days in the Roman Empire, and the Church is unable to do it all even this day. And yet, governments and secular social programs have been unable to solve these same ills throughout the history of the world. But together the government and the faith community present great possibilities in addressing our problems. In an article called *Orphan Care in the Early Church – A Heritage to Recapture*, written by Joanie Gruber, MSW for the North American Association of Christians in Social Work, she says:

Christians worked against infanticide by prohibiting its members from practicing it, voicing their moral view on infanticide to the pagan world, by providing for the relief of the poor, and actually taking in and supporting babies which had been left to die by exposure by their pagan parents. Later, hospitals specifically for orphans and poor children were built by Christians such as St. Ephraem, St. Basil, and St. John Chrysostom.³²

³⁰ John Denver, *Aerie: The Eagle and the Hawk* (Greenwich Village, Manhattan: Cherry Lane Music, 1971).

³¹ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 2.

³² Joanie Gruber, “Orphan Care in the Early Church – A Heritage to Recapture”, *North American Association of Christians in Social Work*, accessed June 25, 2017, <http://www.nacsw.org/Publications/Proceedings2011/GruberJOrphanCareE.pdf>

The early Christians were motivated to save infants because of a certain moral compass by which they operated. The Church promoted personal and corporate responsibility, which was not often found within the corpus of the state, and especially not as a driving motivation.³³ In addition, early Christians were not motivated by the law of humans, rather the loving mandate of the Creator God. The more they cared for the poor children and adults openly in the public, the more the state took notice. Gruber says,

Being pro-life is more than being anti-abortion. As Christians, we worship and serve a God to whom people are uniquely and individually important. First and second century Christians recognized that just as God showed mercy by adopting US into His family, they were responsible to adopt those who were orphaned. Christian social workers in the 21st century have numerous opportunities to apply this truth to the defenseless parentless children today.³⁴

What are the limitations of the Church today in acting alone to address our problems? We know by way of example that the Church has influenced the government to some degree on all levels (local and federal). In fact, this influence has in the past positively affected the state in its outreach, and certainly the Church has offered an exemplary role in keeping the state in-check with the moral compass grounded in the God of creation. D.A. Carson sheds light on the sphere of influence and interconnectedness between the Church and the state, as he revisits Richard Niebuhr's writings in Christ & Culture Revisited. He says,

We human beings have a dismal propensity to corrupt good things, all good things... we persist in our ability to corrupt unity and to prostitute diversity, the same unity and diversity often portrayed as 'good' things... In short, from a Christian perspective, one must say that culture, like every other facet of the creation, stands under the judgment of God... and thus the Christ they claim to represent, are unavoidably part of the culture.³⁵

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ D.A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 74-75.

God sits in judgment over it all. The efforts of government are held within broken, sinful human hands, and inevitably fail. And the state needs the faith community to remind it of true sovereignty. Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo wisely speak to the fallen nature of government. They say, “Part of the problem is that even when governments are well intentioned, what they are trying to do is fundamentally difficult. Governments exist to a large extent to solve problems that markets cannot solve... government intervention is necessary precisely when, for some reason, the free market cannot do the job.”³⁶ They go on to say that in the context of two observations we see critical implications for the role of government. First, it is very difficult to measure and assess the performance and success of government efforts, and secondly, corruption and neglect are ever present.³⁷ This further explains the need for accountability to address the failings, and partnership to get the work done and measure the results. The community of faith is poised in these efforts, and has a successful history in doing such work in partnership. And the citizens of our communities can and will discover the value, presence, and advocacy that the faith community offers in a unique way.

Carson argues that Christians are a part of this culture, and yet, distinguishable from it.³⁸ Either way, both influence the other, and the Church needs the state because we are all broken and redeemable at the same time. Carson says, “... Christians are busy serving as salt in a corrupt world, as light in a dark world. Like the exiles in Jeremiah’s day (Jeremiah 29:1-7), Christians learn to do good in the city where they live, knowing

³⁶ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, 255.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

³⁸ D.A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 75.

full well that the prosperity of their city is both for the city's good and for their good.”³⁹ Perhaps the limitations of the Church in our time are found in the decreasing value of a holy truth in culture? And yet, the Church is called to continue its efforts to expose secular culture to the immeasurable and mighty power we discover in our unity and quest for the common good.

Through the lenses of DSS and its role within the local Oxford government, the citizenry has suffered for the abundance of top-down programs. In 2016, I participated in a community round-table discussion with the Mayor, Jackie Sergent and other public officials and business owners. During this gathering I announced the Parents' Night program and St. Stephen's partnership with Social Services and the Boys and Girls Club. Mayor Sergent expressed concern over what she perceived to be another program for which hundreds exist through the local governmental departments and churches. When she understood what we were attempting to do she became excited and showed great support for our efforts. She knew this was not a program we were offering, rather a relationship. We were offering our hearts, not beaurocracy; and this was a place of commonality in which local officials could join us.

In a real sense, and on a macro-level, this is a mutual relationship where parity must exist, and the walls of power differentials fall - where we each offer and share in unison our unique gifts and talents; and together we see “... *hope for the future and all that we can be, and not what we are*”.⁴⁰ This is the same parity we strive for on the micro level in relationship-building. Lew Daly shares the words of E. Theodore Bachmann in

³⁹ Ibid., 151-152.

⁴⁰ John Denver, *Aerie: The Eagle and the Hawk*, 1971.

which he writes about the condition of church-state relations in regard to social welfare in 1955:

Within the past decades there has been growing concern on the part of many churchmen, clergy and laity alike, that the increasing secularization of welfare services... has just about left religion out. Therefore, there are denominational leaders... who feel that the time may have arrived when the church, which was the originator of most modern social work, must reassert itself, and reclaim some of the ground it has lost.⁴¹

In recent years, we have seen a sort of return to parity among the Church and state under the leadership of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama. Due to the importance of the work, President Bush called for a permanent extension to the Charitable Choice Act and his Executive Office of Faith-based Initiatives in his final State of the Union Address in 2008.

In communities across our land, we must trust in the good heart of the American people and empower them to serve their neighbors in need. Over the past seven years, more of our fellow citizens have discovered that the pursuit of happiness leads to the path of service... Faith-based groups are bringing hope to pockets of despair, with newfound support from the federal government...⁴²

Leading up to his election as the next President of the United States, Barack Obama stated during a “Compassion Forum” on April 13, 2008 that he wanted to keep the Office of Faith-based Initiatives, especially for the purpose of targeting issues around poverty and assisting our neighbors.⁴³

In the case of Matthew, Emmanuel, Kasha, Mrs. Anna Green and her family, and many others I genuinely call neighbors, the presence and commodity of the church and faith community can be extremely valuable. Based on all my information and interactions

⁴¹ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 40.

⁴² George W. Bush, “Final State of the Union Address,” speech delivered in Washington, DC, January 28, 2008.

⁴³ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 65.

with these neighbors, most of them are not regular church-goers, and the presence of a faith community in their lives is somewhat none existent. I believe that from the very grassroots level, the faithful can make a huge impact; even if it is one person at a time. And perhaps it is through a partnership with the “state” that we can focus on the macro-view of our problems; the overarching ills that are plaguing our neighbors.

However, at the same time, the effective work of change begins incrementally; working upward. We cannot continue to fall into the trap of only seeing the neighborhood as the system in which we focus on problem-solving; rather, we should begin with the individual, our neighbor – this is where change begins. In the end, it is supportive and uplifting for the federal and state levels of our government to recognize the value and commodity of the faith community and the issues we can address together. Ultimately, it is the one-on-one interaction and relationship that makes all the difference! As Lewis Solomon states in his book, *In God We Trust?*:

Work, family, and community exist in fragmented forms. With unemployment rampant and sound education only a dream, the children of these communities find themselves unable to escape the poverty and hopelessness that plague their parents. The result is a generation of inner-city children raised on distrust, indifference, and isolation... The goal is to create what have been described as ‘little platoons,’ comprised of private charities (including FBOs), civic associations, and neighborhood groups, that aim to improve civil society one person and one family at a time.⁴⁴

Solomon hits the nail on the head as he acknowledges how this change must effectively work, and the important agent that must be present in it all, to address the problems at hand. First, it requires one-on-one interaction, grassroots - “getting to know

⁴⁴ Lewis D. Solomon. *In God We Trust?: Faith-Based Organizations and the Quest to Solve America's Social Ills* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), 1-3.

your neighbor” kind of work, where true relationships blossom. And secondly, the presence of faith, as it gives hope where there is none. Solomon says,

We must address the damage one brings about one’s actions, for it is these actions that, among other outcomes, keep people mired in hopelessness and despair... Faith helps endow life with meaning and purpose; it aids in overcoming the grip of nihilism and helplessness, offers hope for the future, and brings a new sense of self-worth.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

Chapter Two – Thesis and Prediction

The Church's position in society is changing before our eyes, as its place of priority among the populous has steadily declined in recent years. Luke Bertherton, Professor of Theological Ethics and Senior Fellow of the Kenan Institute of Ethics at Duke University, says in his book, Christianity and Contemporary Politics:

...the Israelites were to learn obedience through pursuing the welfare of Babylon and through forming a common life with pagans and oppressors... In many ways, that is the situation of Christians today: the church no longer has priority and Christians are not in control. The salience of Jeremiah 29 is its call to become part of the public life of the city and to reject the false prophets who perpetuate illusions of escape into a private world of gated communities, religious fantasies centered on Christ's immanent return, or daydreams of revolution.⁴⁶

Bertherton speaks about the challenging place the Church and faith community⁴⁷ finds itself in society today. He defends his thesis through the words of Saint Augustine's The City of God Against the Pagans, in which Christians are called to live in the peace of Babylon, bound to the earthly city; while at the same time awaiting the new Jerusalem. In book nineteen, chapter twenty-seven of Augustine's writings he speaks about the peace the Christian possesses, and the commodity it presents to the Christian residing in the earthly city:

That peace which is our peculiar possession, however, is ours even now, with God by faith; and we shall enjoy it eternally with Him by sight. But the peace which we have here, whether shared with other men or peculiar to ourselves, is only a

⁴⁶ Luke Bertherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 5.

⁴⁷ It is important to note that Bertherton makes the case in Christianity and Contemporary Politics, that wherever discussion occurs around the relationship of the secular and religious spheres, we should avoid the "vogue... term faith community". I certainly understand his rationale regarding what the term communicates. He believes the terms "faith community" and "faith-based organizations (FBOs)" delineate a specific, exclusionary message to other religious traditions. While I understand the underlying premise is to avoid stigmatizing or labeling certain religious communities within a larger, inter-religious society, I also believe the location and demographics of a particular community play a major role in the language we use. Therefore, I consistently use the terms "faith community" and "faith-based organizations (FBOs)" throughout the chapters of this thesis, as it accurately portrays both the religious and secular community about whom I write, and the partnerships that have emerged.

solace for our wretchedness rather than the joy of blessedness. Our righteousness also, though true righteousness insofar as it is directed towards a good end, is in this life such that it consists only in the remission of sin rather than in the perfection of virtue. This is borne out by the prayer of the whole City of God during its pilgrimage on earth; for it cries out to God with the voice of all its members: ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.’⁴⁸

In other words, we are a part of the earthly city in which we live - we are bound to it - we have a responsibility to it, while we wait for the good which we pray will come. Yet as Christians, we have that foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem, and we know of a “peculiar possession” in God’s peace, which sets us apart. This peace should reign within us as an example to the corruption of the earthly city. In our common pursuits, we have no choice but to live faithfully, seeking common ground. Christ himself said in response to the Pharisee’s obedience and loyalty question, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s”.⁴⁹ A further discussion of Augustinian thought about the temporary residency in the earthly city will follow in chapter four.

Unfortunately, today the growing trend in society is for individuals and groups to seclude themselves in protected environments - the various circles and spheres in which they live and move. These are spaces where they are not exposed to or presented with the challenges of encountering that which may, by all appearances, seem different on the outside. The New York Times Op-Ed Columnist, David Brooks speaks to this brand of isolationism in his review of a book called The Benedictine Option, written by his friend Rod Dreher. Brooks states,

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, Translated and Edited by R.W. Dyson, 1998), Book XIX, Chapter 27, 962.

⁴⁹ NRSV, Matthew 22:21.

Rod says it's futile to keep fighting the culture war, because it's over. Instead believers should follow the model of the sixth-century monk St. Benedict, who set up separate religious communities... The heroes of Rod's book are almost all monks. Christians should withdraw inward to deepen, purify and preserve their faith, he says. They should secede from mainstream culture, pull their children from public school, put down roots in separate communities.⁵⁰

The ideology of a purist community, where self-preservation upholds the "supposed" orthodoxy of few is misguided to say the least. There is beauty and revelation found in the encounter of the other. Jesus revealed this reality to us.

Ironically, the Church may well be one of the premier places this avoidance occurs. Church members sit in their pews, within the comforting confines of the Sanctuary, challenged by the words, thoughts, and visions of the God they follow, the Lord Jesus Christ, who walked alongside the other and those who were despised in society. It is a lovely thought for those in the pews when thinking upon it - Jesus living out his words in action. But what about us - are we not to do the same in following this God? It is important to note that Richard Niebuhr presents many options regarding the role of the Church in culture, and withdrawal is simply one.⁵¹

However, aside from the intentional exclusionary views of some Christians and the unintentional approach by some who sit in the pews, there are a few unlikely renowned figures in the Christian faith who seriously question this engagement and backyard community relationship-building. The theologian and author, Stanley Hauerwas and the late Pope, St. John Paul II, have both written and spoken extensively about their belief that the Church should rarely, if ever, partner with the state and civil society. This unwavering view from both, but especially Hauerwas is rooted in the belief that if the

⁵⁰ David Brooks, "The Benedictine Option", *The New York Times*, accessed April 4, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/opinion/the-benedict-option.html>.

⁵¹ D.A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*, 9.

faith community partners with government, the powers of the state will corrupt the mission and presence of what is good and holy in the body of Christ. I disagree and will further explain why these exclusionary beliefs do nothing to build the Church and serve the common good; but rather, avoid engagement with the earthly city and its principalities. These views are certainly at odds with Augustine's belief that the citizens of the City of God should be living and working with the earthly city for a common peace and good, while residing in Babylon. For Augustine, even the most ardent citizen of the eternal city will experience a degree of corruption – that is the state of things and a known risk.⁵² According to Bretherton, and in line with Augustine, this partnership between the two cities must first identify a common love, and not simply a common good. He says, "Thus, over and above coexisting in time, they share mutual space. The question then arises as to whether this mutual ground allows for any common objects of love and thus a common life."⁵³ In chapter four, I will further engage this exclusionary stance.

Bretherton goes on to speak about new possibilities in the ways we as the faith community and other important civic organizations view our challenges:

...what is occurring is the emergence of new forms of political participation and ways of acting together for the common good, ways that are more appropriate to contemporary political problems and patterns of life... churches are key catalysts and sponsors of emergent forms of political associations... it directly relates to the conditions and possibilities of Christian witness amid the earthly city.⁵⁴

Though the institutional Church seemingly continues the failing battle for its relevance and priority in our time, the call of Jesus Christ to serve the poor and downtrodden in the

⁵² Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 84.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

name of the faithful is by no means irrelevant; in fact, the need is perhaps greater than ever. And yes, we are to follow Jesus by living out his words through action. This thesis demonstrates that there are resources and partnerships that the faith community can foster, live into, and utilize in order to fulfill the mandate of the Gospel: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”⁵⁵ And most important to this thesis, is “loving your neighbor”. In chapter four, I will expand a little more on the theological nature of Augustine’s appeal for Christians to work for the common good in this earthly city and how the two cities are constituted differently. The City of God is built around the love of God, while the earthly city is built around the love of self. These two different understandings of love speak to the forthcoming thesis statement and the call to love our neighbors.

As stated in the previous chapter, the social and spiritual problems facing the Oxford community, St. Stephen’s, and its neighbors are real, serious, and expanding. The government, local agencies, and non-profits cannot address the community’s socio-economic issues alone. The faith community, in partnership with these local community stakeholders, offers a powerful proposition. Through collaboration, the faith community, the government, and local stakeholders can work together to address the myriad of issues that plague community backyards in towns and cities like Oxford across the nation; and substantively engage the eroding state of education, health, and the poverty level of our neighbors, one person at a time. Michael Owens, a political science professor at Emory University and author of God and Government in the Ghetto says:

⁵⁵ NRSV, Luke 10:27.

...political scholarship on church-state partnerships focuses too much on the national government... Yet implementation of the partnerships, and the realpolitik of them, often happens at the street level in cities... Collaboration, especially when it involves governmental and nongovernmental organizations, is a relationship of two or more actors working together to mutually achieve goals unlikely to be realized save for collective action... achieving it is greater if they act together than alone.⁵⁶

Thesis Statement and the Foundational Work of Transformation

To this end, my thesis simply contends that by building a relationship in a faith-based setting with the adults and their families of the declining neighborhood around St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, real transformation will blossom. This transformation is understood as the way we come to know and relate to our neighbors around the church; a deeper sense of one's own value as it relates to the other. Real transformation in this understanding is a foretaste of the heavenly city – an intersection of peace and hope which brings people together. In partnership with *The Granville County Department of Social Services* (DSS) and the *Boys and Girls Club of Granville County* (BGC), we can offer and share-in practical resources and avenues of hope and change on a sustained level. These resources will be offered and explored through the Parents' Night program at the BGC. The fostering of deepening relationships in this context will be at the core of this transformation. If successful, this faith-based partnership model could be transportable to other congregations and communities in the larger, ecumenical arena.

It is true that in recent years, faith-based partnerships have successfully taken place within the confines of large, depressed inner cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, and New York. But rarely do we hear of these unique partnerships taking place in small

⁵⁶ Michael Owens, *God and Government in the Ghetto: The Politics of Church-State Collaboration in Black America* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 5-8.

towns and cities, where socio-economic issues persist all the same. In Oxford, North Carolina, St. Stephen's is attempting to address the challenges of our community backyard. Bretherton's words support the core of my thesis, in that the loss of the community and social engagement in our society, with the continued emphasis on individualism has led to unhealthy patterns and continued deprivation in our communities. He says,

...mass membership organizations, from trade unions and political parties to scouts and churches, socialize members into being more civic-minded and more oriented toward cooperation, trust, and reciprocity... Hence, it is argued, a decline in forms of civic and voluntary association affects the health of civic society, the stability of liberal democracies, and the ability to address intractable social problems such as urban deprivation... In turn this leads to what Ulrich Beck calls "sub-politics." Sub-politics is the de facto shaping and organization of political and social life by agents and organizations outside any formal political-administrative systems... "the shaping of society from below."⁵⁷

However, in many ways, the often culturally espoused differences in society between social theory and theology are arbitrary and disingenuous, just like the often-misunderstood connections between science and religion. The truth is theology and social theory inform each other, as they address the same issues, but from a different perspective. DSS, the BGC, and the church want similar results in Oxford. We are working toward a common goal, despite our distinct differences; hence, there is no reason why we should not work together and tackle common issues. Of course, the Church is centered on the Kingdom of God, temporarily residing in the earthly city, but very much a part of it. Perhaps the Church's motivation in this common partnership is ultimately oneness and unity in the God who created all that is seen and unseen in God's image. DSS and the BGC are perhaps motivated by a success and outcome that is measured in a

⁵⁷ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 7-8.

one-dimensional way according to the earthly city. Nonetheless, the common issues bring us together as we collectively combine our motivations for the greater good. The Church's reframing of social theory allows us to consider ways in which we can address the issue as spiritual in nature, recognizing that we offer something unique. Theologian and author, Richard Osmer speaks to the uniqueness in what the faith community offers in his book, Practical Theology:

In recent decades discussion of the spirituality of presence has been wide-spread and has moved in a number of directions. Here it describes a spiritual orientation of attending to others in their particularity and otherness within the presence of God... Such attending opens up the possibility of an I-Thou relationship in which others are known and encountered in all their uniqueness and otherness, a quality of relationship that ultimately depends on the communion-creating presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

St. Stephen's has the opportunity to be a good steward of its community, and to play an active, transformative role, which will hopefully lead to a brighter future for all generations. But the core focus in this transformational work is grounded in the building of relationships with our neighbors – making a space for the “communion-creating presence of the Holy Spirit”.⁵⁹ In the following chapters there are places where this work comes to life within the hearts of participants and me. It is most notably revealed in the interviews and focus groups. Certainly, there is much work needed in the building of a deeper relationship, but the creation of a space and place for the relationships to begin has been established.

For too long the faith community has simply focused on offering handouts and assistance. This action does not solve the problems we face. We must recognize that it all

⁵⁸ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 33-34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

begins with and centers on relationship – the kind of relationships Jesus fostered; walking with and loving our neighbor – putting into action the Christian mandate, not band-aids and handouts. I am convinced from my work and experience on the ground in this community, the church and its people can actively assist in transforming the neighborhood and itself in the process through its cooperation and participation with other faith and secular institutions. St. Stephen’s and the local government cannot do this work alone. In working together, all partners in this faith-based effort have an opportunity for real metamorphosis; from ground level up, not only for the neighbors they build relationships with, but within themselves as well. And this may just be the underlying beauty of this work – the transformation that will occur in the lives of those walking alongside their previously unknown neighbor.

However, in his book review, David Brooks further highlights the dangers and realities which challenge many faith communities: “By retreating to neat homogeneous monocultures, most separatists will end up doing what all self-segregationists do, fostering narrowness, prejudice and moral arrogance. They will close off the dynamic creativity of a living faith.”⁶⁰ Through the messy act of engagement with the world as it is, the faith community can engender buy-in and initiative among its members to participate in the challenging work of building relationships and avoiding this “narrowness”. In the process, we assist in the creation of a sustainable approach to a more hopeful future for adults and children. In other words, this is the active role of the faith

⁶⁰ David Brooks, “The Benedictine Option”, *The New York Times*, accessed April 4, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/opinion/the-benedict-option.html>.

community living its part in Babylon, promoting betterment, development, and hope; advocating true peace, as we faithfully look toward things eternal. Bretherton says,

The allegorical contrast between Jerusalem and Babylon is of course a central theme not only in Augustine but also in the Bible... Revelation does not counsel Christians to leave Babylon but to be faithful witnesses – martyrs – within Babylon so that all peoples might come to acknowledge and worship God... Babylon – a strange, sinful, and evil place directed away from the love of God – but a place that nevertheless, Christians, for the moment, are called to serve God within and enjoy its peace.⁶¹

The goal then, is to demonstrate that in working together in Babylon, our small efforts will create real, substantive transformation among the community and all involved; and offer to those interested, a pathway out of the perpetuated system that has too often become a hindrance. Willis Jenkins, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia speaks to the social problems of Babylon that we encounter in our neighborhoods, and how we theologically engage them. In his book, The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity, Jenkins incites the Kingdom of God and our quest for the common good:

Christian social ethics emerged as a distinct field in the late nineteenth century in response to “the social problem”... Economic dislocation, class conflict, and urban poverty... Another criticism interpreted conflicts between labor and capital within an account of the Kingdom of God. By making the social problem a theological problem, Christian ethics made society a subject of God’s concern for justice. So Christian ethics helped invent “social justice” – an adaptation that extended the competency of justice to industrial forms of relation.⁶²

As Christians and community investors, we are morally obligated to assist in changing these declining conditions. It is the mandate of Christ that we love one another, and especially our neighbors. Jesus was always moving among the poor and

⁶¹ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 5.

⁶² Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 69-70.

downtrodden. We are the body of Christ called to go into the world and make change. And as a result, St. Stephen's will hopefully encourage a sustained ecumenical effort in the community. But more than anything, our presence and work in Babylon will serve as a hopeful Christian witness. Jenkins summarizes the work of the faithful in Babylon through its ethical social roots as we now understand them in our age. He says, "A century later, the task of Christian social ethics remains constant: to discover vital expressions of Christian life that meet the needs of societies imperiled by their own powers."⁶³ This is the Kingdom of God residing in the earthly city, seeking the hope and betterment that is ours.

Engaging the Moment Together on Equal Footing

One of the major difficulties to overcome in the execution of a faith-based program like "Parents' Night" is the local mentality that the Church, DSS, and the BGC are offering yet another free hand-out. The challenge is encouraging the attendees to view this program as an opportunity to help themselves and their children. This is not a one-stop-shop, rather a commitment – it involves facilitators, leaders, and participants of the program building relationships with the parents and guardians - walking alongside one another. We are building relationships and fostering hope that neighbors and institutions, both religious and secular, can work together for a more promising future.

Most importantly, and at the heart of the thesis, this act of ministry is an exercise in redefining "us" instead of "them". And the danger for the Church is if we remain focused on the old-fashioned understanding of outreach - the idea that we are here only to offer something to the needy, rather than engaging in authentic collaboration with those

⁶³ Ibid., 71.

in need. Traditional outreach maintains the power differentials, and collaboration values mutuality; and the Church is called to value and live-out mutuality. In the end, the theory set forth above is proven correct as transformation occurs on some level in the life of a participant: a net gain for those who participate, and especially for church members and the leadership involved. This is because they will meet neighbors with whom they would not normally associate. Hence, there is a social bottom-line, as stated in the thesis statement above; a transformational experience for those who engage in this work with an open heart.

This thesis will likely be challenged, in so far as the genuine commitment of the participants to follow through with the resources offered in this faith-based partnership - making this program a priority, attending and building relationships, overcoming stereotypical road-blocks, and the level of desire for new hope and change. In addition, the long history of racial unrest in Oxford could potentially be a barrier. St. Stephen's is a predominantly Caucasian congregation, and a number of the older generations in the community carry emotions and feelings that have not dissipated. Many of the parents and guardians are younger, so perhaps this history is more distant. Regardless, the attendees are from within the three-mile radius of St. Stephen's, and they are mostly from the African American and Latino communities, engaging the white church for support. Will the history of racial unrest in Oxford impact the assistance provided by the church and local government, and the receptiveness of the parents and guardians? This is an important question to ponder and explore, and it will naturally reveal itself in the "Act of Ministry" chapter. Nevertheless, it could be an obstacle.

Fear and lack of trust are certainly barriers. There are some people who do not trust local government agencies, including DSS. There could be concern about their information and life details being recorded and retrieved. There may also be a trust issue in sharing personal information with someone of a different ethnic background. In addition, there may be some fear and lack of trust in regard to the church and its role and agenda – perhaps some fear of ecumenical differences. Pride will also be a factor. Some people are embarrassed about their life situation, and therefore find it challenging to share personal stories and information with strangers. And of course, parents and guardians may choose not to participate, even despite the directives and encouragement from the BGC.

Luke Bretherton speaks to these difficult barriers, as he acknowledges the strength and openness we amazingly discover and experience with those who are seemingly different than us, when we realize the actual value and equality of all our fallen natures:

Such a vision, I contend, is best glimpsed through attention to how the church fosters just or right judgments and neighbor love within the temporal, fallen order... hospitality is the normative pattern of faithful relations between Christians and those who are strangers to them... Christian hospitality, as a way of framing relations between Christians and non-Christians, pertains to politics because it is a way of conceptualizing how to forge a common life – that is, a public life – with others with whom we disagree or who are, at some level, strangers to us.⁶⁴

At the heart of this thesis is recognizing and addressing the problem that exists in the way our society organizes and responds in our respective neighborhoods. We know the age of individualism persists in our common life, and there is a real call and hunger to reorient people back to the public square, where we interact and live together. And perhaps

⁶⁴ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 18-19.

Bretherton is right: hospitality is a pathway forward in loving and walking alongside our neighbor, and most certainly a vital aspect of this thesis. Bretherton speaks to the fostering of a stronger, united community to address our common social issues:

... The remedy for this decline lies in building up thick communities of character formation that embody particular traditions of practice and visions of the good. These thick communities of character foster the bonds of friendship and enable the rational deliberation that is a necessary precondition for the formation of a just and generous political order.⁶⁵

If we elicit the metaphor of “thick communities of character” through which we build and foster friendships and engage in rational deliberations, perhaps we can further point to the beginnings of the solution to our ills; the challenging grassroots work in the local community - the work which begins locally and transforms the heart, one person at a time. In God’s Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State, Lew Daly sums it up:

In general, religion and government were viewed as competing sources of welfare... Today, however, the most significant new thinking in the field is focused precisely on how to coordinate religion and government in a system that distinguishes these great powers constitutionally but unites them, all the more, in a common purpose of restoring families and communities to their proper place of dignity in a morally ordered world.⁶⁶

Daly rightly states that the focus of this work is not on isolated, hot-button issues that so often monopolize church and political conversations; rather “...on how church and state are structurally coordinated to properly accommodate the perspectives and activities that God ordains the church to provide”.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁶ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 19.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 95.

An Identity of the Community of Character

One avenue that has seen success in the way churches engage this work is in the creation of an ecumenical, 501(c)3 institution, designed to build partnerships with government and local agencies. This type of institution is a clearinghouse or focal point of gathering for leaders of the Church, both lay and ordained. However, such institutions require enormous amounts of capital, hired leadership, and determined direction.

Over the past six years, St. Stephen's has been an affiliate member of *Granville-Vance Faith Initiative for Community Action* (GVFICA), a 501(c)3 institution of which I was a founding member and the vice chairman of the board. At the height of our work in the two counties which we serve (Granville and Vance), pastors and lay leaders from about fifteen different congregations gathered together to address specific socio-economic issues concerning health, education and economic development. We accomplished some good results. However, the learning for me and other leaders in this approach to partnerships is that without significant capital and employees to run the day-to-day, week-to-week operations and agenda, the important work just does not get done. And the biggest stumbling block in many rural communities such as Oxford is that every church and local institution wants to have their own ministry or initiative. Therefore, duplication of ministries is common place and negatively affects the eventual outcomes across the community.

In the course of bringing together key partners to address the issues at-hand in Oxford, and to come to an understanding of our common goods, several pathways assisted us. As stated above, GVFICA was an opportunity and venue for many partners from government, local agencies, and the faith community to engage in valuable

conversation about our issues and how best to address them. The Parents' Night program and partnership were born out of GVFICA and its work. In the early stages, people representing the local government, the educational community, the medical community, the faith community, and local businesses met together at St. Stephen's to discuss what was most pressing and important to us. Out of the many meetings and conversations, some key areas of focus were identified, and we all agreed to serve together through a singular approach; tapping into our own unique gifts and talents for the common good in which we had identified. With an ecumenical spirit pervading our work, it became evident to us all that much of our shared interest and current service in the community was overlapping, and often resulting in our collective failure due to duplication. If partners were willing to let go of sole ownership in a local interest, and willing to work with other agencies, businesses, and churches toward the same goal, then perhaps, greater success could be realized.

Michael Owens speaks to this problem of duplication of ministries and initiatives, and the reality the local church inevitably faces:

Another explanation of the choice by... churches to collaborate with government is that they are responding to the enduring poverty predicament. Churches located in or proximate to impoverished black neighborhoods may simply want to reform the social conditions of those neighborhoods, using any resources available... But most churches in poor neighborhoods do not partner with government, and many churches that provide social welfare choose to work independent of other churches.⁶⁸

The act of ministry in this thesis is focused on a direct partnership between St. Stephen's and local community stakeholders, and not through a 501(c)3 vehicle. Of course, the

⁶⁸ Michael Owens, *God and Government in the Ghetto: The Politics of Church-State Collaboration in Black America*, 42-43.

hope and vision in this work is that the wider faith community will join St. Stephen's in the partnership, and together we can participate in the transformation of our neighborhoods. Perhaps this work will eventually consolidate as a part of a nonprofit, such as GVFICA, where churches, institutions, government, and local stakeholders can also come together. As Richard Osmer says, "The congregation is seen as the bearer of an authoritative tradition with distinctive beliefs and values, which guide its public presence. The desire to impact the local community outweighs the desire to build up a strong sense of community within the congregation."⁶⁹

In the chapters to follow, I will support the basic underlying premise that in knowing and loving the people of our racially diverse neighborhood, through the development of a deep and abiding relationship, real Christ-like transformation occurs. The relationships are developed through the act of ministry itself in the Parents' Night program, presented through the partnership of St. Stephen's, DSS, and the BGC. Supportive information has been gathered using focus groups, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and my experience and observations. All this information and the outcomes of the budgeting and parenting classes offered through the BGC Parents' Night are supported by deeply-rooted literature in the fields of theology and social science theory.

In the defense of this thesis, a serious examination and rendering will be offered in the theology and social science chapter on the shortcomings of America's "New Deal" in the 1930s and the "Great Society and War on Poverty" of the 1960s, where government attempted to do it all; and we see the ramifications of these governmental

⁶⁹ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 44.

policies to this day. True and authentic welfare and social service to the poor and downtrodden was at work prior to the 1930s, through religious entities in America and Europe in the form of key organizing principles.⁷⁰ But most importantly, its earliest beginnings originated in the grassroots communities of the early Christians throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. As Bretherton accurately claims:

Faith communities, in one way or another, both fit the communitarian vision and are seen to be a resilient part of civil society and so vital to its renewal... the communitarian turn, and the emphasis on the free market, legitimized the retreat of the state from welfare provision. A key factor in this retreat was the spiraling cost of the welfare state. However, the solution, proposed in one way or another by all political parties in the United Kingdom, was to recast the state as a “partner” rather than sole provider of welfare services... Faith communities are seen as an obvious partner and are increasingly being used as conduits for the provision of welfare services and education. Examples range from contracting a local church to provide a program for young people at risk to the Prison Service giving a Christian charity, the Kainos Community, responsibility for running whole prison wings.⁷¹

It is the hope, dream, and vision of the faith community in Oxford, that within our differences of tradition, demographics, race, and so forth, we can come together as one community in faith and partner with secular agencies to bring about a new vision of what is holy and good. And in it all, the faith community is truly a witness to the holy.

⁷⁰ Dutch Calvinist “sphere sovereignty” and Catholic “subsidiarity”.

⁷¹ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 33.

Chapter Three – Act of Ministry

Parents' Night: Purpose and Description

The purpose of the Parents' Night classes was to offer and engage in practical and substantive assistance with the parents and guardians of the Boys and Girls Club (BGC) children; hoping that we might all translate our learning and experience to a better education and home environment for the children and families. This was St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (part of the Oxford faith community) acting and partnering with local agencies, government, and stakeholders to participate in change and transformation in the lives of the parents, their children, and the community. We were the faith community experiencing transformation in our own lives by building relationships with our neighbors. Perhaps our prayer and hope, is that this work will translate into a new reality in the efforts to address the declining state of poverty and education among our children as it relates to the home environment. The beauty of the program was that while the parents and guardians were moving through the classes and partaking of a simple meal, the children were provided dinner, help with their homework, and physical activities by the BGC staff.

The context of this act of ministry was St. Stephen's creation of a neighborhood program, as part of the "Education Initiative: Family and Child Engagement" inspired by *Granville-Vance Faith Initiative for Community Action (GVFICA)*, a 501(c)3 ecumenical ministry. St. Stephen's was a charter member of this institution. GVFICA was born out of a desire to bring the faith community together, working across county lines, and partnering with local government and stakeholders to address health, education, and economic development issues affecting our local communities. The vision was carried

forward by a small ecumenical group of pastors and lay leaders. The new ministry was called “Parents’ Night”, a collaboration with *The Granville County Department of Social Services* (DSS) and *The Boys and Girls Club of Granville County* (BGC). The church and DSS jointly signed a Letter of Intent of Cooperation to work together and partner with the BGC to offer and participate in classes with parents of the BGC children.

Pre-Program Planning and Team-Building

Beginning in 2015, there were numerous planning meetings held over the course of two years when the idea for this ministry first began to take shape. Out of a passion for faith-based partnerships and the work I was doing in the local community at the time, Parents’ Night at the BGC became a reality. For over a year, John Thomas, the Adult Protective Services Supervisor at DSS, and his staff met with me and other church members as we explored ways the church and local government could come together in our small community to address socio-economic issues. The discussions were largely based on our recent reading of Robert Lupton’s book, *Toxic Charity – How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help*.

John, his staff, and I had a number of visions that we fleshed-out over many months, pondering what would or would not work. One of the visions was a partnership that included the Granville County School System, whereby we worked directly with the principals of the local Elementary Schools where the BGC children attended; seeking access to the parents through the schools and the children’s statistical progress. Julie Finch, the Principal of Credle Elementary, the largest of the schools in the area explained very carefully why that would not work for us or them. First of all, the school could not release confidential information to us, such as progress reports or grades. And the only

way we could access the parents was for the school to circulate a flyer explaining the program we were offering. There was no guarantee that parents would come to the church for Parents' Night, and as much as they liked what we were doing, their focus was on the children and their work in the school.

This is an example of why the nature of that partnership would not have worked. Besides, as a church ministry, St. Stephen's was already sending tutors into this school to mentor and read with the youth. We wanted to get to the parents – the source of many of the problems. Nevertheless, once we scaled our vision down to the makings of a simple program, we approached the Directors of DSS and the BGC leadership, and a partnership agreement was signed. The BGC organization was a logical focus for this work. Even with a vision in place in the early days of the plan, all partners involved knew there would need to be adjustments as the program unfolded.

After the many months of meeting with DSS and the BGC, I began to search for experienced personnel who might believe in this vision and plan. Leading up to the beginning of Parents' Night, I met with a few local professionals trained in the areas of budgeting and parenting. One was a woman named Annie Mitchell who led the budgeting classes at the local food bank. She had a good reputation for teaching and a passion for those in need. I called her and asked if she would have time to meet. Shortly after, she said yes.

One Sunday, I stood up in the pulpit and preached a sermon about walking alongside the other and getting to know our neighbors. I focused on our moral responsibility and Christian calling to transform our neighborhood; that it begins with us and the details of this work. I invited the congregation to join me in this new ministry. At

the back of the church that day a parishioner approached me and said his wife, Betsy Anders was looking to get involved in this sort of service. So, he went home and told her about it and the next day she emailed me wanting to meet. Once we did, she was onboard. Eventually Annie, Betsy, and I met to work-out the details, and they continued to communicate with each other as to the curriculum and plan. In the end, I was able to secure Annie and Betsy, who both had backgrounds in financial management and experience in teaching similar classes. Annie is a vivacious, seventy-something Caucasian and member of a local Baptist church, and Betsy is a reserved, sixty-something Caucasian and member of St. Stephen's.

For Annie and Betsy, the challenge became the issue of time and how they could jointly teach such a class in an hour, and over the course of nine weeks. They questioned whether these classes should build upon each other, or remain somewhat open for participants who might show up in the middle of the program. The decision was made in the beginning to have sequential sessions and to encourage late participants to the program to come back if we decided to have additional classes again in the spring of 2017. However, Annie, Betsy, and I realized quickly that this would not work due to the number of parents and the unpredictability of their schedules. Any help we could offer, even just one class, could make a difference.

The parenting class was taught by Addie White, a sixty-something Caucasian and trained Social Worker who is now retired, but who has a real passion for talking about and teaching parenting skills. She was recommended by John at DSS, and is a former member of St. Stephens, but currently she does not attend a church. She took a different approach in the beginning that worked well throughout the nine-week course. Addie kept

each class open, which allowed parents to attend all sessions in some cases, and for others just one. Of course, this makes it all the more challenging to measure and track outcomes from my perspective. Nevertheless, we proceeded, and in preparation the church purchased materials the class facilitators requested, such as large and small notepads, folders, pencils, pens, dry-erase boards (for the facilitators), and calculators.

In terms of the overall plan and desired outcomes, I became comfortable with the fact that I would pursue feedback, suggestions, stories, and as much qualitative data as I could retrieve from all participants. I made a point to carefully watch the parents' demeanors, attitudes, and openness to our genuine desire to know them. In the end, as the one who would be compiling all the information and conducting the interviews, focus groups, and presenting the surveys, my hope and plan was to have a variety of details that would shed light on the problems we face as a community. I knew this ministry would not solve or present the ultimate answers, rather a starting point for redemption found in relationships and partnerships.

Structure of the Program and Participants

This new, faith-based program began on September 19, 2016 and continued through January 23, 2017, with sessions taking place twice a month on the first and third Mondays of the month, for a total of nine sessions. Each session began at 5:15 PM and ended by 6:30 PM, with the occasional option to extend to 6:45 PM if needed. The sessions began in St. Stephen's Parish Hall, but after four sessions everyone involved in a leadership position decided to relocate the gatherings to the BGC's facility so as to make it more accessible to the parents.

The participants were from among the parents and guardians of the children involved in BGC activities. In total, there were three case workers from DSS, three instructors from the community, and ten parishioners from St. Stephen's Church working together. Over fifty parents and guardians completed an initial survey form, indicating the areas of interest they have in this ministry. The BGC director and staff strongly encouraged the adults to attend this program on a regular and consistent basis, while their children were engaged in club activities. The surveys indicated a desire for budgeting and parenting classes.

In addition to the classes, a simple meal was offered, usually consisting of a sandwich or pizza. During the meal, the representatives from DSS, the class instructors, and members of the church joined the parents. As a part of this time, DSS had a case-worker present with materials concerning how to access local community resources. The meals were all prepared and served by a St. Stephen's parishioner in the church kitchen and then transported to the club. Church members were present to greet the parents and children, wear a name tag, spend personal time with the parents, and attend and participate in the classes, which lasted approximately one hour. My efforts focused on the coordination between the church, the BGC, and DSS, making sure the class facilitators had everything they needed. This meant providing all the materials necessary for the work. As the classes progressed, I spent valuable time interacting with participants in the classes, collecting pertinent demographic details, and eventually the data and information needed from all parties involved.

The BGC of Granville County had approximately one hundred and ten children enrolled, ranging from Kindergarten through Twelfth grade, and over fifty percent of the

children came from single parent families. We knew in the beginning it would be difficult to handle all the parents and guardians should they all come at one time, so we set a limit of fifty parents. But this was more than generous as we only experienced twenty-five individual parents on the first night of September 19, 2016. And from that point forward, each session saw the numbers decline. Of the nine sessions scheduled, two of them did not take place. The November 7, 2016 session was canceled since the BGC bus broke down and the club had no children present, and decided to officially close for the day. Additionally, the January 9, 2017 session was canceled due to winter weather and the closing of the local schools. Therefore, this act of ministry through the faith-based partnership with the BGC and DSS officially held seven sessions of budgeting and parenting classes.

September 19, 2016 - Session One:

On Monday, September 19th, we prepared three rooms for the first session. As the parents began to arrive in the Parish Hall, church members were standing at the doors to offer a welcome and invite participants to fill-out a name tag and have some dinner. The facilitators were sitting at the tables ready to meet the parents, and DSS had a table set-up with local materials and resources. On this first night, DSS had three representatives present. As we began, I walked around and personally introduced myself to each individual. After a short period of food and fellowship, I stood-up and introduced myself, the program, the facilitators, and church members. In the process, I passed out an Informed Consent to everyone present in the room, asking them to read, sign, and return it to me by the end of the evening. I then invited the parents to choose a class, either budgeting or parenting, and indicated they should stay in the class for the full nine weeks,

with no crossovers. In addition, I gave a two-page, self-created demographic survey to each of the parents and asked them to return it as soon as possible.

The first session was mostly introductory in nature, as the classes presented the areas of focus. In the budgeting class, Annie and Betsy presented their intended agenda, and the topics to be covered each session through January. Addie White began the parenting class by asking what the parents wanted to get out of the sessions. She wanted to hear from the parents as to their concerns and desired areas of learning. I believe this approach was most helpful, and likely contributed to the fact that she maintained a steady number of participants throughout the whole program. The parenting agenda was focused, but it allowed for more fruitful conversation, participation, and collaboration; whereas the budgeting class was fairly inflexible in its presentation.

Of the twenty-five individual parents present on the night of the first session, two were Latino, two Caucasian, and twenty-one African American. Fifteen attended the budgeting class while ten attended parenting. Most of the adults were over the age of forty, and, according to the survey I prepared, all participants had graduated from high school with a majority acquiring an Associate's Degree, or having attended some college classes. However, at the time of this first session and the initial survey, only half the participants had steady employment, while the other half were unemployed. At the end of the first session there was a hopeful sense that all twenty-five parents would return in two weeks. In fact, we felt like the numbers might increase.

October 3, 2016 - Session Two:

After the first session, Annie and Betsy decided to ask the parents what they needed from these classes. The two main responses were “how to save money” and “how

to budget”.⁷² I sat in on the budgeting class and listened to some very rich conversations. I believe the second class went much more smoothly than the first, by simply asking questions about their desires and hopes as Addie had asked of her parents on the first night in the parenting class. In this second session, Addie began her class by talking with the parents and all participants about the decision-making process when dealing with difficult issues.

Present this night in the budgeting class was a fifty-year-old African American mother of five children, two African American fathers in their late forties (both with young daughters), one Latino father in his fifties with two children, and an African American grandmother in her sixties. While these five participants engaged in the program and participated, three additional mothers arrived halfway through the class, asking questions and engaging four church members at the door. The BGC director had strongly encouraged them to attend. The church members and I stepped outside with the mothers to explain the purpose, the partnership, and the reasons for the classes, but they were resistant to the idea. This was the first time in these early sessions that I realized the location may be a negative factor. We needed these parents to stay, and in my estimation, they needed us; because together we could solve problems. Yet, they displayed hesitation and concern about being late to pick-up their children from the BGC facility, and clearly did not want to make a commitment to the program.

Nevertheless, the five present for budgeting engaged a lesson on “Income and Expenses – the coming in and going out of money”. Each of them filled-out a budgeting

⁷² Annie Mitchell and Betsy Anders, Parents’ Night Budgeting Class, recorded by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, October 3, 2016.

sheet which depicted their own personal income and expenses, and this led into some fruitful conversation about their own lives and challenges with money. Yes, it was disappointing, because the number of class participants dropped from fifteen to five in just two weeks, and the parenting class went from ten to five. So, participation went from twenty-five in the first session to ten for the second session.

October 17, 2016 – Session Three

Session three brought about a further reduction in the number of participants. The parenting class had four individuals and the budgeting class had three. Therefore, we moved from a beginning number of twenty-five to now a total of seven. Nevertheless, we had our usual beginnings with a simple dinner and time to visit. Once again, I attended the budgeting class with Eugene, a forty-year-old African American truck driver who has three children, Pam, a fifty-year-old African American woman who works for the State of North Carolina, and Terri, a thirty-year-old African American nurse and mother of a young son.

Eugene had a real moment of enlightenment as he shared with Annie and everyone present the amount of money he spends each week on lunch. After figuring out the details on a piece of paper, Annie helped him see that he had been spending about seventy-nine dollars each week on Subway sandwiches. If he shopped wisely, he could make his own sandwiches and save a considerable amount of money over the course of a month. In addition, he talked about the money he spends on wheat pancake mix for his family each month, and Annie proposed the possibility of buying the mix in bulk, and therefore saving money. Eugene seemed to come to life as he realized how simple changes in his habits could financially assist him and his family.

Eugene explained his challenge in this way, “What I was doing was writing this stuff down. By the end of the week I had already spent seventy-nine dollars, and that is eating just one time a day. Then I would come home and eat, and I realized I needed to change something.”⁷³ Annie said very gently while looking at Eugene, “Take that seventy-nine dollars and plan a trip to the grocery store. Buy sub bread, salad dressing, mayonnaise - buy the meat, and figure out how many meals you can make for seventy-nine dollars. Do not grocery-shop every day.”⁷⁴ Eugene said, “That is the other thing, I kept a list of things to get at the store, and then my wife calls me and says get this and that... and I said, ‘look, I’m trying to do this budgeting thing.’”⁷⁵ Annie said, “This is not a bad thing, you just need to be conscious of your bottom-line.”⁷⁶ And Eugene responded enthusiastically, “Look, I just bought in-bulk this past Friday at Sam’s Club, and I shouldn’t have to buy anymore for the month... budgeting really is a family matter.”⁷⁷ This was a small moment of transformation, which seemed to resonate with everyone sitting around the table.

However, Terri spoke about how hard she works and the long hours. She said she splurges quite a bit on the weekends with entertainment. What Terri enjoys doing for her own sanity and the entertainment of her son, is to visit the indoor amusement park in Raleigh. Annie pushed back just a little. She said, “Is this necessary every weekend? Think about the amount you are spending on gas and the cost of each visit to the park - it gets expensive. Think about how much you could save if you went only once or twice a

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

month?”⁷⁸ Terri did not like this thought. She became defiant, and said this was for her sanity after a long work-week and a way to entertain her son. There was absolutely no way she would give this up, and her son would not be happy with her. Of course, my first thoughts went to parenting, as this could be a parenting issue as much or more than budgeting. But Terri was not willing to engage in any conversation concerning change in life-style.

November 7, 2016 – Session Four

On this fourth session, the program was cancelled at the last-minute due to the BGC bus breaking down. The children went home after school, rather than coming to the club. I thought we might at least have a few folks show-up, but as 5:15 PM arrived no one came, even though we had the food prepared and church members and facilitators were present. It was at this point that I knew we needed to make some adjustments to the program.

The next day, I reached out to Debbie Williams, the Director at the BGC in Oxford. We scheduled a meeting for November 9th to discuss any changes that might be helpful. In our conversation, I asked the question about the possibility of holding the classes and dinner at the club. She was very receptive, but wanted to speak with other BGC leadership first. Later that day, Debbie contacted me and said it was a perfect plan, and that we could use the boardroom and large classroom for our sessions. She would continue to strongly encourage parents to attend. As I notified the facilitators, DSS, and church members, everyone felt like it was a great move; and for the church it was

⁷⁸ Ibid.

symbolically emphasizing our responsibility and visibility out in the community, and not simply what we do inside our walls.

November 21, 2016 – Session Five

With adjustments made, the facilitators, church members, and a DSS representative showed up on Monday, November 21st, just days before Thanksgiving. The BGC facility is huge, with multiple rooms and space to grow. In fact, the main space is as large as an indoor football field. It was once a tobacco warehouse - now completely restored, up-fitted, and donated by Santa Fe Tobacco. As you enter the large, blue double-doors, the echoing voices of playful children fill your ears, and it can be difficult to hear at times. There are tables at the entrance where BGC employees check-in and check-out the children with their parents and guardians. And St. Stephen's had its own table for food, nametags, and class materials.

On this first night at the BGC, many of the elementary-aged children expressed a great interest in what we were doing. They knew we were “the church” (outsiders) coming to the club, and they wanted to help. I believe their presence and knowledge of what we were doing in this program was a great point of learning that eventually manifested itself for all to see and experience.

The parenting class had nine parents in attendance. They gathered in the large classroom with tables and a window that looks out on the main room. It was exciting to see the numbers increase. Two of the parents were Latino, one was Palestinian, one was Jamaican, one Caucasian, and four were African American. The parents ranged in age from their late twenties to late fifties. Addie’s topic for the evening focused on “stress and anger”, and how to properly model behavior before our children. And then Addie

asked the question, “How is it going with your children?”⁷⁹ Many of the parents spoke about peer pressure, knowing their children's friends, and when to apply pressure on their children. The discussion was very rich and helpful for participants, and many of the church members engaged the conversation, sharing their own experiences and struggles.

The budgeting class had five parents, and they met in the boardroom where it was much quieter than the location of the parenting class. It was clear to me that the environment was much more conducive for the classes at the BGC, and the parents felt more at ease, knowing their children were right next door. For this session, we had six St. Stephen's parishioners present, welcoming the parents, sitting at the tables with them during the short dinner, and attending the classes. I considered this session to be a success, and we were pleased that our numbers went from zero at the previous session to fourteen.

December 5, 2016 – Session Six

The sixth session saw a decrease in the number of parents attending classes, as we had a total of eight, with five attending the parenting class and three the budgeting class. One consistent measurement is that the same parents continued to return to the classes, and there were only a few new participants. Debbie and the BGC leadership did the best they could to encourage all the parents to attend. After all, out of one-hundred and ten children enrolled in the club, we averaged a very small percentage of parents.

Many parents, when encouraged by Debbie and others to attend a class, would explain that they would love to attend, just not now; perhaps with better, advanced notice.

⁷⁹ Addie White, Parents' Night Parenting Class, recorded by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, November 21, 2016.

It was in these responses that I began to think that perhaps Monday was not the best day for the classes. As Debbie often said, many who were reminded of the classes on Fridays would forget over the weekend. She suggested that we consider moving the sessions to Tuesday or Thursday if we continued the program. This would allow proper notification and perhaps a better attendance.

In the budgeting class, one African American woman in her fifties, one Latino man in his fifties, and one African American woman in her thirties participated in a conversation around the topic of “wants and needs”, and the costs and expenses related to them. Aside from these productive classes, there was one noticeable occurrence which caught many of the participants’ attention. There were four enthusiastic children, three boys and one girl who engaged the parents as they came through the doors at the club. They joined St. Stephen's parishioners in wearing a nametag and encouraging parents to pick a class and attend it. In fact, these four children, aged eight to ten-years-old had better success at convincing the parents to attend than did the BGC leadership. The children made nametags, helped serve the dinner to the parents, and then led the adults to the class location. Although the total number of parents in attendance was low, I was encouraged by the participation of the children. I decided that before the program ended, I would seek to interview a few, and get their thoughts and perspectives on the presence of the church at the BGC and our partnership.

December 19, 2016 – Session Seven

This session was one week prior to Christmas, and I expected the number of attendees to remain low. Fortunately, our regular participants showed-up. We had a total of seven parents, with four attending the parenting class and three the budgeting class.

There were four African American women, ranging in age from their early thirties to mid-fifties, two Latinos (male and female) in their forties and fifties, and one Jamaican man in his fifties.

One of the African American women in her thirties attended the budgeting class. She works at the local bank, has an elementary-aged child enrolled in the club, and is pregnant with another. She was encouraged by one the BGC children at the entrance to attend a class. While in the class, she introduced herself and expressed her desire to learn more about saving money. What made her situation different than most of the other parents attending the classes, was that she has a job, is married, and had already taken some steps in her life to deal properly with her management of money.

January 9, 2017 – Session Eight

On this eighth session, the program was canceled due to winter weather, as the Granville County School System closed all schools. The roads were covered in ice and snow, and it was clear that the sessions would be canceled. In speaking with the facilitators, we decided to stick with our original schedule for the sessions as planned, and not attempt to make-up any days that were missed.

January 23, 2017 – Session Nine

In preparation for this last session, I created an anonymous questionnaire for the parents. The questionnaire asked a lot of questions concerning the successes and failures of the classes, their understanding and perception of the church's role in the sessions, suggestions for future opportunities, and general demographic information. I asked everyone to complete the form and return it to me by the end of the evening.

We had one parent present for the budgeting class, a Latino man in his fifties, and four for the parenting class, which included one Palestinian man in his fifties, one African American woman in her twenties, one Latino woman in her forties, and one Jamaican man in his fifties. Therefore, aside from the two sessions that were canceled, the last session was our worst participant turn-out, with a total of five parents. This was disappointing, but a reminder that further adjustments would need to be made if this program was to continue in some capacity.

The budgeting class went forward as the facilitator worked directly with the one parent present. In the parenting class, John Thomas, the DSS representative, and Addie White taught the class together, allowing for a fruitful conversation on dealing with behavior problems among our children. Two parishioners from St. Stephen's were present and engaged in discussion in the parenting class. As the classes came to an end, it was clear from those present that they hoped we would offer the classes again in the near future.

Challenges, Findings, and Opportunities

As a way of better illustrating the parents' participation and attendance, there is a diagram below displaying the total number of attendees in each class session, and delineating those into who are repeat attendees and those who are new. In the end, the chart reveals the "bottom-line". The total combined average attendance per session for seven actual sessions was 10.8 individuals. This is thirty-six percent repeat attendees for budgeting and fifty-two and a half percent for parenting. Both classes averaged about twenty-two percent for new attendees.

Table of Attendance	Budgeting			Parenting		
	<i>Total in Class</i>	<i>Repeat</i>	<i>New</i>	<i>Total in Class</i>	<i>Repeat</i>	<i>New</i>
Session One	15	N/A	15	10	N/A	10
Session Two	5	4	1	5	4	1
Session Three	3	2	1	4	4	0
Session Four	Canceled	0	0	Canceled	0	0
Session Five at BGC	5	1	4	9	5	4
Session Six	3	2	1	5	3	2
Session Seven	3	2	1	4	3	1
Session Eight	Canceled	0	0	Canceled	0	0
Session Nine	1	1	0	4	3	1
Total Average	5	36%	22%	5.7	52.5%	22.5%

**The total combined average attendance per session was 10.8 individuals.*

If my intention was to base the progress of the Parents' Night program solely on a quantitative scale, where numbers are most important, then this act of ministry would need to be re-evaluated regarding its vitality and sustainability. The truth is, the program began with twenty-five parents attending, and concluded with five. Out of one hundred and ten children enrolled at the BGC in Oxford, twenty-five parents attended one or more sessions. Over the course of five months (September to January), the number of parents attending steadily fell to a low of five. However, I do not consider this act of ministry as a whole to be a failure; rather we experienced some set-backs along the way which will only inform any changes made to future programs. And to average 10.8 individuals across both classes is promising. Quantitative data is difficult to collect in a meaningful way in the context and nature of this particular ministry. If I were to collect data and measure the results over the course of a year or more, perhaps this method would prove to be more beneficial. In addition, the moving population of those who participated in this ministry complicates any meaningful quantitative measurement. I conclude that the nature of deepening relationships and interactions in this ministry are best measured in

the qualitative data collected. As will be highlighted in chapter five, measuring the depth and quality of one-on-one relationships is not found in numbers.

Yet, some of the challenges we faced in the beginning of the program were due to our obsessive focus on the end result. Who was our target? What were we hoping to accomplish and transform? What was transformation here in the Oxford community? Were we targeting the children or their parents? And, could we affect the lives of both? One line of thought among some leaders in both the black and white communities of Oxford was that the parents are a worthless cause; that we needed to focus on assisting the children, because they are the future. I rejected this notion, as did everyone involved in Parents' Night, except one of my church members, Hank Simms; he felt our focus should be mainly on the children. Hank is a Caucasian in his early eighties, and he believes that the parents are too set in their ways and they will not change their bad habits. However, to Hank's credit, he agreed to participate and assist the church in its efforts despite his personal feelings. And for me, this was an opportunity to observe Hank and his presence throughout the course of the program. He was truly engaged in conversation with the parents about his own struggles and experiences, and he listened.

The parents were struggling in many complicated ways. I see the need every day - people walking through the church doors seeking assistance. The question was, how could we, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church be a part of the solution? In the focus group I conducted with three members of DSS on Monday, September 19, 2016 at St. Stephen's, John Thomas and his fellow case workers discussed the importance of the partnership between the religious and secular, and the difficulties of building relationships. John said,

Like Taisha was talking about, we're giving the services, that's what we're about, because we're working directly with the people; but then on the other side with

the Medicare and Food Stamps, they're about numbers – how much do you make? What assets do you have? How many people are in your house? Those are all numbers and all that stuff gets put in the computer, and if the numbers line up, you can have what you think you need; but if they don't line up, it's like, I am sorry, we can't help you. And that's it... the workers are going to try to develop a relationship, but they just don't have enough people to actually do that with every single one. They have 150 people in their case load – that's probably minimum – so they're just dealing with 'what can I get in the computer'. And we have a lot less, so we have to be 'that' relationship.⁸⁰

This poses the question - what is the nature of the church's relationship with individuals outside the church walls? In the case of this act of ministry, I believe the opportunity is a relationship where numbers mean nothing. We, the faith community, offer a social service; therefore, our goals are synonymous with DSS and the BGC. We all want to help those in need. And the challenge in carrying forth this ministry is not viewing the parents or children as numbers; rather, in recognizing that the faith community has something unique to offer.

The nature of a relationship with the church should not be morphed into a certain kind of role based on various criteria and data. Rather, this relationship is caring, understanding, and unconditional; the kind of unconditional love that Jesus manifested. Perhaps the opportunity in this act of ministry was in understanding that the unconditional, non-judgmental relationship and bridge-building, is in fact the commodity the faith community brings to the table; and it uniquely defines the faith component. To this end, it is important to acknowledge the demographic disparity between the parents who attended and the leadership at the BGC, DSS, class instructors, and church participants who joined them.

⁸⁰ John Thomas, Department of Social Services, Focus Group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, September 19, 2016.

The parents were predominantly African American and Latino, and the church members and instructors were all Caucasian. Although racial disparity is not a key focus in this thesis, clearly it had to have some indirect impact on all involved; even though during the sessions it was never discussed or asked in interviews and focus groups. I was keenly aware of this dynamic and the power differentials it presented. Once we moved the sessions to the BGC location, the presence of racial disparity eased; in part, due to the prevailing demographic nature of the staff and participants at the BGC.

On one level, the presence of DSS seemed minimal. There were only a few parents who approached the table, looked at the resource materials, and spoke with the representatives. And those individuals clearly knew the DSS representatives from previous encounters. However, the parents knew they were present and that resources were available; because their very presence and partnership with the church served as a reminder that DSS really cares and wants to help. In addition, during the parenting classes, the DSS representatives were able to offer some supportive advice that complemented Addie's class topics and discussion.

Originally the plans were to incorporate a "Spiritual Hope" station. This was a good idea and fitting in the church location. It would have served as a safe space for parents to speak and share confidentially with church members. However, the time constraints made this very difficult. Once the parents arrived, sat down for dinner, visited with church members, facilitators, and DSS, the classes were beginning. There was an intentional focus on finishing promptly at 6:30 PM because the parents' children were ready and waiting. Additionally, as indicated in the original survey, the parents requested budgeting and parenting classes, as many of them already had a church community in

which they were connected. Therefore, once the first session was underway, I determined that if we had offered a spiritual hope station, it would most likely not have been engaged by the parents. They were on a mission and time was tight. We needed to keep this program simple in its infancy, and coincidentally, some spiritual aspects did arise in the classes.

As pastoral situations and stories were shared, spiritual hope actually took center stage. But one of the challenges a program like this presents is to what extent evangelism is engaged. St. Stephen's parishioners knew they were not present to proselytize. The faith community's presence was known mainly in its action, participation, and listening. We wanted to make sure that no one thought we had an ulterior motive; that we were trying to get people to come to our church, or believe something we believe. Our evangelism was simply in getting to know our neighbors. This act of ministry was an opportunity to simply manifest evangelism in a non-threatening way.

One of the frustrating challenges that persisted, was in getting the church members to understand their presence and participation in the program was not to be understood as the church offering something to those who are in need. We were not offering these practical resources and a meal to the parents simply because it is what a good Christian does; or, because it makes us feel better. No, our presence and purpose were found in walking alongside our neighbor; breaking down barriers and journeying together. And clearly this required a transformation in the way we think and approach Parents' Night. However, it also required a transformation of the heart, and that was something out of my control. Therefore, it was critical in my estimation that everyone - church members, DSS, and parents all move through the classes together. I was keenly

aware in organizing the act of ministry that the last thing we wanted to be was another program offering assistance to those in need. DSS had plenty of resources in which to point to those kinds of programs.

This is why collecting quantitative data to measure our efforts was low on the list of priorities. Yes, we would have been delighted to have seen more parents attend the classes; but this was not a measurement by which I would assess the program's final outcome. Unfortunately, two of the church members and one of the facilitators in the budgeting class tended to focus too much on the number of attendees. For instance, Betsy Anders was beginning to measure her budgeting lessons and the overall function of the program through the lenses of a "success and failure" model. This was obvious in her language and questions following each session. All of this was based on the number of attendees and its steady decline. She was losing interest quickly. I suppose the more parents present the better it would look and feel, and those numbers would give the program more credibility. However, Annie and Addie in their respective instructor roles approached each session with great flexibility and openness to the strength of this ministry despite the number of attendees present. Furthermore, trying to quantitatively measure outcomes in a parent's home environment is challenging at best, and certainly not the focus here, or even at the heart of this act of ministry.

Throughout the five-month program, I continued to encourage everyone to view this act of ministry as a new beginning. The parents present wanted to be there. Anything new and important must start somewhere. But I must admit it was difficult at times for the facilitators, the church members, and me to see so many children present and moving

about and yet only a handful of parents. The truth is no one can force anyone to participate in something they really don't believe they need.

Another challenge which quickly became apparent was the attempt to collect data on the children as a way to measure their transformation. In other words, if we could have access to their progress reports and report cards, and compare the results over a span of five to six months, perhaps that would say something about the contribution of the parents and an improving home environment. The BGC provided a partial amount of the information in a confidential manner. But this quantitative approach was challenging at best. There must be continuity of information in the reports in order to arrive at a reliable conclusion. There were not enough parents sharing the progress reports with the BGC; and when they did, often the information provided was incomplete.

However, it is important to ask the question, would the progress reports have given us reliable data and insight into a difference in the lives of the children and their long-term progress directly attributable to the parents participating in the classes? The answer is no. As stated above, the most effective search for results in this act of ministry is through qualitative data, which speaks to a changing heart. This measurement was all the more confirmed in the interview I conducted on January 23, 2017 with two young boys, Russell and Tramain, both nine-years-old. When asked the question, "How does it make you feel to see the adults, the parents attend these classes? How does it make you feel?"⁸¹ Both boys responded enthusiastically, "Excited!"⁸² And then Russell went on to explain further, "It makes me feel excited, because I think they are learning something

⁸¹ Russell and Tramain, The Boys and Girls Club (BGC), interviewed by Jamie Pahl, BGC, Oxford, North Carolina, January 23, 2017.

⁸² Ibid.

real good.”⁸³ And when asked why they wanted to help with Parents’ Night, Tramain said, “I like helping with this because it supports our parents and helps us learn more about the BGC.”⁸⁴ But, when I asked if their own parents had been attending the classes, they both shook their heads negatively. Tramain said, “I don’t think so... but my mom will.”⁸⁵

Both Russell and Tramain went on to share their impressions about the presence of the church in these efforts, and this information will be detailed further in chapter five, concerning the analysis of the program. Nevertheless, the genuine words and thoughts shared by these two young men spoke far more to the power of building transformational relationships with our neighbors than many of the other insights shared throughout the program. In fact, I shared their words with Debbie, the Director of the BGC, and it was all she needed to hear to conclude, that what the church was offering in partnership with DSS was a complete success. In a subsequent interview with Debbie on January 26, 2017, she said:

If Parents’ Night is going to maybe spark a fire under their butts to be a better parent, then what do we have to lose?... Nothing... I have had parents tell me they are glad to have had the class, even if they came to just one. In all honesty, Tramain’s comment is all that I need to hear to know that it was a success, because they recognize the parents are helping themselves. You know, if Tramain or Russell sees the parents helping themselves, then they are going to help themselves too. So just to hear a child say that, it marks the success in my book, because a child has learned a valuable lesson just from seeing a parent walk into a parents’ meeting.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Debbie Williams, The Boys and Girls Club (BGC), interviewed by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, January 26, 2017.

Russell and Tramain's simple words confirmed the purpose and end result of the Parents' Night program. It was not about the numbers or measurable results; rather the simple purpose found in changing hearts and transforming lives through relationships. These boys were seeing it in action, and it was clearly leaving an impression on them and their participation in club activities. This is the value of what the faith community through this partnership offers.

During a focus group with St. Stephen's church members on January 25, 2017, everyone agreed that the meal was not a deciding factor in attracting parents to the classes. Most of the meals over the course of the five months consisted of pizza, salad, sandwiches, soup, bottled water, potato chips, and cookies. And at the end of every session, there was a significant amount of food left over. During the church focus group discussion, Sherry Owens, one of the church members said:

I observed, Fatima and Jesse, the Hispanic couple, the ones who came every time; they would always get something to eat, but I had the sense that probably from a cultural thing; we were offering it, and so it would be rude not to take something - it wasn't that they cared... I mean they weren't coming up here because they were getting something to eat; and probably Kasha, who fed her little girl, it was probably a benefit to her. But for the most part, I didn't feel like anyone was coming to the program because we had food.⁸⁷

The point was rightly made that the parents' driving motivation was the classes offered and the opportunities for change, and not food per se. I do find this revelation puzzling, because typically in the faith tradition sharing a meal is a place of open hearts and building of relationships; a place where we bond. In this case, perhaps, the time constraint defused the power of the meal. Furthermore, the parents occasionally

⁸⁷ Sherry Owens, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, focus group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, January 25, 2017.

questioned me and others as to what we expected in return for such hospitality. We of course explained, “nothing”. The suggestion was made that should Parents’ Night continue in the future, instead of a full meal, perhaps a small snack and bottle of water would suffice.

There is no question but that “the biggest challenge is our biggest opportunity”:
to attract more of the parents to the Parents’ Night program. One of the best decisions in the program was the move to the BGC facility. To make the classes more central and closer to the parents’ children was an important factor. And from the faith-based perspective, having the church members, DSS, and facilitators visit the BGC location together, and building a relationship with the parents, was in fact, the body of Christ going out into the world through words and deeds. Therefore, on a macro level, the program itself was transformative.

On a micro-level, the program progressed as well. In response to the anonymous questionnaire presented to the parents on January 23, 2017, a fifty-seven-year-old African American woman indicated a positive outcome from the parenting class. The question was: “Has your budgeting or parenting changed in any way since the first class? How? Please explain.”⁸⁸ She responded, “I have decided to listen more and give my daughter an opportunity to explain herself.”⁸⁹ Individual, shared stories and experiences speak to the positive outcomes of the parenting and budgeting classes, and what is possible moving forward.

⁸⁸ Anonymous Questionnaire, organized by Jamie Pahl, The Boys and Girls Club, Oxford, North Carolina, January 23, 2017.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

In many respects, the Parents' Night program resembled a "moving skills fair". Yes, on one level most parents were present because they wanted to help themselves. They saw this program as a genuine offering from lay and professional people in the community who care and want to help those in need. However, a real challenge of the partnership (church, DSS, and the BGC) in this program was that the parents would not view us as one of those groups or organizations offering another assistance program. The purpose was so much more. The facilitators and I touched upon this purpose in our first session as we introduced the classes and our motivation. We emphasized the desire and need to know our neighbors in a personal way. And once again, I believe a key factor in communicating this purpose was found in the actions of all participants (church, DSS, the BGC, and the parents), as everyone attended the classes and parity was engaged to some extent on all levels.

In hindsight, we could have done a better job working toward parity, by empowering parent participants to assist in the leadership of some sessions. This is clearly a learning point, and foreign to many of our usual practices in leadership. Robert Lupton says, "The challenge for those of us in service work is to redirect traditional methods of charity into systems of genuine exchange."⁹⁰ The closest we came to this alternative approach in walking alongside the other, was through Eugene, the truck driver in session three of the budgeting class. He assisted a few other participants in the activity of completing an "expense/revenue" form. As others struggled to fill-out the form, Eugene worked with Annie to explain the categories and helped the others to understand

⁹⁰ Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 38.

where perhaps their expenses are exceeding their revenue. This small example revealed the nature of what Robert Lupton is calling us to strive for in the work of parity.

Of course, for St. Stephen's parishioners, this was evangelism in action. Parents' Night and our presence in the community was a reminder that we care about our neighbors, we want to know them personally, and that we were invested in so much more than simply what happens within our own walls. Too often in Oxford, as is the case in many smaller towns and cities, churches compete with one another as to the number of programs and opportunities offered. Everyone wants to have their own unique offering to the community. As a result, too often there is duplication in what the faith community offers, and this invariably leads many programs and projects to failure. Ultimately, this means churches are unable to effectively participate and assist in the progress of transformational work. Parents' Night was one way of saying we want to work together with everyone in our community to assist in solving problems, and it begins with a relationship among all parties. No one can do it alone.

Chapter Four – Theological and Social Science Theory Reflection

Theological Reflection

In the process of confronting the problems and challenges of life, where we ask the questions of what, why, and how, we encounter holy living, loving, and growing through the transformational engagement of the individual and community. When we arrive in these difficult places, we are compelled to ask the questions Richard Osmer poses in Practical Theology: “What is going on here? Why is this happening? What ought to be happening? How should we respond?”⁹¹ And in responding to these difficult places, we discover the “self-emptying” mystery of Jesus, where we learn to live, love, and grow. Christians are called to love their neighbors, and in so doing, discover the Lord of life. This theological command and response is at the heart of this thesis.

Anthony Gittins implores a Viktor Frankl statement in A Presence That Disturbs, which frames the very heart of the work the followers of Jesus live into: “To live we must choose; to love we must encounter; to grow we must suffer.”⁹² These words echo the command of Jesus, that if we love him we must feed and tend his sheep. There is the theological implication that in following Jesus we go forth to places that challenge us; places that are in need of our presence. After all, it is in the Gospel of John, chapter twenty-one, where following breakfast Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” He is asked three times if he loves him, and each time as he responds affirmatively, Jesus says, “Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep”.⁹³

⁹¹ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 14.

⁹² Anthony Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs*, xvii.

⁹³ NRSV, John 21:15-17.

Love replaces judgment and retaliation, for this is the way the Lord himself lived and breathed. It's the way of the cross. It is the way of God, our Creator. And the way of the cross is to be our code of conduct, and it is not easy - and it is not desirable; but the truth is, it leads to eternal life. Instead of being right, we are called to be righteous - right with God. But how is this possible? These commands are so out of touch with the world we live in, and most especially our human nature. Jesus goes on to say in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter five, one more thing that is impossible for us as well: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."⁹⁴ None of us are perfect, nor can we be. The ancient Greek word for "perfect" here in the scriptures is τέλειος (teleios), which literally means "purpose and meaning".⁹⁵ It is "one who has accomplished the intended goal (telos)".⁹⁶ If something accomplishes what it is designed to do, it is said to be perfect (teleios). So perhaps another way for us to understand Jesus' call is for us to be "*complete, having accomplished the goal*" and serving the same purpose and goal that is of our Lord; to be present in those difficult and challenging places, because the Lord is very present in them and calls us to follow him there.

It is simply divine love that will lead us to genuinely act as Jesus does. Perfection here is to love everyone, neighbor and enemy alike; to simply give fully of ourselves to the extent that our identity is one hundred percent tied to others in a Jesus-like, self-emptying posture. We are not perfect. Jesus is calling us to submit our weaknesses to him and allow him to pour his strength into us. When we are weak, He is strong! That just may be a great truth and mystery of life! We don't like it; but it's true. It is in our

⁹⁴ NRSV, Matthew 5:38-48.

⁹⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume One* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1956), 175-176.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

weakness that we are powerful agents of God, because we will have opened space within ourselves for God's true love and presence to reign. In fact, St. Augustine of Hippo tells us in The Confessions that through his faith journey he came to recognize that true, divine love is found when we extend beyond ourselves; when we recognize the presence of eternal love within and about us.⁹⁷ In this realization, we concretely know God's redemption and grace abound.

“Turning Points”

D.A. Carson, in Christ and Culture Revisited, calls Christians to focus on the “great turning points” found in God's redemption story - where love, grace, and hope are found.⁹⁸ This redemption begins in our reaching-out to the other in community. With love of neighbor in our heart as Jesus defined it, we encounter transformational experiences which stretch us both individually and corporately. The Prophet Nehemiah frames this transformation in his vision of what can be and should be in the restoration of Jerusalem. He calls the people to remember their journey with the Lord, and prays for a renewed relationship and transformed community. In chapter two of the Book of Nehemiah he says, “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. I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me... Then they said, ‘Let us start building!’ So they committed themselves to the common good.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, Maria Boulding, 1997), 202-203.

⁹⁸ D.A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 44.

⁹⁹ NRSV, Nehemiah 2:17-18.

In God's Economy, Lew Daly highlights the transformational focus of the prophets:

In his Notre Dame Commencement speech in 2001, President Bush was correct in pointing to the “Jewish prophets” as the starting point for understanding the problem of poverty and social welfare. In fact, the prophets gave voice to a consistent social vision... they gave relief to the indebted, resources to the propertyless, and freedom to the enslaved.¹⁰⁰

The Old Testament prophets were messengers and vessels of the Lord, continually seeking renewal and reformation not only of the individual, but chiefly of the community, the people. This quest emphasized the sovereignty of the Almighty, living God, and inevitably encountered the crossroads where the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world intersect and often collide.

Luke Bretherton further speaks to this intersection in Christianity and Contemporary Politics, as he incites the imagery of the City of God and Babylon, using The Book of Jeremiah, chapter twenty-nine, and St. Augustine's writings in The City of God Against the Pagans, as previously stated in chapter two. Bretherton presents these resources to support the contemporary theological implications of the two kingdoms at the intersection:

Contemporary advocates of theological politics, like the architect and legislator, establish the parameters of political life within the earthly city and build theological foundations for Christian political witness... Thus a central concern of this book is the theological articulation and practical description of what it means, in the contemporary context, to maintain the specificity and particularity of Christian witness, and at the same time, cooperate with religious and non-religious others in pursuit of goods in common... Out of attention to this interaction an account is developed of what the faithful pursuit of Babylon's peace may involve.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 10.

¹⁰¹ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 18.

Fleshing out more of the Augustinian theology, Bretherton argues that for Augustine the way societies organize and understand citizenship in the earthly city is fallen due to the reality that it is neither natural nor fulfilling.¹⁰² In other words, the ultimate end is that human beings long to be in communion with God, where an abiding fulfillment occurs. However, at this intersection, human beings are too often swayed by their own prideful, self-destructive ways, and we lose sight of the sovereignty of God and the true city to which we belong. For Augustine, “At its minimum, political witness... is about negotiating what is necessary for a tolerable earthly peace to exist within which the Gospel can be preached and which the city of God makes use of for a time. It is not an end in itself, but serves an end – communion with God – beyond itself.”¹⁰³

Of importance in this understanding is how these two cities are constituted, and how they parallel and under-gird the principle of this project thesis. Augustine explains the difference between the citizens of the two cities:

We dwell, therefore, in the midst of temptations, of which it has been succinctly said in the divine eloquence, 'Is not human life upon earth a temptation? Who can presume that he is living in such a way that he has no need to say to God, 'Forgive us our trespasses'? No one but an arrogant man would think such a thing: not a truly great man, but one puffed up and swollen with pride, who is with justice resisted by Him who bestows grace upon the humble. For this reason, it is written: 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.'¹⁰⁴

Therefore, citizens of the City of God are understood to dwell in the love of God, which is a love that knows no bounds; a love which is perfect. In fact, this love is God, and while residing in the earthly city this love naturally extends to our neighbors no matter their citizenship. This love wants to be bound in an abiding relationship. However, for the

¹⁰² Ibid., 83.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, Book XIX, Chapter 27, 962.

citizens of Babylon, their love is corrupted in a selfish way, and inwardly focused with no sense of a lasting common good among all. This represents “the proud” that Augustine references in his book. Nevertheless, as citizens of the City of God, the eternal love which communally draws us together, represents an imperative engagement with others that the earthly city does not understand. It is an example of communal life which opens us to engagement with the other. In this holy engagement, we come to better understand who we are and who the other is; and in the midst of it all we experience the very presence of the Lord. This is the intersection of peace and hope in a deepening relationship, where parity reigns.

In the negotiation at the intersection, Bretherton cites Augustine’s precondition for such a partnership to succeed in the first place. It cannot simply begin with the two cities recognizing an overlapping common good; rather, it is in the further identification of an object of common love in which both cities have a desired interest. In many respects, it is not always a crystal-clear understanding of the common objects of love; rather, difficult, grey spaces and places where both cities must maneuver together and identify the terrain ahead. Bretherton says,

...forming common objects of love between the citizens of the two cities is a necessary condition of faithful witness to the Lordship of Christ over all things. Discovering and tending common objects of love is a precondition of forging the kind of multifaceted or “complex space” and “hazy” boundary between different forms of life and institutional arrangements, including church and state... Thus common objects of love between the citizens of the two cities are a precondition of the kind of tolerable earthly peace that Augustine envisages.¹⁰⁵

For the Christian living in Babylon – for the citizens, the faithful living in Oxford, North Carolina, it is tempting to allow the heart to believe that the Lord of life, the

¹⁰⁵ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 84.

presence of the City of God is not found, nor is it present in the earthly city. Certainly, a faith community can choose to focus internally on the maintenance aspects of their common life, or they may choose to be “missional”,¹⁰⁶ as Kennon Callahan highlights in The Twelve Keys to an Effective Church. However, the church which chooses to move beyond its walls is following the ministry of Jesus, who was always going and moving to uncomfortable places in his community; he was and is present in Babylon. And in those local places, the work of redemption found its beginning, with a transforming presence in the lives of individuals and community in the earthly city. The theological aspect of redemption in the heart of the individual, and the desire and need to share this hope with others individually and corporately, is at the heart of this redemptive work. As the Lord says in Jeremiah, chapter twenty-nine concerning the Israelites’ livelihood in Babylon, the earthly city:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare... 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.¹⁰⁷

Both Richard Hays in The Moral Vision of the New Testament and Walter Brueggemann in The Prophetic Imagination speak to this temporal residency the Lord addresses in Jeremiah, and the holy living and transformation the Lord blesses there. Hays brings to light the hermeneutical task of bringing our vision and understanding of

¹⁰⁶ Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1983), 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ NRSV, Jeremiah 29:4-7, 11.

scripture to life, in that it informs our world-view, and can lead to transformation of both individual and community.¹⁰⁸ In the Holy Scriptures, both New and Old Testaments, we are given a realistic vision in our contemporary times of a transformed community, where hearts are changed one-by-one. And Brueggemann highlights the impetus scripture places on us in the use of different lenses to break-down the walls and barriers; a new consciousness, which leads to new hope and vision.¹⁰⁹ This is a theological focus on transformation, as it is the underpinning of the work involved in community restoration; and it reminds us that God is ever present at the heart of this work.

Brueggemann elicits the compassion of our hearts for community and what it can become in his example of Moses' plight: "He was not engaged in a struggle to transform a regime; rather, his concern was with the consciousness that undergirded and made such a regime possible."¹¹⁰ It was a struggle to transform a prevailing consciousness, or understanding and thought of community in the earthly city, and thereby allowing a new, holy reality to reign in the hearts of God's people. This is the dream; this is the "prophetic imagination" of a better, more just community. Brueggemann adds, "The royal consciousness... has created a subjective consciousness concerned only with self-satisfaction. It has denied the legitimacy of tradition that requires us to remember, of authority that expects us to answer, and of community that calls us to care."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 208-209.

¹⁰⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001), 8-9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

“The Beloved Community”

In more recent times, we have seen the “prophetic imagination” manifested in the life, works, and words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King believed that when we experience redemption and live into a generative mode, there is a deeper desire that bubbles-up in us. We are moved toward a special freedom that he speaks about in his book, Stride Toward Freedom. Dr. King was working toward “The Beloved Community”, as he referred to it. This is a community which forms out of truth and love. This is a community where the faithful and secular come together to jointly build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth - to be co-creators with our God. This is a dream that lives every bit as much into the vision of the Old Testament prophets, and envisions an intersection where the City of God and Babylon can jointly place the welfare of its people first. This is a dream and reality we ultimately see intersecting in Jesus Christ. Dr. King says in his book:

Religion, at its best, deals not only with man’s preliminary concerns but with his inescapable ultimate concern. When religion overlooks this basic fact it is reduced to a mere ethical system in which eternity is absorbed into time and God is relegated to a sort of meaningless figment of the human imagination. But a religion true to its nature must also be concerned about man’s social conditions. Religion deals with both earth and heaven, both time and eternity... Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion. Such a religion is the kind the Marxists like to see – an opiate of the people.¹¹²

Edward Wimberly speaks to the harsh divisions and separation often encountered between the faith community and the secular, the intersections of the “two cities”. In his

¹¹² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1958), 23.

book, African American Pastoral Care and Counseling – The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment, Wimberly says:

A public theologian is one who is able to enter public policy debates addressing issues and concerns of the day from the point of view of one's faith tradition... We should not separate the life within our religious institutions from the life of the world. Public life and private life are never mutually exclusive, but rather intimately connected.¹¹³

The New York Times Op-Ed Columnist, David Brooks once again speaks to the danger of this “separate life” that Wimberly addresses. According to Brooks in his review of The Benedictine Option by author Rod Dreher, he makes a “purist” case that both the religious and secularists need to isolate and separate themselves from community in order to maintain the purist forms of their traditions and beliefs. However, Brooks rightly identifies with the realities of life, both religious and secular and what he calls the “ironist” position, which recognizes the necessity to engage the messiness and complexities of life. Brooks says,

The right response to the moment is not the Benedict Option, it is Orthodox Pluralism. It is to surrender to some orthodoxy that will overthrow the superficial obsessions of the self and put one's life in contact with a transcendent ideal. But it is also to reject the notion that that ideal can be easily translated into a pure, homogenized path. It is, on the contrary, to throw oneself more deeply into friendship with complexity, with different believers and atheists, liberals and conservatives, the dissimilar and unlike.¹¹⁴

When we engage in community, and especially in “the slums that cripple our neighbor”, as Dr. King stated, this is how we come to know the other and love them. As Brooks says, “... Most people are dragged willy-nilly into life - with all its contradictions and complexities. Many who experience faith experience it most vividly within the web

¹¹³ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling: The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 141-142.

¹¹⁴ David Brooks, “The Benedictine Option”, *The New York Times*, accessed April 4, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/opinion/the-benedict-option.html>.

of their rival loves - different communities, jobs, dilemmas... It gives them a way of being within the realities of a messy and impure world.”¹¹⁵

In Doing Justice - Congregations and Community Organizing, Dennis Jacobsen speaks to the realities of achieving Dr. King’s vision of the “beloved community”. He says Christians should not focus on the world as it is, but rather as it should be. Our focus is on the vision of what we can collectively accomplish and build through partnerships. Jacobsen believes that the primary activity of the Church is in the public arena, not the sanctuary.¹¹⁶ King would not have disagreed, as his efforts to build the “beloved community” took place in a very public fashion. The vision of a hopeful, restored community is at the core of this thesis. It is further supported in the work of Walter Fluker in Ethical Leadership, as he studies and works toward the restored community, enlightened through the lived examples of Dr. King and Howard Thurman. He says,

Theologically, Martin Luther King, Jr. labeled this quest ‘the search for the beloved community,’ and Howard Thurman, ‘the search for common ground’... a community grounded in an unshakable confidence in a theology of history... social institutions and organizations that have prophetically challenged the world to move toward a ‘beloved community’.¹¹⁷

However, this community is not easily achievable as it lives predominantly in the idealistic realm. It is akin to the visions and foretaste of the City of God. I agree with Fluker in his assessment, that in order to realize some form of the “beloved community” there must first be a vision springing forth from a leader who is upright; a vision in which

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice - Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001), 14.

¹¹⁷ Walter Fluker, *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2009), 13-14.

others encircle and participate in the work of creative change and relationship-building.

And without the relationship piece, the community will not succeed. Fluker says,

Every great leader who has brought about creative change and transformation has done so with a community of fellow travelers who are organized around vision, mission, and specific goals and strategies. Hope without a plan is a dangerous fantasy. Creative change and transformation begin and end with a sense of community. The ethical leader seeks community as both a starting point and the end of her existence. In the midst of worlds colliding, she dares to raise the primary ethical question in public life: What's going on?¹¹⁸

Fluker incites the challenges that will inevitably get in the way of community and relationship-building. These challenges are found at the “intersection” where the two cities collide. “When leaders ask people to change, they must expect resistance at the intersection... The intersection is noisy, and as a result, it is often difficult to hear what others are saying. It is also a place dominated by fear, deceit, and threats of violence.”¹¹⁹ In the act of ministry in which this thesis is centered, the resistance at the intersection manifested itself mostly as fear and deceit; fear of the unknown, fear of something new, fear of commitment, and even fear and suspicion of intentions and expectations. This is why the deepening relationship - one heart, one person - is vitally important and calming as it relates to fear. And the reality is fear and deceit are readily present in the problems that perpetuate themselves among many of the citizens of Oxford, who are unable to break free from the social ills that plague them.

The Theology of Relationship

I am convinced all the more, through my own interactions with people seeking assistance at the church, and especially in the stories I have heard from parents

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

participating in the Parents' Night program at the BGC, that everything changes in the way we relate one to the other when we look inward on a person's heart. We must get beyond the exterior. From my experience, when we are able to see and share this in-depth reality, there is a spiritual connection between individuals as they come to recognize commonalities and shared purpose. I experienced this connection in an April 19, 2017 interview with Chaquita at the BGC, where her two adopted daughters are enrolled.

Chaquita is an African American in her late thirties, unmarried, and raising two young, Latino girls. After undergoing the adoption process, in coordination with a family friend who could no longer care for the girls, she became their legal mother and guardian. Both girls have mental health issues, and Chaquita works three labor-intensive jobs to support them. As we sat in the interview with Addie White, the parenting class facilitator with DSS, Chaquita spent an hour talking about life challenges and raising children. She sat across the table from me wearing youthful, hip-hop/gangster-style clothes with a large metal chain around her neck and a colorful hat on her head. I will admit, she did not impress me at first. In my mind, I conjured-up images of who she is as an individual based on the exterior. I even arrived at a conclusion on why her life is so difficult and the reasons why she is unable to break free from the so-called "trap".

However, as Addie and I sat there and simply listened to her story, it became increasingly clear that this was an amazing woman, who was smart, driven, and full of compassion for her children and a greater society. I asked her the question, "What was your motivation in adopting the girls?"¹²⁰ She said, "The adoption agency has kids, and

¹²⁰ Chaquita, The Boys and Girls Club (BGC), interviewed by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, April 19, 2017.

Social Services got kids all the time, but I didn't think that, you know, they would be the kids I would take-in... you know, to actually show them what it feels like to have a family – that somebody loves them.”¹²¹ At the conclusion of the interview, Addie and I agreed that this is what it is all about. This is why we are offering these classes. It does not matter how many people attend, so long as we build open, deep, and sustainable relationships with individuals; in these relationships, they know we are engaged out of love, and that is all that matters.

Knowing that the community will not be as it should without the efforts of individual, grassroots relationships, Fluker highlights in his work the value and importance of character, as revealed in Thurman and King. He says, “At the personal dimension of character... The focus is placed on reconciling acts of community, with the spiritual and ethical question being, What can I hope for?... The dreams, the keys to the meaning of life, the answers to the problems we face are not only outside of us but also within.”¹²² This work is all about what lies within our hearts and the capacity to bring it to life in a self-emptying way allowing space for the love of the other. When this love fills that space, we are able to authentically walk alongside our neighbor. The late philosopher and President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel shared these words about the source of salvation for the world in his 1990 address to a joint session of the United States Congress: “The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power, to reflect in human modesty and in human responsibility.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Walter Fluker, *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community*, 32.

Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better...”¹²³

The majority of people who come through the church doors seeking assistance are African American. Most of the children attending the BGC are African American. And many of the churches who assist the needy in Oxford are Caucasian. The truth is the exterior of an individual for the most part remains constant, and unfortunately, the exterior too often brings harmful stereotypes and judgments; notwithstanding racial bias. The worth and identity of an individual lies within their heart and soul, and the challenge is in getting people to look inward and at the same time wholly except the exterior. This is difficult work; especially in places like Oxford where racial tensions have remained somewhat elevated since the 1970s.

Walter Fluker speaks to the worth and spiritual reality of relationships and their power:

For our purposes, spirituality refers to a way or ways of seeking or being in relationship with the other, who is believed to be worthy of reverence and highest devotion. With this devotion I am concerned with the other as inclusive of both individuality and community... the other has a face – and the face of the other is the foundation of ethics and the origin of civil society... in order to be fully human and ethical, we must ‘face the other’.¹²⁴

Facing the other and encountering the unknown is what leads to this spiritual reality in who we are to each other. The other exists, and we are called to recognize, acknowledge, and engage that which may seem different on the exterior, but in reality, is not on the interior. Fluker says, “Spirituality is the core of the inner and social lives of ethical

¹²³ Ibid., 34-35.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

leaders. It informs the relationship between the private and public spheres of leadership at the intersections where worlds collide.”¹²⁵

The late American psychologist, James Hillman, believed that humans are most effective at making individuals invisible through our broken social behaviors, whether we do it consciously or not. It is almost like we cannot bear to let our face and exterior connect with the other because that intersection will result in a collision that challenges us, and perhaps even calls us to account. But the reality is that we are likely to encounter the very presence of God if we let these collisions stretch us. Hillman wrote,

The Other’s face calls upon my character. Rather than thinking my character shows in my face and that my face is my character exteriorized... character requires the face of the Other. Its piercing provocation pulls from us every possible ethical potential. In bad conscience we turn away from the face in the wheelchair, the face of the beggar; we hood the face of the executed, and we ignore the faces of the socially ostracized and hierarchically inferior so that they become “invisible” even as we walk down the same street.¹²⁶

Today, more than ever, we talk past one another and we turn away. When we do not engage each other, everyone fails, and the social ills that plague our people in regard to poverty, education, and health cripple our communities. But more importantly, nothing will transform within us. If it does not originate within the heart, perhaps we are doomed. Fluker calls leaders to task in these intersections: “For leaders who must negotiate the traffic at the intersection where worlds collide, compassion must of necessity be a suffering love that seeks the redemption of the other. By redemption, I mean the ability and willingness to stand in the other’s place and to become a sacrifice for his or her highest good.”¹²⁷ This is the self-emptying love that Jesus models for us, and it is the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 39-40.

¹²⁶ James Hillman, *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life* (New York, New York: Random House, 1999), 142.

¹²⁷ Walter Fluker, *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community*, 150.

place where I sat across from Chaquita and experienced my heart reaching toward hers and recognizing our common purpose. We both value love and family, and we both want our children to be free and prosperous in a loving community. The mystery of the “beloved community” is found in the individual heart as it relates to the other. Fluker sums it up in the following words:

Redemptive suffering in compassion for the other, therefore, becomes the means of removing barriers that inhibit the actualization of community... The ethical leader consciously participates in the collective destiny of the human community. She acknowledges the dynamic tensions and crises wrought in life by destructiveness and violence but refuse to ascribe to normalcy to this state of affairs. The leader’s vision is set rather to an ideal of harmony, integration, and wholeness that is always in the future. The compassionate leader never accepts the absence of community as his destiny... therefore, the leader is driven by her identification with the movement of life toward community.¹²⁸

Edward Wimberly taps into the holiness and power of the individual relationship and community. He says we cannot simply rely upon our extended families and support systems as we once could; rather we must be encouraged “... to rediscover the village or communities of care and nurture that will provide all the necessary ingredients for our healthy self-esteem... that guides interpersonal relationships, fosters love, builds compassion, constructs systems of support, and denounces violence and abuse in all forms.”¹²⁹ This rediscovery of community springs forth from a personal desire and longing for something better. It is a dream and vision of those who reside in the earthly city, longing for the reality and wholeness of the City of God.

Taking the theology that drives us individually to work toward the ideal of the City of God and its full consummation, Social Science theory walks alongside to help us

¹²⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹²⁹ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling: The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment*, 20.

better understand our human motivations and desires to rediscover the “village or communities of care”. Dan McAdams defines this motivation as “Generativity” in his book, The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By. He underscores the work of community building and the focus of institutions such as the BGC. He says, “Generativity is an adult’s concern for and commitment to promoting the well-being of future generations.”¹³⁰ And this concern and focus leads us to action, and to offer ourselves in a “self-emptying” sort of way for a greater purpose; the quest for welfare in the earthly city as stated earlier in Jeremiah, chapter twenty-nine: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”¹³¹ McAdams says, “Generativity is about giving birth to things. It is about creating life and nurturing that life along. It is about bettering the lives of the next generation.”¹³²

All of this having been said, I come back to the question posed in earlier chapters: What is it that the Church and faith community have to offer in this work? What is our commodity? Does the theological realm offer understanding in our quest for a whole and redemptive community? I believe it does, and the work continues as we endlessly search for meaning and purpose in the earthly city. Our purpose and meaning are found in the hope and peace we know in the City of God; that same purpose we model as the church working alongside DSS and the BGC. As Richard Osmer says, “The church has something to offer the world about the moral and theological ends that inform the wise

¹³⁰ Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

¹³¹ NRSV, Jeremiah 29:7.

¹³² Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 223.

use of human knowledge.”¹³³ This is the wisdom that comes only from God, and this wisdom speaks through the words, presence, and actions of the faithful followers of Jesus Christ. The ultimate end is the eternal wholeness and unity in our Creator.

Osmer highlights the difficulty of this work and especially for those standing at the intersection where worlds are colliding, ready to see new visions and dreams of what can be, and not what is: “The leaders of learned congregations, thus, face a challenge. How can they remain open to the world and learn from the knowledge it offers, while placing this knowledge in a theological context based on the redemptive Wisdom of Christ?”¹³⁴ This is the way of life and what it feels like as a citizen of the City of God residing in Babylon. We are called to seek its welfare and assist in creating the greater good through our hopes, prayers, and Christ-like presence. So, what does this mean? It means the way of life dictates a responsibility for the faithful Christian who has the deep, abiding hope and desire to live into the welfare of the citizenry. Wimberly defines this as the political process, through which we are called “for the purpose of contributing to the common good”¹³⁵ despite our differences. He says,

... participating in how one’s life and community are governed and administered is essential in the political process... enabling people to participate in the political process of self-governing and community building is not a privilege but a God-given right, which God expects us to exercise even when that right is denied and obstacles to exercising it are erected.¹³⁶

¹³³ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 94.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³⁵ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling: The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment*, 21.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Social Science Theory

At the heart of Christian service stands the mandate of Jesus Christ to love one another - to reach out to the other in genuine love and concern: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”¹³⁷ Are Christians and faith-based organizations uniquely positioned to carry-out this mandate in a way no other group or organization can? This question has long been asked as to whether or not faith-based services are more effective than secular (or government-driven) programs.¹³⁸ In God’s Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State, Lew Daly believes that faith-based services and organizations can be marginally more effective because of the “faith factor”.¹³⁹ In other words, by example, Daly promotes the positive correlations between church involvement and pastoral leadership with the behaviors and outcomes of youth participation in criminal activities.

Beyond our Christian calling and at the heart of these services is a motivation which brings us to care for another, and to envision a better society; to genuinely desire the betterment of all citizens in a community – “to love our neighbor as ourselves”. Robert Lupton’s focus on betterment, development, personal responsibility, and welfare in Toxic Charity create an interesting and supportive dovetail with Dan McAdam’s work on “Generativity” in The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By, and Luke Bretherton’s concern with personal responsibility and welfare in Christianity and

¹³⁷ NRSV, Mark 12:30-31.

¹³⁸ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 190.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

Contemporary Politics. These three sources, along with others, highlight the power of the redemptive story and its “betterment” and “development” effect on the individual.

“*Generativity*”

The twentieth century psychoanalytic theorist, Erik Erikson coined the term, “Generativity”. He recognized the presence of a psychological challenge facing men and women in their middle-adult years.¹⁴⁰ The challenge is a desire to genuinely express a care and concern for the younger generations, much like that of a parent for a child, as society generally ascribes to the maxim that youth are the future of our society. Erikson's theory is that generative adults want to give something back; to make their world a better place, not just for themselves, but for future generations - to pass it on.¹⁴¹ But before we reach generativity, we experience our own, unique redemptions along the way – “the redemptive self”. We have our own self-defining, redemption stories we are to share with others. In redemption, our focus turns to the other, and especially ways in which we can improve the circumstances of the other's life for the future. This remains at the heart of this thesis - to offer a brighter, more hopeful future; one that originates out of redemption and love.

The example of Chaquita and her two adopted daughters speaks to the redemption story and concern for the future of our youth. “Parents’ Night” revealed its genuine purpose when Addie White and I were present with Chaquita to listen to her story and her struggles. There were not many answers, but together we walked through a sketch of her life, and we did this together. In speaking about the nineteenth-century African American

¹⁴⁰ Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, xii.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

slaves in the United States, McAdams states that, “Telling their stories to others was itself a redemptive act... The telling is as much a redemptive act as are the acts that are told, for telling the story sets an example and provides an impetus for change.”¹⁴² He goes further through the cathartic process of listening and walking alongside the other and how it has manifested itself in today’s society:

In the 20th century, Americans began to share their personal stories of pain and suffering with therapists, counselors, social workers, support groups, and a host of other audiences, including those watching daytime talk shows and reality TV. According to many experts today, intimate self-disclosure has become a necessary ingredient for forming close personal relationships and leading an authentic and meaningful life.¹⁴³

The first two verses of the eighteenth-century Charles Wesley hymn, *A charge to keep I have*¹⁴⁴, speak to generativity and a redemptive God calling us to the service of others and the glorification of our Creator. President George W. Bush used these words in his book, *A Charge to Keep*, symbolizing the redemption found in his own life: “A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify, a never dying soul to save, and fit it for the sky. To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; O may it all my powers engage to do my master’s will!”¹⁴⁵

McAdams captures the very nature of the personal relationship and breaks down the process two individuals typically undergo when face to face, with glaring differences on the line. He says, “The redemptive self is a narrative identity framed within an individualist culture that tends to construe people as more-or-less autonomous, independent agents... When we meet a person for the first time, we immediately and

¹⁴² Ibid., 12.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁴⁴ Published 1762.

¹⁴⁵ Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 255-256.

unconsciously begin the process of assigning basic personality traits”¹⁴⁶ This is exactly what took place in that first meeting with Chaquita at the BGC, as I automatically assigned traits and arrived at some conclusions. I have no doubt that somewhere deep within her own being she followed the same process regarding me and Addie. However, the more I heard her story and connected with her on a personal level, the deeper I found myself going; moving beyond the initial traits to a deeper purpose and meaning. McAdams says, “As you get to know a person, you move beyond initial trait attributions to consider a person’s needs, wants, goals, fears, conflicts, interests, and the like.”¹⁴⁷ This is the power of the redemption story and the transformation that takes place amid deepening, one-on-one relationship-building.

However, Luke Bretherton frames the example of Chaquita and others like her in the context of redemption, in which transformation will only manifest itself once the individual acts. There are no outside forces that alone will effectuate this change. He quotes the author and Scottish reformer, Samuel Smiles, in his book Self Help (1859): “No laws, however stringent, can make the idle industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober. Such reforms can only be effected by means of individual actions, economy, and self-denial, by better habits, rather than by greater rights”.¹⁴⁸ This is where the faith community and church come into focus. No amount of programs or assistance offered to people in need will ever solve their social ills. There must be other avenues and partners, and a willingness on the part of the individual to address the problem. Smiles

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 275-277.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 281.

¹⁴⁸ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 33.

rightly recognized this reality in the nineteenth-century. And McAdams attributes this need for another partner found in the value and solidarity of a faith community:

Religion builds solidarity within groups while providing clear answers to life's deepest questions. The same binding and clarifying forces, however, can lead to rejection of and prejudice toward those who are outside the group, and to an unwillingness to consider nuance in certain kinds of complex and morally ambiguous scenarios.¹⁴⁹

Interestingly enough, we have seen this model of solidarity throughout the pages of history - communities of individuals corporately working together through their own redemption stories, with one, united view of a greater, redeemed society. McAdams revisits the example of the Puritans: "With respect to the Christian church, the Puritans hoped (and expected) that their move to America would prove a victory for reform. Their city on a hill would serve as a model for all of Christendom – a model of a redemptive community made up of redemptive souls working together to redeem the world."¹⁵⁰ Of course, present at the heart of the work is the "generative" spirit and principle.

Robert Lupton illustrates the power of redemption and our priorities amid the realities that surround Americans on a daily basis. He tells the story of President Jimmy Carter and the morning news which awakened him to the reality of his neighbors in 1990. Entrenched for years in his international work, an early morning news story in Atlanta, Georgia disturbed him. A homeless man froze to death just steps from his presidential office and library. Right there, in his own backyard, a neighbor dies for no good reason. This event served as a reminder to the President of suffering humanity in the midst of supposed life and vitality. He was compelled to respond and act; in so doing, he launched

¹⁴⁹ Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 134.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

a major initiative called the Atlanta Project (TAP), which focused on the resources of the corporate sector, government, religious, education, social service, and non-profit partnering together to address the social ills that plague Atlanta.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, this was a “top-down”, bureaucratic effort for change rather than a “bottom-up community transformation”.¹⁵²

The work of redemption has proven most effective when engaged one person, one heart at a time, just like the organizing principle of “subsidiarity”, with its focus on the grassroots, bottom-up approach to community transformation. It is amazing to me how one tragedy or awakening to the realities of a neighborhood can move the heart of an individual to action, even a President of the United States. Dennis Jacobsen cites a wonderful example of where we often place our heart and vigilance, and the unrealized dream of the power it could harness if it were placed upon a neighbor’s heart with the same emphasis.

He speaks of the Ethiopian monks, who for three thousand years have guarded what Coptic Ethiopians believe to be the Ark of the Covenant in the ancient city of Aksum. Every day a solitary monk vigilantly guards the Ark, consistently praying and reading scripture in the context of a fifteen-hour vigil – unbelievable dedication. He says, “Is not the human heart also a holy Ark that merits sacred vigilance? One-on-one interviews are a heart-to-heart conversation. Would that we could bring even a portion of the vigilance of that Ethiopian guardian monk to such conversations. We might then

¹⁵¹ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help – And How to Reverse It*, 86-87.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 89.

begin to see the presence of God in the other.”¹⁵³ I imagine President Carter saw the presence of God that day, right there on the doorstep to his office.

Partnership on the Local Level

The partnership with DSS and the presence of their representatives for “Parents’ Night” was vitally important to this act of ministry. They have a perspective and knowledge of how the parents operate within the community, and their motivations shed further light on the problems and the opportunities. In the focus group on September 19, 2016, John Thomas said:

We’re all about helping people... and different people need different types of help at different points in their life. That’s it. We’re all doing the best we can with what we’ve got at any given moment. And if you’ve got to come – I mean it’s important to us to treat people with that dignity and respect. I too am one pay check away from homelessness. I don’t want to have to call Social Services you know - and if I do, they need to recognize I’m a human being doing the best I can, and if you can help a brother out, help a brother out. And that’s my philosophy, and I expect that out of the people I work with as well – to own that – and they do.¹⁵⁴

What I found encouraging about John’s comments is that there is an organizational and personal expectation of empathy on the part of caseworkers who work for this governmental agency; they too are people, who at any moment could be on the other side of the table seeking help. And when we treat others the way we would want to be treated we have made a positive step in the relationship.

Interestingly, some of the comments made by the parents on the anonymous questionnaire from January 23, 2017 give an insight into their expectations of a relationship with those who assist them; and it does not matter if it is the church or DSS.

¹⁵³ Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice - Congregations and Community Organizing*, 64.

¹⁵⁴ John Thomas, Department of Social Services, Focus Group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, September 19, 2016.

Combining six of the questionnaires together, the parents responded in the following way when asked if they feel it is important to build a relationship with the individuals of the church and DSS who want to help and assist: “Yes, because it’s good to help pay it forward... Yes, support, encouragement, strength... Yes, Trust!... Yes, because if they know you better they can help more... Yes, so they can understand the real situation, and therefore know and understand why I need help... Yes, if help is needed I know where to go and if they need help they can come to me!”¹⁵⁵ I am moved by this last comment; that if an individual from the church or DSS is in need they could go to the parent. This highlights John’s expectation of himself and others, and underscores the two-way avenue in such a relationship.

On that same day in September 2016, John acknowledged in the focus group the commonalities that exist between the government and the Church. We both want to help and provide a better “end” for our people. In fact, before the government, the Church was the social service provider, and quite effective to that end. I agree with John and find it interesting as stated previously in chapter one, that in the early days of the Church, somewhere in the third-century, there was this “rag-tag” group of people who followed Jesus Christ; loving the people, saving infants from the trash heaps, and caring for the sick and lonely.

In the early fourth-century, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and suddenly became the primary source and model of Social Services in its pastoral understandings. This all goes back to the early Christians caring for the poor, the

¹⁵⁵ Anonymous Questionnaire, organized by Jamie Pahl, The Boys and Girls Club, Oxford, North Carolina, January 23, 2017.

sick and the needy, and the people who were down-and-out. As we talked about this reality in the context of the focus group setting, John said: “St. Stephen’s was one of the first social workers right here in Oxford in our time!...”¹⁵⁶ I responded, “Yeah, you’re right, and so all of a sudden that became known as, wait - these Christians are good people and it influenced the local governing bodies, or at least it became part of the official empire. It was like Social Services at its very beginning; so there really is a commonality when you go back that far and think about it.”¹⁵⁷

“Organizing Principles: Sphere Sovereignty and Subsidiarity”

This same understanding of care, ingrained for the most part in the leaders of democratic governments and its citizenry, came from England to America in the early days. During the seventeenth-century in colonial America, four English principles played a part in the formation of state responsibility. Lewis Solomon says, “... First, poor relief was a public responsibility; second, it should be managed locally; third, if possible, individuals should look to their families and not the public; and fourth, children should be apprenticed to those who would train and care for them in their homes.”¹⁵⁸ I concur with the English principles that “poor relief” is a public responsibility, and that it is best handled locally. This is certainly the case in regard to Oxford. There are funding resources available from the federal and state levels to address these issues but, first and foremost, Granville County, the city of Oxford, its citizenry, and the faith community have a responsibility. When I hear general stories about children in the city and county

¹⁵⁶ John Thomas, Department of Social Services, Focus Group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, September 19, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Lewis D. Solomon, *In God We Trust?*, 48.

taking baths in outdoor, fire-heated cauldrons because of the lack of water and facilities, I know we have a problem, and one that is best addressed locally.

In the nineteenth-century, Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch Calvinist theologian and statesman, presented the theory of “sphere sovereignty”. This theory recognizes the freedom and autonomy of institutions, such as schools, families, and the faith community, to exist and effectuate change in their lives and communities - to have sovereignty within their own sphere, and equal access to government finances. This principle has come to life in recent years with the passage of the United States “Charitable Choice Act” of 1996, and the creation of the Executive Branch Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. Kuyper viewed the proper ordering of spheres and their purpose in this way:

That state, then, rather than obliterating the spheres under the ordering power it is given by God, has but one strict purpose: to make it possible for the various [social] spheres, insofar as they manifest themselves externally, to interact appropriately, and keep each sphere within its proper limits, while also, notably, protecting the individual from the tyranny of the group.¹⁵⁹

Likewise, the Catholic principle of “subsidiarity” recognizes the power and strength in the lower levels of social order, such as faith-based groups and local institutions. It is a bottom-up theory, where action and results begin locally and small. In concept and practice, both theories constitute a partnership with the sovereign state whereby, together and collaboratively, problems are addressed, and action is taken. As Daly states in God's Economy, “Religious autonomy depends on a pluralist vision of society, and pluralism is ultimately a vision of 'social justice,' a rightful ordering of government and society, and of resources and power within society.”¹⁶⁰ Further, Daly

¹⁵⁹ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 158.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

acknowledges these two principles undergird the vision of welfare at work today in our society - the City of God residing in Babylon:

Particularly acute in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, where strong confessional political parties first emerged (Catholic in Germany and both Reformed and Catholic in the Netherlands), this was the struggle that forged the church-state principles and the vision of welfare governance at work in the faith-based initiatives of today.¹⁶¹

These organizing principles are the essential framework to the social theory and grounding of this thesis and act of ministry, as St. Stephen's and the faith community partner with local government (Social Services) and the Boys and Girls Club to collectively address the problems of our community. Today, these principles influence our care as a society, as they open spaces and invite partners to the table who can fill the empty places:

As an approach to social welfare, however, it originated in Europe more than a century ago, with the rise of confessional movements that resisted the onset of centralized liberal welfare states and gave birth to what is now known as Christian Democracy... Two concepts of political order, Catholic "subsidiarity" and Dutch Calvinist "sphere sovereignty" were crystallized in this struggle and helped to define the unique character of the German and Dutch welfare systems, among others. Ultimately, these ideas and the welfare systems they inspired served as a model for America's faith-based initiatives as they emerged in the 1990s.¹⁶²

In the spirit of subsidiarity, St. Stephen's local partnership is focused on one individual, one heart at a time; hoping each individual who experiences redemption and transformation through a deepening relationship will translate to a wider good for the community as a whole. At the same time, as a member of the faith community, we operate within our own sphere, recognizing our boundaries and those of other groups. We are a religious entity, and therefore we do not push an agenda that infringes upon DSS or

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶² Ibid., 18.

the BGC. Rather, we find the overlapping common good that we and the other institutions strive to achieve together.

It is important to examine and analyze the goals and outcomes of such faith-based partnerships. However, it would be incomplete without taking note of a few variations and beliefs on the positive and negative impacts of a Church and state partnership. Luke Bretherton touches upon the differences in his book by presenting two renowned opponents of such partnerships, who come from unlikely places: The Duke Divinity School theologian and author, Stanley Hauerwas, PhD., and the late Catholic Pontiff, Pope St. John Paul II. As mentioned earlier in chapter two, both these men come from different backgrounds, but share a common belief about the mission of the Church and the corrupting powers of the state.

Bretherton says,

Hauerwas opposes foundationalist attempts to find a common language or a form of “public reason” on which church and state can systematically cooperate and understand each other. For Hauerwas, the church contributes to civil society but at the same time is an alternative civil society. Its purposes are never simply to help the nation-state and liberal democracy to function... For Hauerwas, the call to work together with the state risks compromising the true gift of the church to the state: that is, its ability to open new horizons, provide new languages of description, and embody alternative practices.¹⁶³

Hauerwas does not completely rule out the value of the faith community “harnessing the resources of state power”, and most especially when it comes to alleviating the needs of its people.¹⁶⁴ Rather, he is overly concerned about the effects such a partnership would have on the Church’s identity, call to mission, and outcome in remaining a unique force to accomplish the ultimate good. In the end, Hauerwas leaves the door open slightly, and

¹⁶³ Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 54.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

I would agree with him that the Church offers a unique commodity that the state does not possess. However, I would disagree that by associating with the state to achieve a common good, the Church would become complicit in the act of corruption. I suppose it is possible to lose one's identity; but the Church enters such a partnership with its core focus on the mission of Jesus Christ in the end. This would be my hope; a hope that believes God is present somewhere in it all.

On the other hand, Pope St. John Paul II espoused a similar belief to Hauerwas, as he departed slightly from familiar "contemporary Roman Catholic social teaching".¹⁶⁵ As discussed earlier and in previous chapters, the Catholic social principle of "subsidiarity" speaks to the good that arises between the state and the Church; a shared pursuit to bring transformation in the lives of its people, and especially when we recognize the state and the Church are comprised of many of the same people. But for St. John Paul II, he believed the Church should never be confined to civil society: "... and where partnership with the state undermines the autonomous and free witness of the church, the church must resist co-option... Thus St. John Paul II locates the primary political responsibility of the church in its faithful witness."¹⁶⁶

But I would ask the question, "What is faithful witness"? I believe, like Bretherton, it is understood and lived-out in many shapes and colors, and most certainly includes the pursuit of "the common good through partnership with people of good will, who may or may not be found in the apparatus of the State. For example, the task of the laity is defined as 'infusing the temporal order with Christian values, all the while

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 54-55.

respecting the nature and rightful autonomy of that order...’’¹⁶⁷ This is espoused in the principle of sphere sovereignty. Nevertheless, Stanley Hauerwas and St. John Paul II are attempting to defend and preserve the Christian identity and uniqueness of the Church from the often-destructive powers of the state. This is the motivation behind their views, as I am sure they explored and grappled with the very questions and options H. Richard Niebuhr professed about the Christian response in Christ and Culture.

The Church does lose power and identity if co-opted. Yet, both express a specific need for such partnerships and their value, while maintaining uniqueness to the needs of the world. This is possible, and the bottom-line is that the state cannot accomplish the good by itself. In partnership between the Church and state, where the two cities intersect, it will undoubtedly get messy. Often, it is in the messy engagement between the citizens where the true, lasting love lies. Bretherton says, “... it is a conflict over people’s loves, thus it is a conflict over what binds people together in a public or common life. Conflict, while inevitable in the *saeculum*, is not the fundamental condition or the sum total of human relations... love, albeit often in distorted and self-destructive forms, is fundamental to political life.”¹⁶⁸ This is faithful witness. Since the beginning of the Christian movement, and its emergence with the Roman political system, the people of God have served, cared for, and loved the very same people of the state. This love and concern was visible through the ministry and presence of the Hebrew prophets, long before the early Christians; including leaders like the prophet Jeremiah.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 85.

Working in Partnership for “Societal Restoration”

At its core, Lew Daly reminds us that from a governmental and faith standpoint, faith-based initiatives are grounded in a central protection and wider vision:

...Sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity do not only protect religion from the state. Restricting the state is part of a larger mission of protecting the natural structures of society – families, churches, communities – from coercive, ‘monistic’ powers, whether public or private... The fundamental core of charitable choice law and the faith-based initiative (broadly understood) is a vision of societal restoration.¹⁶⁹

Daly shares the words of Stanley Carlson-Thies, PhD., one of the key architects of the Charitable Choice Act and the faith-based initiative. Thies served in the Bush White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives from 2001 until mid-2002. Currently, he is the founder and senior director of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, a nonpartisan group in Washington, DC.¹⁷⁰ Thies says the faith-based initiative is a model of “pluralism... overcoming extreme separationism in government social services... a powerful and just idea.”¹⁷¹ And Daly defines pluralism in the context of the faith-based initiative:

Ultimately, pluralism, here, as it has come to define a new era of religious autonomy in our social safety net, concerns the sovereignty and attendant rights of communities and other social structures within the liberal state...but the deeper structures of family, church, and community that literally originate a person’s life and have the capacity to renew it if the person goes astray... which Christian Democracy and other conservative traditions define as God-given, grows out of a long evolution within Western legal and political thought, the cornerstone of which is the freedom of church.¹⁷²

One aspect that remains certain is that no one group alone, even the federal, state, and local governments, can solve the problems that persist among our citizenry. The facts

¹⁶⁹ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 238-240.

¹⁷⁰ “The Poverty Forum”, Biography – Dr. Stanley Carlson-Thies, Forum Participants, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.thepovertyforum.org/bio-carlson-thies.php>

¹⁷¹ Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*, 124.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 124-125.

and statistics that exist today continue to show a state of decline regarding poverty and education in many of our communities. This problem was clearly stated in chapter one.

However, looking back in our national history, we can see the origination of ongoing problems we currently face, and why many of the problems today are not being properly addressed. With the rise of The New Deal in the 1930s under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the federal government began to fill the gap. The result was a weakening of the previous prominent position of faith-based organizations (FBO). This was a pivotal turn in the role of faith institutions and their role in society. Some believe it was also a reengineering of how society addresses the myriad of socio-economic issues by eliminating the religious components.¹⁷³

Carl Esbeck, a law professor at the University of Missouri and the main progenitor of the 1996 Charitable Choice Act, said he was motivated as to the value of faith-based initiatives due to “government discrimination against faith-based social service providers.”¹⁷⁴ In other words, government was restricting the access to religious service providers and thereby indirectly discriminating against the poor communities of our nation. I would argue that perhaps American society was better served by the faith community prior to the 1930s, as FBOs were given the freedom to work alongside government in addressing serious, common issues. But of course, the lack of funding was a crucial piece to the puzzle, and now government under The New Deal was set to occupy a much larger piece of the territory.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 53.

The 1960s saw an expansion and doubling-down on Roosevelt's New Deal, and the government's role with The Great Society and War on Poverty under President Lyndon B. Johnson. This was a time in which more emphasis was placed on the role of government and the care of the citizenry. The role of the faith community and its social service resources were diminished. However, in his review of Esbeck's big-picture view of the role of government and the Church, Daly states why this needed to change with the expansion of the Charitable Choice Act:

The separation of church and state does not require a complete institutional separation of all government functions and resources from any kind of contact with religious organizations or expression – that is, a public purgation of religion. Rather, separation means a minimization of impact or constraints on religion... The welfare state's increasing control (through taxation and other powers) of the "resources diverted to charitable use", Esbeck argued, creates a context in which the church is more or less forced to seek government support in order to perform its essential missions with meaningful effect, which compulsion, in turn, requires greater care for religious autonomy on the part of the state.¹⁷⁵

Perhaps the real reason government naturally sought to restrict access to religious resources is fear itself. Fear that religious institutions would infringe upon the spheres in which different groups operate. But at the same time, one could make the strong case that government itself was infringing upon the spheres, and thereby disrupting sovereignty among the groups. Daly states the importance these two principles have in the ordering of our public responsibility and the danger when infringement takes place:

... [We have] two religious ideas of political order, closely related [which] are crucial to understanding this distinctive approach to public responsibility: the Dutch Calvinist concept of 'sphere sovereignty,' particularly as developed by Abraham Kuyper, and the Catholic concept of 'subsidiarity,' one of the core principles of Catholic social teaching as developed by Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 90.

In the 1950s, the Atlanta, Georgia-based pastor, William Holmes Borders, Sr. hypothesized the possibilities of church-state partnerships and how they could be beneficial to depressed communities. This is the idealized mission and ongoing work at St. Stephen's Church in Oxford today. How can we better serve our neighbors and community together? The Rev. Borders was pastor at Wheat Street Baptist Church, one of the first churches in the country to enter a faith-based partnership with the federal government during the so called, War on Poverty. Michael Owens speaks to this partnership and one of the unique ways the church can establish such an arrangement:

Could some of the problems of low-income blacks in Atlanta be addressed via churches' working with government? Here was a chance, he reckoned, to channel the resources of government to poor black neighborhoods through the institution of the church, or at least a subsidiary of it. Such channeling held the potential to achieve a common goal of the government, the neighborhoods, and the church: the revitalization of depressed black spaces in the city. Following his reflection, Borders instructed his congregation to charter a nonprofit subsidiary, Church Homes Incorporated, to take advantage of the federal government's affordable housing programs.¹⁷⁷

It was through the church-associated subsidiary, "Wheat Street's Church Homes Incorporated" in which the faith-based work was engaged. This path provided separate funding and legal status, typically a 501(c)3 status in which to operate, and certainly kept the congregation's finances separate and apart from public monies received.¹⁷⁸

However, Owens identifies a stumbling block that often interrupts such partnerships. He says, "Even if church-state collaboration is successful at revitalizing low-income black neighborhoods, clergy worry such collaboration may work against the interests of neighborhood residents."¹⁷⁹ He cites a political scientist who believes this is

¹⁷⁷ Michael Owens, *God and Government in the Ghetto: The Politics of Church-State Collaboration in Black America*, 23.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

because there is a fear that government assistance will stop once the faith community is involved.¹⁸⁰ This fear was never expressed throughout the act of ministry. Not one of the parents claimed this fear. However, I have experienced it from my neighbors who visit the church for assistance; as well as their comments about receiving help from the local nonprofit food bank, Area Congregations in Ministry (ACIM).

Regardless, Owens states from his research that participation across the country in faith-based partnerships is statistically higher than in recent years, and not only in the number of partnerships, but in the funding provided by the federal government. He said,

Moreover, government agencies were the primary initiators of the collaboration; that is, government sought faith-based organizations, not the other way around... All of this suggests that the policy environment for collaboration with government by activist churches, including African American churches, is good and possibly getting better.¹⁸¹

I imagine much of this is a direct result of the declining position of the traditional Church in society – the faithful searching within to reclaim the authentic ministry of Jesus.

People are not attending church like they used to, and statistically the numbers continue to drop. As the Church, we must now go out into our communities taking the commodity that we have - our faith, hope, and love. I believe it, and know it to be true in Oxford.

And yet, Owens reminds us that, “As others before them, pastors preached ‘pie in the sky,’... In the process, they ignored temporal conditions outside the stained-glass windows and closed doors or burglar-barred and security-gated storefronts of their edifices.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 59-61.

¹⁸² Ibid., 88.

Owens shares the words of the Reverend Dr. William Augustus Jones of Bethany Baptist Church in Bedfore-Stuyvesant, “Monasticism and asceticism are not presented in the Gospel narrative as models of Christian witness... Jesus’ hometown was the slum section of Galilee. He grew up in a ghetto. He sat and supped with sinners.”¹⁸³ Everything we do in this country that ultimately succeeds begins locally, and within the realms of our calling and expertise. There is no question, that if we want to change lives, hearts, and souls, and in-turn transform a community, we must genuinely know our neighbors and work together – a holy union and pact, if you will.

The underlying principles detailed in this chapter make for a simple, yet successful framework through which we can build relationships with our neighbors and transform communities. It begins with a generative spirit to envision a better future, working locally to build sustainable relationships from the ground-up, and making sure we respect the places and spaces in which the various groups and identities move and act in society. As Daly says in his book, God and the Welfare State, “If a person can be born again from reading a psalm – as I saw happen once – why not a church that tries to apply scripture, and why not hundreds of churches or thousands, united together to do as the prophets did?”¹⁸⁴ Why not in “little ole” Oxford, North Carolina?

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Lew Daly, *God and the Welfare State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 126.

Chapter Five - Analysis

One Relationship at a Time

In the final analysis, I recognize more than ever the need and call for people of all faiths to work together in relationship with each other and our secular partners; together there is so much we can transform in our communities - not the least of which is ourselves. In this season, I pray and dedicate myself to Oxford, North Carolina, and the issues the faith community are attempting to address through Parent's Night. I definitively confess that the combined efforts of the partnership between St. Stephen's, DSS, and the BGC in the Parents' Night program have not even come close to solving the problems at hand. In fact, we barely scratched the surface in this act of ministry. I do however, believe we have presented a sustainable framework that has never been authentically engaged or implemented in Oxford; or at the least, it has not happened in over thirty years. This framework, grounded in the organizing principles and theology as stated in the previous chapter, imply some positive and promising signs for the future. Parents' Night and other such programs are coming to life out of this simple act of ministry. I can say this because of the responses received in the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires conducted at the end of the program with all participants. However, most importantly, there are new ministries and transformation taking place in the lives of many of my parishioners, including mine.

Based on all outward appearances, St. Stephen's and its partners had a vision that resembled a top-down outreach ministry. However, with each session, and especially as we neared the end of the program, we were bottom-up focused. All throughout the nine sessions we revisited our approach and adjusted as needed in both classes and the

structure of the program. I believe the focus changed when our numbers bottomed-out and we were forced to recognize the value and worth of impacting just one life, one family. In January 2017, I found myself saying repeatedly to the instructors and church members, “Yes, the numbers are disappointing, but if we can affect one life then the program is a success”. And for the most part, everyone agreed. Interestingly, I never really thought I would be one of those lives.

In the same vein as our original top-down approach, Robert Lupton’s description of what he calls the “ultimate failure” of President Jimmy Carter’s Atlanta Project (TAP) is insightful when considering the relative progress of Parents’ Night. Near the end of the TAP program, the institution released a very humbling assessment of its goals:

Like many comprehensive initiatives, TAP’s complexity and scope remain difficult to evaluate... TAP has learned a great deal since its inception. TAP doesn’t claim to have all the answers, or solutions for eliminating urban decay... TAP hasn’t solved the homeless problem... What TAP has done is come to understand that community involvement is a critical component in achieving true empowerment.¹⁸⁵

Lupton goes on to quote from an article written by Stanford’s Hoover Institution that spells the real reason why TAP failed. He says, “A tour of some of these ragtag, innovative organizations, each the product of dedicated citizenship, reveals what works in easing urban pathologies – one person, one family, one neighborhood at a time.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, it is in the spirit of the subsidiarity principle, where the work focuses on the individual and the building of one relationship at a time and that in-turn, grows and develops outward in God’s time. This is the small and relative progress of St. Stephen’s Church, its partnerships, and the Parents’ Night program.

¹⁸⁵ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help – And How to Reverse It*, 91-92.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

The Truth of Empowerment

In Poor Economics, Banerjee and Duflo offer some interesting thoughts on Robert Lupton's assessment of our approach to poverty and issues of parity. They soften Lupton's understanding just a little on empowering locals in the work of transformation. Yes, we recognize our role as the faith community should not be doing for others, rather empowering them to do for themselves. Certainly, this is the assessment of DSS. However, to what extent do we as the faith community, empower and turn-over the reins too soon and to the wrong people? A leader is still needed, and not just a leader, but the right leader; and that leader or leaders need to be properly cultivated, which may take some time. They profess,

... the surprising power of small changes comes from the rules governing local political processes. The new ideology in a lot of international institutions is that we should hand the beneficiaries the responsibility for making sure that schools, clinics, and local roads work well. This is usually done without asking the poor whether they really want to take on this responsibility... the logic of handing anti-poverty policy back to the poor is superficially irresistible. The beneficiaries are directly hurt by bad services, and they should therefore care the most; moreover, they have better information, both on what they want and on what is happening on the ground. Giving them the power to control the service providers (teachers, doctors, engineers) – either the ability to hire and fire them or, at least, the power to complain about them – ensures that those who have the right incentives and the right information are the ones making the decisions...¹⁸⁷

Anthony Gittins in A Presence That Disturbs speaks about the comfortable places we often find ourselves and the need and desire to manipulate God; because when we manipulate, we become the judge, and we become closed to any possibilities of being awakened. “We become closed to the possibility of being shaken up, challenged, and commissioned by God. We have little or no social conscience; and quite soon we place

¹⁸⁷ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, 247-248.

ourselves beyond the criticism of others and particularly out of earshot of the cries of the poor.”¹⁸⁸ We must allow ourselves to be stretched and open in order that the Lord of creation can rattle and shake us out of what can become so comfortable and secure. It is a scary place to be, but we meet God there. Perhaps that uncomfortable place is cultivated in the empowerment of local leaders. And to do this work we must gradually decentralize ourselves, allowing space for the other to rise-up in time and take the reins. No one should seek to do this work of community relationship-building based on ego or self-importance. After all, as the faith community, we must remind ourselves that this is not our work; it is the work of God. Banerjee and Duflo state,

Moreover, the very act of working together on a collective project may help communities rebuild their social ties after a major civil conflict. The so-called Community Driven Development projects, in which the communities choose and manage collective projects, are quite the rage in post-conflict environments like those in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Indonesia... How can we ensure that the interests of the underprivileged groups (women, ethnic minorities, lower castes, the landless) are represented?¹⁸⁹

Personal Transformation and New Ministry Outgrowths

This is the result of Parents’ Night and what has blossomed out of it. My own heart has been transformed because of experiencing and walking alongside the other in our unique stories. I have been deeply disturbed in spirit by the children who go home every evening to violence, absent parents, little food, and no one to love them. I have been deeply disturbed in spirit by the parents and their personal struggles to help themselves and their families. I have been deeply disturbed in spirit by the appalling living conditions in which some reside. And in this disturbance, I have found and

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, 247-248.

experienced God in a new way; ever present in one-on-one conversations and pleasantries with my neighbors.

My heart has been transformed by moving with some of my parishioners beyond the walls of our historic, well-to-do parish, and engaging the work of building deep and sustainable relationships with our neighbors. God is as much or more present and moving in the rough neighborhoods near and around the church, as God is experienced in the walls of our sanctuary. I stated earlier in this thesis the words of Viktor Frankl as shared by Gittins. These words sum-up my experience of Almighty God in the other: “To live you must choose; to love you must encounter; to grow you must suffer.”¹⁹⁰ This I have experienced.

As an example of what the Parents’ Night program has indirectly produced, I share with you the emerging partnership and ministry with Greater Joy Baptist Church. Working with the city of Oxford, DSS, the BGC, we are partnering in a ministry effort called, “The Oxford Orange Street Project”. This is a vision Pastor Reggie Miller had of purchasing dilapidated homes in the worst sections of town, where prostitution, drugs, violence, and murder rule the streets. Together, along with the city partners, we purchase the homes, officially burn them to the ground, and rebuild city-approved, basic structures in their place. These homes are to serve as temporary housing for young people and adults who want to transform their lives. Each home is to be a community house with trained house-parents and job resources.

The work is already underway, and thousands of dollars have already been given. However, the real work and blessing has been found in bringing together an ecumenical

¹⁹⁰ Anthony Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs*, xvii.

community to do the labor, and to sit down together at the table and share a meal and life stories. This is happening and continues to unfold in exciting ways, and it all began through a relationship with the African American community that budded out of the Parents' Night program. Over many months, Pastor Miller and I have developed a relationship which has highlighted our partnership as an example in the community of Oxford.

In addition, Parents' Night continues in a sustainable way. I believe the framework can and will be transportable to other venues, even other congregations. And at the very least, my vision has been from the outset that other faith traditions join us in this work with the parents, as this has never been the sole property of St. Stephen's. In the fall of 2017, Parents' Night will resume. We will continue to work with the leaders at the BGC and DSS as we tweak the program details. Instead of offering two classes, we will combine them into one with a focus on both parenting and money management. We will offer only five to six sessions with a planned curriculum.

However, we want this time with the parents to resemble a support group model, as our instructors are willing to let the parents lead the conversation where their hearts are drawn. Furthermore, as an incentive, the BGC and some of my parishioners will offer a free month's tuition for each child whose parents faithfully attend all the sessions. This is substantial, because the cost is twenty-five dollars a month per child, and it adds up in the larger families. The free month would be offered at the conclusion of the sessions, and mostly likely just in time before the expense of the holidays. And the Granville County Health Department has approached me and the church about partnering in the Parents' Night program to offer a class on healthy cooking in the home environment. Through all

this, there is the potential for building additional relationships in the community. The good news is that this original act of ministry is springing forth new life, with the hopes of real, sustainable progress in the Oxford community; and it all originates through the work of building deep, sustainable relationships.

Amid these growing partnerships, the 501(c)3 organization GVFICA, mentioned earlier in chapter three, is falling apart. The lack of commitment and funding has proven its death-nail, and we are in the final stages of dismantling the institution. However, out of its death there is life. Many of GVFICA's initiatives led to current partnerships now underway through the local faith community, and good work is being accomplished. Although there is sadness when such a vision dies after so much work and time, it is a reminder that sometimes the more complicated and institutional we become, the more difficult it is to focus on what really builds change. My only concern going forward in its absence is the one goal GVFICA encouraged - the efforts to get the faith community and its leaders on the same page in focused ministries together, rather than in duplication. Regardless, the work completed has sparked a vision that continues forward.

Transformational Presence among the Leaders and Participants

Regarding transformational realities that have manifested themselves and deeply grounded the significance of this work and thesis, I offer some additional words and eye-opening experiences from the leaders and participants in regard to the challenges that we continue to face. After all, this has been an exercise in the experience of new realities, and especially ones that are in our own backyard. Jerry Broyal, a church member and dedicated Parents' Night attendee, who lives on the edge of the neighborhood, shared his

initial impressions of our efforts in this faith-based partnership within the context of a focus group on January 25, 2017:

Well, I thought it was a good idea from the perspective that I heard that there are some needs out there that I believe through the food-bank... ACIM has been discussing things like budgeting and so forth, and it seemed to be a way we could bring it all together, and be more focused in the community in a way that it made it easier for folks to access what we wanted to do.¹⁹¹

Additionally, I asked the group what would be their motivation in attending one of these classes with the parents as a member of the church? Lindsey Swanner, a young mother, the church Senior Warden, and occasional attendee said:

I wanted to find out what Parents' Night was all about for myself, and I think it is two-fold: I was hoping to take something. There is probably something I could learn from a budgeting and parenting class myself, but also to be around, you know, be around some of the people we were hoping to support; and also, to be there with them and interact with them and learn from that experience as well.¹⁹²

Jerry spoke poignantly to the value of Parents' Night in regard to the children and our hopes for their future. He said,

From my previous work in this field, a lot of the time there is family involvement... environment and so forth, but my point is it is frustrating because we worked really hard with the kids, but nobody worked with the environment, and if we made progress with the kids we sent them right back to the environment that taught them the inappropriate survival skills. So, I think that if we can touch just a few parents we can make a huge impact.¹⁹³

Jerry is speaking directly to one of the intended goals in the Parents' Night program. The BGC have the kids for only a few hours in the afternoon each day. Beyond this time and school, a majority of their hours are spent in the home environment. To the extent to

¹⁹¹ Jerry Broyal, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, focus group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, January 25, 2017.

¹⁹² Lindsey Swanner, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, focus group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, January 25, 2017.

¹⁹³ Jerry Broyal, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, focus group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, January 25, 2017.

which we can reach the parents, there is hope for the children in need, and perhaps our small efforts can impact a child's home life. Jerry posed the rhetorical question that must continue to stand before us as the Parents' Night program continues to unfold. He says, "Are we there, kind of as an outsider doing something; or are we joining with them in what's happening?"¹⁹⁴ Jerry is right, because if we are only there as an outsider to do something, then no authentic relationships will develop, and change will be minimal. In a sense, we are there "to be"; not "to do"!

Debbie Williams, the Director at the BGC said in an interview on January 26, 2017 following the Parents' Night program:

A church has that welcoming aspect that DSS does not have... and parents feel like if DSS is involved in anything it's a negative thing... that is what I would think too, because when I started working with kids in the BGC, if DSS was involved it was always bad... you know, a kid was being taken into foster care, a kid was taken from its parents... I had never put together, oh, DSS has resources for you no matter who you are. You don't have to be on Food Stamps or Medicaid to access the DSS resources... A lot of it is educating our parents.¹⁹⁵

She then spoke to the parity issue in how these classes make the parents feel when church members and all participants attend:

If you go into a parenting class and it's all BGC parents, it's like, oh, we all share the same struggle because our kids are similar. Most of my kids are African American and don't live in the best neighborhood... many are under the poverty line. But you know, if someone from your church goes in there and is in the same meeting, shares the same struggles, and has the same issues, it's like, the light goes off, in that, oh, we aren't the only ones who deal with this – we aren't the only people in the Oxford community who have budgeting and parenting issues. So, I feel it is very important to have had your presence in these classes.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Debbie Williams, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, focus group conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, January 26, 2017.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Debbie goes on to express the following in regard to the difficult task we face in transforming our community into a new reality:

This community is capable of so much, and there are a lot of people here who could give a lot and do a lot of good, but they have their blinders on to what is going on and they live in their bubble. That is why I think it is absolutely important to mesh these groups together (the faith community and its partners), not only for what it does on our level, but for your church members to see, oh, these people have the same issues we have, and we share the same struggle.¹⁹⁷

She then highlights the value of each person participating in the classes, and speaks about the success we experienced with Eugene, the truck driver:

Just like Malia and Melinda's dad, you know, if that was the one parent that ya'll got to in budgeting that has now done this and is going to better serve his children, because he is not buying Subway sandwiches every day, then it's a success. And just like your conversations with Russell and Tramain – that has made me so happy, just to hear them say they like the program because the parents are helping themselves.¹⁹⁸

Finally, the words of Phyllis Ramsey, a fifty-something, African American attendee, speak to the challenge of those caught in a cycle of poverty in her response to my rhetorical question, during an interview at the BGC location on May 16, 2017. I said, “How can we together help people in Oxford become more sustainable?”¹⁹⁹ She said,

It's a cycle, it's a cycle! The parents pass it down. I know someone right now who is living over in the subsidized housing park, and you know she was a good student, making straight A's and she even has an Associate's Degree, but no job. I ask her all the time why she won't come out of there, but she has no answer for it.²⁰⁰

I share these words because I believe the strength in this act of ministry is found in its presence. In other words, Oxford has been put on notice that St. Stephen's and

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Phyllis Ramsey, The Boys and Girls Club (BGC), interview conducted by Jamie Pahl, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, North Carolina, May 16, 2017.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

others in the secular arena jointly recognize we have a serious problem. We may not have specific answers; but together, with others who care and want to see change, we are dedicated to immersing ourselves in the problem and walking the road together with those who are trapped. That is what it is going to take. In this process, we will come to know each other, and together we can make change. The blessing of Parents' Night and the partnership that undergirds it is that the community knows we are working together – we are visible and present for all to experience. As Lewis Solomon said about the work ahead of us: “It is evident that traditional welfare (and more generally, public social service) programs are not effective... I would like to see power decentralized and devolved with responsibilities pushed back to the “little platoons”... enabling them to build stronger families and neighborhoods and to overcome poverty.”²⁰¹

Hoping and Dreaming as Transparent, Substantive Partners

My hopes and dreams are that through this act of ministry, we have incited the faithful in Oxford and beyond to join us for an ecumenical partnership with local government and stakeholders. St. Stephen's does not monopolize Parents' Night; rather we simply serve as a transparent, substantive partner - shining and reflecting the myriad of lights and colors of God. In many respects, we are like the stained-glass windows in our sanctuary, made of many colors, shapes, textures, and sizes; but of all the work and service we do, one of the most important tasks is lived-out through word and deed - shining and reflecting the light of God to our neighbors and friends.

Parents' Night offered many challenges and opportunities to learn new ways of being. Most importantly, the program highlighted the “good” that emerged in offering the

²⁰¹ Lewis D. Solomon, *In God We Trust?*, 16-17.

sessions in the first place. First and foremost, the conversations and discussions during the two classes were evidence enough that transformation was taking place. Parents, facilitators, church members, DSS, and the BGC leadership engaged and shared with one another. And we must not forget the presence of the BGC children and their observations of transformation in themselves and the parents. Those who participated in the sessions resembled a true cross-section from Oxford and the surrounding communities. We got to know one another, and we all served as a window to God's light, reflecting one to the other.

Secondly, and what I considered to be part of the larger question going into the program, we further proved that the secular and religious cannot only co-exist, but rather the two can mutually benefit and support each other. No expressions of proselytizing were present, and yet St. Stephen's reflected the presence of God through our welcome, presence, genuine desire to build a relationship individually with our neighbors, and to walk alongside the other in parity. Could these relationships have been taken deeper? Sure, without a doubt. The reality remains, this evangelism was on display in our partnership and new relationship with DSS and the BGC, and this image and reality matters most. The theological implications of this ministry are grounded in scripture and manifested in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: loving our neighbor, feeding and tending the sheep, emptying ourselves in the way Jesus did, allowing God's divine love to fill our hearts, and engaging the theological questions that take us to the difficult places; places where we must grapple with the realities of life, and encounter that which is seemingly different from us.

Third and finally, the qualitative data collected from all parties, which is highlighted in this chapter and throughout the thesis, proves that the program was indeed a blessing. In the end, everyone walked away saying the program is highly needed, must continue, and is considered a success. Despite the low number of participants, those who attended and participated found their lives gently touched through the simplicity of an incarnational, holy relationship with the other.

The organizing principles discussed in the previous chapter support the act of ministry carried-out in this project thesis. They promote and highlight the beginning of transformation sourced in the local, grassroots efforts of community citizens who love God and their neighbor. And this love of God and neighbor promotes a desire within to build sustainable progress in the lives of the younger generations. The generative citizens of the community want a better, more fruitful life for the children who will be the future builders and sustainers of our community; where the hope, love, and redemption of Christ Jesus reigns. As stated earlier in chapter three, the truth of the matter is, no amount of quantitative data gathered in this ministry effort will prove the power and depth of a blossoming relationship. The feeling one experiences in their heart when two people recognize the true meaning each is to the other and what they can accomplish together for the common good is untouchable. This begins one person, one relationship at a time. This is the place where we must step onto the floor and dance with the wind, touching upon the mountain-tops, sailing up to the stars, reaching for heaven with a hopeful glare, and with all that we can be, and not just what we are!²⁰²

²⁰² John Denver, *Aerie: The Eagle and the Hawk*, 1972.

Conclusion

The act of ministry in this project thesis, the subsequent materials gathered from various interviews and focus groups, and the under-girding framework of faith-based work all highlight the purpose and validity of my thesis statement in chapter two. When people share their stories heart to heart, and begin the process of building relationships in the context of a faith-based partnership (the faith community and secular/governmental organizations), transformation and hope can and will lead to new realities in the way we relate one to the other. In this relationship and partnership, walls come down and perpetual traps are opened.

As simple as this thesis is, there is truth in its simplicity. This is the hope that emerges from these relationships which can and will change lives; and if engaged, will especially manifest a new reality in the lives of children who hope for a future - a world that is redeemed by the presence of Godly peace and hope. Walter Fluker sums it up in this way:

These leaders must take as their moral compass a renewed vigor in the struggle for justice and a heart filled with compassion for the stranger – the radically different other in whose face we see our own and the face of the new world that calls us. These are the leaders who stand at the intersections of character, civility, and community and dare to reimagine the world.²⁰³

The truth of the matter is that from those original neighborly encounters and through the past nine years, I have settled into my Oxford neighborhood. My family has joined me in observing various crimes at the intersection of our street, where our neighbors are either participants or victims. I have encountered my neighbors in every facet of daily life; and through it all, I have acquired a community name in “Pastor

²⁰³ Walter Fluker, *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community*, 156.

Jamie”. And whether I like it or not, I am known as the pastor who will help financially and otherwise. The point is that none of this was intentional. I did not set-out to canvass the neighborhood. I simply immersed myself, claiming it as home, and I lived there with the same hope and dreams as others. I imagine that one day when I am gone the new leader at the church will need to find their place. Therefore, it is vitally important that the pastor not be the center of community engagement. Rather, the pastor can assist in the development of many leaders from within their faith community, because the church members are the steady presence and bridge to building relationships. This work is in their hands.

As a Christian leader in the Church, I seek transformation and redemption for all of God’s people, and it is an effort that goes beyond any one organization to effectuate change. The Church brings the commodity of a hope, peace, and love that is eternally fulfilled in the Kingdom of God, and we exemplify a taste of it in the earthly city. The hope is that through us, we can redeem and transform those who are searching. In the case of the woman who called me out in the ABC store six years ago, she has experienced redemption and transformation in her own life; it has come full circle. Recently, I was entering the Parish Hall at St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church following one of our shared services, and this same woman was standing behind a table serving lunch to parishioners. She reached out and gave me a hug, and said, “Do you remember me”? Of course, I did. She then began to tell me how she made her way out of the poverty-trap she was in for years; and with the assistance of the church, community, and DSS she was

independent and rebuilding her life in a nearby town. What a blessing! My hopes and prayers are that this same spirit would become generative and encourage the younger generations and the entire earthly city to know and experience that, truly with God, anything is possible!

Appendices

Original Planning Documents



The Education Initiative

Granville-Vance Faith Initiative for Community Action (GVFICA)

Child and Family Engagement

After the Band-Aid (A Pilot Program)

A faith-based pilot program designed to create a developmental support system for families struggling with issues caused by their socio-economic status.

The Goal

St. Stephen's looks to partner with Credle Elementary and the Department of Social Services to engage parents/guardians of educationally marginal children to promote positive changes within the home environment.

The vision is to create this pilot program and measure its success for an undetermined period with the hopes that it will be exportable to other member churches within GVFICA.

The Program

St. Stephen's Education Minister will communicate each month with the Principal of Credle Elementary as to what St. Stephen's is offering for parents/guardians of students who are the beneficiaries of the GVFICA literacy initiative. The Principal and Guidance Counselor will share this program offering with the designated parents/guardians. Participation in the program will be entirely voluntary. About once a month initially, St. Stephen's will offer Financial Counselors, Hope Advisors, Resource Counselors, a representative from the Department of Social Services (DSS), and food for parents/guardians. These sessions will be an opportunity for the adults to receive assistance in jumping some hurdles in their life and hopefully making a better life for themselves and their children. The ultimate goal and hope is that by helping to encourage a healthy home environment the child may better focus and excel in their education.

Some criteria:

- The church volunteers will undergo training from a representative of DSS.
- A representative from DSS will be present at each session for support, referrals, etc.
- Indemnity Clause

Letter of Intent of Cooperation

This Letter of Intent of Cooperation is between **St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Oxford, NC** and **The Granville County Department of Social Services of North Carolina (DSS)**.

The following agreement covers a period of time beginning the fall of 2015 and continuing through the spring of 2017, with the option to extend into the future by mutual agreement.

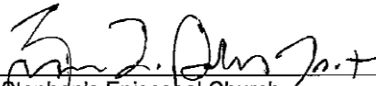
St. Stephen's will host a pilot program called "After the Band-Aid – Parent's Night", working jointly with DSS in providing a faith-based program designed to create a developmental support system for families struggling with issues impacted by their socio-economic status.

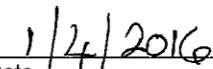
Operating as a member-church of Granville-Vance Faith Initiative for Community Action - GVFICA [a 501(c)3], St. Stephen's will partner with DSS and The Boys & Girls Club of Granville County (BGC) to engage parents/guardians of "at-risk youth" in promoting positive changes within the home environment. This pilot program will measure the success of these youth for approximately one school year, with the hopes that it will be exportable to other member churches within GVFICA.

In coordination with DSS and BGC, St. Stephen's will offer a "Parents' Night" for parents/guardians of students who are the beneficiaries of The Boys & Girls Club, grades K to 12. Twice a month on the 1st and 3rd Mondays, we will jointly offer the following from 5:00 until 6:30 PM:


1. Simple dinner for the parents/guardians who attend.
2. Budgeting classes.
3. Parenting resources.
4. Child & reading resources.
5. Hope & spiritual resources.
6. DSS representation.

These sessions will be an opportunity for the adults to receive assistance in jumping some hurdles in their life and hopefully making a better life and environment for themselves and their children. The ultimate goal and hope is that by helping to encourage a healthy home environment the child may better focus and excel in their education.

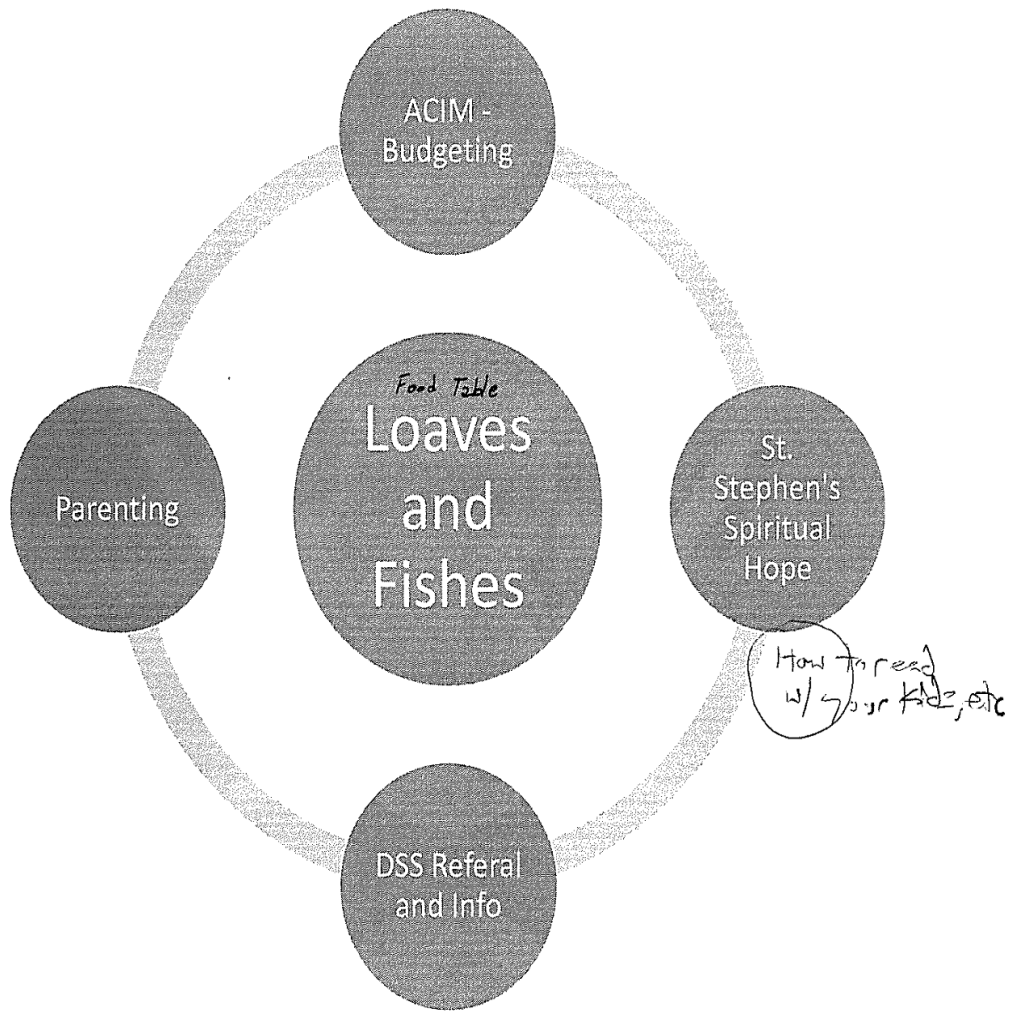

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Rector
Title


Date


Granville County Department of Social Services Director
Title


Date

Station Table Layout



Pre-Parents' Night Agenda & Survey

Please choose and mark one (1) course in which you wish to follow over these nine (9) sessions. There will also be available a simple meal, Social Services resources, and spiritual hope and listening stations.

Parent's Name _____

Child/Children's Name _____

_____ **Budgeting / Financial Management Class**

- Practical resources to manage your daily and monthly budget.
- Wise spending.
- How to save.
- Financial practices that help your home environment and family.

_____ **Parenting Resources**

- Homework and study tips for the school year / tips for attending parent teacher meetings.
- How to stop yelling and start listening / positive parenting / rewards and consequences
- Handling stress and anger parents and child
- Being a positive role model for my child
- Alternative discipline techniques
- How to get my child to listen / communication tips
- Helping my child become responsible and respectful / age appropriate chores

Other interests - please write here

Classes:

September 19 th	5:15 – 6:30 PM
October 3 rd	5:15 – 6:30 PM
October 17 th	5:15 – 6:30 PM
November 7 th	5:15 – 6:30 PM
November 21 st	5:15 – 6:30 PM
December 5 th	5:15 – 6:30 PM
December 19 th	5:15 – 6:30 PM
January 9 th	5:15 – 6:30 PM
January 23 rd	5:15 – 6:30 PM

Informed Consent

Parents' Night: A Faith Community and Local Government Partnership

**St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, *The Rev. James L. Pahl, Jr.*
140 College Street, Oxford, NC 27565
919-693-9740**

Project Description:

This program will offer a simple meal and four resource classes/stations: 1. two budgeting/financial management classes, 2. one parenting resources class with special attention on assisting children in the home environment, 3. giving and receiving spiritual hope in the small chapel, and 4. accessing community resources with a DSS representative. Each of these resources will offer facilitators who are trained in the particular area of interest, or simply have experience and knowledge. Classes/Stations will last approximately one hour. Before the program begins parents will choose which track they wish to follow (budgeting or parenting) for the nine sessions. The purpose of these classes/stations is to offer practical and substantive assistance to the parents and guardians of the BGC children, in the hope that it may translate to a better education and home environment for the children.

Procedure and Risks:

At the beginning, end, and throughout the program I would like to ask questions, conduct interviews, and focus groups with participants - both parents and facilitators. Many of these questions will be recorded if you are willing, and the use of the tapes will assist in writing my materials. We will record the interviews only with your written consent, and will ask that no personal identifiers be used during the interview to ensure your anonymity. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview any time you want. The tapes and transcripts will become the property of the project. If you so choose, the recordings and recording-transcripts (or copy of notes taken) will be kept anonymous, without any reference to your identity, and your identity will be concealed in any reports written from the interviews. There are no known risks associated with participation in the study.

Benefits:

It is hoped that the results of this study will benefit the participants, their families, and the wider community; by providing greater assistance and practical resources to our neighbors, as we build transformational relationships and offer our children paths forward for their future success.

Cost Compensation:

Participation in this study will involve NO costs or payments to you.

Confidentiality:

All information collected during the study period will be kept strictly confidential until such time as you sign a release waiver. No publications or reports from this project will include identifying information on any participant without your signed permission, and after your review of the materials. If you agree to join this study, please sign your name on the following page.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

Parents' Night: A Faith Community and Local Government Partnership

I, _____, agree to be interviewed for the program entitled *Parents' Night* which is being produced by *The Rev. James L. Pahl, Jr.* of *St. Stephen's Episcopal Church*.

I certify that I have been told of the confidentiality of information collected for this project and the anonymity of my participation; that I have been given satisfactory answers to my inquiries concerning project procedures and other matters; and that I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without prejudice.

I agree to participate in one or more electronically recorded interview(s) or focus group(s) for this project. I understand that such interviews/focus groups and related materials will be kept completely anonymous, and that the results of this study may be published in an academic journal or book.

I agree that any information obtained from this research may be used in any way thought best for this study.

_____ Date _____
Signature of Interviewee

_____ Date _____
Acknowledgement of Interviewer

If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this program, contact:

[St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 140 College St., Oxford, NC 27565, 919-693-9740]

Cc: signed copy to interview.

Anonymous Survey
Parents' Night
September 19, 2016

- 1. Were you raised in Oxford, NC (circle one)?**
 - Yes
 - No

- 2. What Is Your Ethnicity (circle one)?**
 - African American
 - Asian
 - Hispanic
 - Pacific Islander
 - White

- 3. What is your age (circle one)?**
 - 18 to 24 years
 - 25 to 34 years
 - 35 to 44 years
 - 45 to 54 years
 - 55 to 64 years
 - Age 65 or older

- 4. What is your education level (circle one)?**
 - Completed some high school
 - High school graduate
 - Completed some college
 - Associate degree
 - Bachelor's degree

- 5. What is your marital status (circle one)?**
 - Single (never married)
 - Married
 - Separated
 - Widowed
 - Divorced

- 6. What is your gender (circle one)?**
 - Female
 - Male

- 7. Do you have a job (circle one)?**
 - Yes
 - No

8. How many hours per week do you USUALLY work at your job (circle one)?

- 35 hours a week or more
- Less than 35 hours a week
- I am not currently employed

9. What is your occupation?

10. Do you attend a church (circle one)?

- Yes
- No

11. Is faith important to you (circle one)?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you ever seek help from the Department of Social Services (DSS) and/or Area Congregations in Ministry (ACIM) (circle one)?

- Yes
- No

13. How often do you seek assistance from DSS or ACIM (circle one)?

- Once a week
- Once a month
- Every so often

14. Do you find it more difficult to seek help at a church or DSS/ACIM? Why?

15. Do you feel it is important to build a relationship with those who are helping and assisting you (circle one)?

- Yes
- No

16. If so, why?

17. Do you have a budgeting plan for your family on a month to month basis (circle one)?

- Yes
- No

18. How many children do you have?

19. Do you find parenting to be challenging (circle one)?

- Yes
- No

20. If so, why?

**Granville County Department of Social Services Focus Group
September 19, 2016**

This is Jamie Pahl (JP), Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, and I'm sitting here with 'Taisha' (T), 'Amy' (A), and 'John' (J) – and you all work for whom?

T, A, & J: *Granville County Department of Social Services (DSS).*

J: *So what do you consider yourself... a government agency?*

T, A, & J: *Part of the local government.*

JP: *Okay. So, what we are doing tonight with the parents of the kids from the Boys and Girls Club... you are here offering resources, and we are offering classes... parenting and budgeting classes. What is the significance of doing this at a church as opposed to holding these on the grounds of Social Services or in your building? What is the significance in your mind that it's happening in a church or that a church would open up space to do this?*

T: *I think it allows that faith-based piece of it, and local government ... we are not allowed to base things on faith.*

A: *Separation. Church and state.*

T: *We're not supposed to say - we're here for prayer also. You wouldn't normally talk about God or faith or anything like that?*

A: *Right.*

J: *Not unless the client brought that up – if they bring that up to you and say this is important, then we can have a discussion. But as a state agency we can't introduce the concept of religion to the client. If they bring it up, then they open that door.*

JP: *Is that stated anywhere... like in documentation? I'm sure it is.*

T: *I'm sure it is. We can't discriminate based on race, age, religion, that kind of stuff.*

J: *For me, having this gathering in the church setting – I think there's more stigma going to DSS than there is coming to a church; and this isn't even – it's not like we're meeting in a chapel – we're meeting in a Parish Hall - Fellowship Hall.*

J: *It's a fellowship hall, it's a cafeteria type of place, and it's a lot less threatening than if you were in the actual chapel.*

JP: *Sure.*

J: *Unthreatening is not the right word but it's still part of a church. You're not in the sanctuary... We're not in the church, but it's still part of church.*

JP: *Right. Do you think that makes people feel uncomfortable especially when we're focusing on socio-economic issues that don't have anything to do with faith per se, you think it is?*

T: *I think it will impact their responses and interactions inside the classroom.*

JP: *Positively or negatively?*

T: *Both. On one end there are some things they're not going to say that go on in the home, and on the other hand, they're going to feel obligated – like this is church, I'm not going to lie in the church.*

(Laughter)

J: *I think there's much less stigma about that here than at DSS.*

JP: *Really?*

J: *Yes, like if you come to DSS...*

T: *We're prying!*

J: Yeah, we're prying into their stuff – we're asking questions, so we can get information about them, so we can use it against them! Here they're just learning something.

JP: I see what you're saying, yeah. Well, and also, I imagine when they come to you all, lots of times they are looking for something that maybe DSS can provide – I imagine financial or some kind of resource (acknowledgment) – not just a class. Here we're not – aside from a free meal – we're not handing out dollars or anything like that. But you know it's interesting when people come through the church door here looking for assistance, they've usually already been to DSS and a lot of time they have no money – so I imagine the restrictions... you follow a budget and there's only so much you can do – there's no wiggle room – is that fair to say?

T: That's right, we get a certain amount of money, and a lot of times it's like, first come-first served, especially with emergency assistance, or like day care, those kinds of programs, essentially, they can... like run out. So, if we get the funding in December, it may be gone in February and so there may not be anything. But, things like Medicaid and food and nutrition services, I don't want to call them unlimited, but throughout the year we can kind of apply without having to worry about whether you will be able to get it. Those programs are a little less restrictive as opposed to ones that get budgeted once a year.

JP: I know when folks come here, and they usually have really big bills – sometimes they'll have \$400 and \$500 electric bills and water bills, and they've been to DSS, they've been to ACIM – I always ask that question – and they often say, 'they want me to take a budgeting class and I don't have a budgeting issue' – they're not willing to take the budgeting class. So, I say there is only so much here I can do to help you. I mean I could go sit down, and say write a check from my discretionary that might help somebody but is that really going to solve the problem – it's not getting at the core issue.

A: You can teach a man to fish or you can give him a fish.

JP: Exactly, and to what extent?

T: And I think sometimes, for some of these people, they need a right now fix – a budgeting class is going to take 8 weeks – it isn't fixing their problem if their lights are about to get turned off. If you're coming to somebody for help, you've probably exhausted a couple of other options such as asking a family member of whoever else might be around or your own personal church; so, a lot of times they're at their last string just trying to find a quick fix, not somebody telling them this will work in the future.

JP: Yeah, they want something in the moment to solve the problem – I mean I can understand that.

A: And that probably means they've come to us a least one time that year – if ACIM is turning them down and we're turning them down – they've probably come to us at least one time.

JP: Yeah – that's got to be a real difficult place to be, though I imagine when you're down and out and you're not really sure where to turn and you have a lot of debt on you or something that's holding you back and you just want somebody to listen to you or point you in the right direction. Isn't it hard, I imagine to face 9 sessions, or the need to do all these budgeting classes, but first I just need this situation solved right now?

A: Right. It's kind of hard to see long term when you're focused day to day.

JP: Right. I'm sure y'all see that.

T: *And sometimes we have to fix it right now, so they can focus on the future – you're right – like I can sit through budgeting classes but if the whole time I'm thinking, are my lights being turned off while I'm not at home right now, I'm really not focused on budgeting class. You know – no matter how many times I sit there, I'm not there.*

JP: *Sure, exactly.*

J: *You know, we don't want people to starve while we're teaching them how to fish but that's the difficulty we have, that you have as well, when folks come up; but part of why they are in need, only in part, is because of what they've done prior to today. And, you know, you give me \$50 and I'll go spend it on something other than what I need to spend it on – you know – I'm going to have the same problem in another month. And it's a very cynical way to look at this, but it's a truth for many people.*

JP: *Do you have, when folks come through the door... I know you have a process that must be followed... do you refer folks to churches or faith institutions? Do you have referrals you make in that regard?*

T: *Yes, we have places that we kind of know about and are kind of consistently open so if they're looking for food, we know ACIM's schedule or that Penn Avenue Soup Kitchen is going to give out food on Wednesday – so those kinds of things are kind of consistent. Because what we don't want is for people to keep hitting dead-ends, because that's frustrating enough to have to ask for help and then you send them someplace that's not open until next week; you know that doesn't solve anything and it makes them not trust what you provide to them. So, you know we have – I don't want to say go-to agencies – but say somebody needs furniture, they're more likely going to Habitat or something like it... so we do have those.*

JP: *Well, you mentioned trust, which makes me want to ask this question, because this is important – the relationship piece – so people come through and I know it would be easy to see folks – because you have a lot of folks that come through DSS – to see folks as numbers. To what extent do you build relationships with people, where you get to know them, and you really care - you really want them to find some kind of transformation in their spending or in the parenting or whatever it might be in their life – do you find that culture exists in DSS here?*

T: *I can see that happening in the other units. We're services, so we typically, that's typically what we're about is building that relationship.*

JP: *You say other units, you mean like...*

T: *...like Medicaid and food and nutrition services. We do Adult services and children's services, so like we're typically working with the families more so than the individuals, so let's find out how to make it work. Not necessarily giving them that Medicaid or food stamps or emergency services. But I can see them becoming Case number 54329 in another unit because they have deadlines, they have things they have to process every day; be in by a certain time, and they have to get certain information in by a certain date, and if they don't they get in trouble. So, you know throughout the day it can become a thing of 'let's get it done' for them. And sometimes you can lose a person in the process; but I think a lot of people who do work there have to have a heart. There's not much money in it, so you know, you have to have that heart in order to stick around. They refer to us a lot of times if they see something really unusual and that kind of shows us too... sometimes, that they're not just a case to them. If somebody's coming in too often, or if*

something's not right or not looking right, or information is off when they've been given it, they'll let us know and we can kind of help out on the services end sometimes.

JP: *That's a big piece, the relationship piece, and getting to know folks and caring about their situation.*

J: *Like Taisha was talking about, we're giving the services, that's what we're about because we're working directly with the people, but then on the other side with the Medicare and Food Stamps, they're about numbers – how much do you make? What assets do you have? How many people in your house? Those are all numbers and all that stuff gets put in the computer and if the numbers line up, you can have what you think you need but if they don't line up, it's like, I am sorry, we can't help you. And that's it. So, on the income maintenance side, what all those programs fall under, the workers are going to try to develop a relationship, but they just don't have enough people to actually do that with every single one. They have 150 people in their case load – that's probably minimum – so they're just dealing with 'what can I get in the computer'. And we have a lot less, so we have to be that relationship.*

JP: *Yeah, you know it's interesting, I think when you get back to the church focus, you look at where it began, I'm talking about the universal Church and early days, the history; it was in the 200's – where there was just this rag-tag group of people that were followers of Christ and it was when they started caring for people. It was in the 300's when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and all the sudden, it's like Christianity become the start of Social Services – it goes back there, because Christians started caring for the poor and for the sick and for the needy and the people who were down and out, and all the sudden people were taking notice...*

J: *St. Stephen's was one of the first social workers right here in Oxford in our time!*

JP: *Yeah, you're right, and so, all of a sudden that became known as wait, these Christians are good people and it became part of the government, or at least it became part of the official empire. It was like Social Services at its very beginning; so there really is a tie when you go back that far, and you think about it.*

J: *We're all about helping people and different people need different types of help at different points in their life. That's it. We're all doing the best we can with what we've got at any given moment. And if you've got to come – I mean it's important to us to treat people with that dignity and respect. I'm one pay check away from homelessness. I don't want to have to call Social Services you know and if I do they need to recognize I'm a human being doing the best I can and if you can help a brother out, help a brother out. And that's my philosophy and I expect that out of the people I work with as well – to own that – and they do.*

JP: *Thanks, y'all! Today is September 19, 2016.*

Parents' Night
Questionnaire/Interview (Kasha)
At the BGC Facility
December 5, 2016

1. What has brought you here this evening?
2. How would you describe your life and family challenges?
3. What will it take to help you get out of your present challenges and move forward in life?
4. What will it take to help your child/children succeed in life?
5. What is your thought about the Church?
6. Do you attend a church?
7. Does the church offer anything of value to you and your family?
8. What are your thoughts on government assistance through DSS?
9. Does government (local and federal) offer anything of value to you and your family?
10. When I say, "Church and state" what does that mean to you?
11. Can the faith community (the Church) work with the government to solve problems?
12. What is the difference between a handout and an opportunity to help yourself?
13. Does it feel different coming here to the church versus DSS?
14. Does it make a difference when you get to know someone and build a relationship when you are seeking help?
15. What is important to you in building a relationship?

Anonymous Questionnaire
Parents' Night
January 23, 2017

1. Which class did you take (circle one)?

- Budgeting
- Parenting

2. Was your class helpful? If so, how?

3. Has your budgeting or parenting changed in any way since the first class? How? Please explain.

4. How many sessions of the class did you attend?

- 1
- 2-5
- 5-8

5. How could the classes and Parents' Night Program improve?

6. What was it like to meet and work with the church volunteers?

7. What Is Your Ethnicity (circle one)?

- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Pacific Islander
- White

8. What is your age?

9. What is your education level?

10. What is your marital status?

11. What is your gender?

12. Do you have a job?

13. What is your occupation?

14. Do you attend a church?

15. Is faith and church important to you? If so, how and why?

**16. Does faith and the presence of the church make a difference in these classes?
If so, how or why?**

**17. Have you ever seek help from the Department of Social Services (DSS)
and/or Area Congregations in Ministry (ACIM)?**

18. How often do you seek assistance from DSS or ACIM?

19. Do you find it more difficult to seek help at a church or DSS/ACIM? Why?

**20. Do you feel it is important to build a relationship with those who are helping
and assisting you? Why?**

**21. Do you have a budgeting and parenting plan for your family on a month to
month basis? If so, what is it?**

22. How many children do you have?

Parents' Night
Interview Questions
BGC Kids (Russell and Tramain)
January 23, 2017
5:15 PM

1. Why are you so excited to help?
2. How does it make you feel to see adults (Parents) attending classes?
3. Have your parents attended one of the classes?
4. What do you know about the classes?
5. What do you think about budgeting and money?
6. What do you think about parenting?
7. Do you and your family attend a church?
8. How does it make you feel to see a church helping and working with the BGC?
9. Why do you think we are doing this?
10. Why is it important to wear a name tag?
11. Is it important to make friends with everyone?
12. Could these classes help the adult in their life? If so, how does that affect you?
13. What is your plan for the future? What do you hope to be and do in the future?
14. Do you like the BGC? If so, why?
15. Does it feel similar to the church?

Parents' Night Focus Groups

Questions

Group A

Session Facilitators

January 24, 2017

10:00 AM

Group B

Church Members

January 25, 2017

10:00 AM

Group C

BGC Leaders

January 26, 2017

10:30 AM

Introduction: Day, Date, Time, Those Present

1. Tell me, what is your name and what is your background?
2. When I reached out to you about this program what was your first impression?
3. Why would you want to teach a budgeting or parenting class? Your motivation?
4. How have you felt the program has gone? A success or failure? Were lives transformed in any shape or form?
5. Should it continue? What changes are needed to make it more efficient?
6. How have you found the attendees to be in demeanor and personality?
7. How would you describe the life and family challenges you heard about?
8. Was there any transformation in your own life as you encountered the parents and children?
9. What will it take to help get the parents out of their present challenges and move forward in life?
10. What will it take to help the child/children succeed in life?

11. Do you have a connection to St. Stephen's or another church?
12. What is your thought about the Church?
13. Is there a difference when the Church is offering this as compared to a secular group? If so, why?
14. Does the church offer anything of value to the parents and their family?
15. What are your thoughts on government assistance through DSS?
16. Does government (local and federal) offer anything of value to these families?
17. When I say, "Church and state" what does that mean to you?
18. Can the faith community (the Church) work with the government to solve problems?
19. What is the difference between a handout and an opportunity for someone to help themselves?
20. How did it feel conducting the classes at the church versus the BGC?
21. What were your feelings about DSS being present?
22. Does it make a difference when you get to know someone and build a relationship when they are seeking help?
23. Is it important to you to building a relationship with those whom you are journeying?
24. What does it mean to "walk and move alongside the other"?
25. What were your observations of the BGC kids?
26. What were your observations of the church volunteers and DSS?
27. In the book, In God We Trust, the author, Lewis Solomon makes the case for the success of faith-based organizations partnering with government and secular organizations. He shares examples of important and successful partnerships like the "Ten-Point Coalition". This partnership consisted of three ministers who

could not alone solve the out of control youth violence taking place in Boston. So, they partnered with the government and police department to bring about a reduction in youth violence. Solomon said, *“The key contribution of the Coalition centered not in its programs for at-risk youth, but rather in changing the way Boston's inner-city community and the police (as well as other elements of the criminal justice system) related to each other... it changed the relationship between Boston police and inner-city communities from open antagonism to partnership.”* Can the same be said for this faith-based partnership with the BGC and DSS? That our success is in how we all work together toward a common goal, forging relationships that didn't exist before, bringing about transformation in all lives, and not stressing over the number of participants involved or lives transformed?

28. Just before the House Bill, HR 7 failed in Congress in 2001, Congressman Tom DeLay said the faith-based initiative is *“A great opportunity to bring God back into the public institutions of the country... [a way of] standing up and rebuking this notion of separation of church and state that has been imposed upon us over the last 40 or 50 years. You see, I don't believe there is a separation of church and state.”* Carl Esbeck and other legal advocates of the faith-based initiative challenged DeLay's view early on, believing it is more a matter of establishing neutrality between the religious and secular, and not an effort to re-establish “God” at the center of government. This thought evokes the organizing principles of “sphere sovereignty” and “subsidiarity” (explain the principles). To what extent do these Dutch Calvinist and Catholic principles influence our faith-based work today and the proper relationship between Church and state in the United States and in Oxford, North Carolina?
29. Lew Daly says in God and the Welfare State, *“America's exceptional religiosity is actually less exceptional, among advanced countries, than its record of failure on poverty and inequality.... Critics must concede that the faith-based initiative [under Bush] is no threat to some great achievements of the past: since Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty in the mid-1960s the poverty rate has remained essentially unchanged... If this is God's “chosen nation,” it is not as Isaiah promised – a place where the people will benefit from their own labors; where they will no longer “build houses for others to live in or “plant for others to eat”; where they will not “toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune.” God seems to have a clear policy on poverty. And [Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama] believe that in restricting support for religious groups that care for those in need, the government discriminates against God's work and creates the largest barrier to reducing poverty today... this is the missing link in the war on poverty.”* I believe in our country's exceptional status, but is there not some element of contradiction with Holy Scripture, as we have actually seen the poverty rate increase in recent years? Is it fair to attribute this in large part to the ineffectiveness of government alone, and the true missing link is grassroots – on the ground, in the neighborhoods – faith communities building relationships with the downtrodden? The organizing principle of “subsidiarity” at work?

30. In his book, God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State, Lew Daly says that "...restoring deprived communities has something to do with a proper coordination of church and state: the long tradition of effective Christian Democratic welfare policy in Europe is founded on this idea... Put simply, the faith-based initiative embodies a pluralist vision of societal restoration, based on legal recognition of the real personality of social groups – most importantly families and their churches and communities..." Do you believe societal restoration is an important element of the vision for this faith-based work between faith communities and government? Did you (do you) have a big-picture view of the restoration of our society; a turning of the world upside down, which is actually right-side up? A sort of war on poverty, if you will? Jesus certainly turned the world upside down.
31. In his book, Toxic Charity – How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, Robert Lupton distinguishes "betterment" from "development" in our efforts to assist the poor and needy of our society. He says, "*Betterment does for others. Development maintains the long view and looks to enable others to do for themselves. Betterment improves conditions. Development strengthens capacity. Betterment gives a man a fish. Development teaches a man how to fish... But superbly run betterment programs do little to strengthen the community's capacity to address its own needs... They are entry points but not ending points.*" If the vision for faith-based partnerships in the United States was in part "a reinvigorated war on poverty", to what extent was the vision and focus on "betterment" as opposed to "development"? It seems to me that these partnerships between faith communities and government should always have the goal to focus beyond the band-aid and immediate relief, and to provide sustainable development? And where does the personal, building a lasting relationship with my neighbors come into play? Is there room for the relationship?
32. Stanley Carlson-Thies believes that the challenge of "reengineering" the social safety net along pluralist lines is only part of the struggle to restore impoverished communities across the United States. He said, "*According to biblical teaching, government has a high calling to do justice. When it misses the mark, it's time for an overhaul, not to cast about for whatever other tool might be pressed into service. The Bible insists that help should be given to the needy. So it is heartening that policymakers and policy experts are being driven by the failings of government welfare to devise more effective ways of rendering assistance to the poor.*" Was the faith initiative essentially a "war on poverty" in a new and reinvigorated way?
33. In the final State of the Union Address in 2008, President Bush called on Congress to "*permanently extend Charitable Choice... Faith-based groups are bringing hope to pockets of despair, with newfound support from the federal government. And to help guarantee equal treatment of faith-based organizations when they compete for federal funds, I ask you to permanently extend Charitable*

Choice.” President Obama continued this effort. Considering all the divisiveness that exists among the various and different denominations and faith traditions, is it not fair to say this collaborative work with secular institutions is a great way to find common ground?

34. Many of the faith-based partnerships with government agencies and local stakeholders have found success in the larger cities, especially the inner cities of New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, etc. What about the small towns and cities that make up most of our country; places like Oxford, North Carolina? What would it mean to you to see this faith-based work succeed and replicate in small towns and communities where poverty is just as prevalent as the inner cities, but often overlooked?
35. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how much of these partnerships between the faith community and the government are based largely on successful relationships? In other words, my thesis contends that by building a relationship with the adults and their families of the declining neighborhood in a faith-based setting, and offering practical resources and avenues of hope and change on a sustained level, real transformation will blossom. The government, local agencies, and non-profits cannot address community socio-economic issues alone. The faith community, in partnership with these local community stakeholders offers a powerful proposition. In collaborating, the faith community, the government, and local stakeholders can work together to address the myriad of issues that plague community backyards across the nation, such as education, health, and poverty. This would not be a ‘one-stop shop’ or a hand-out. Rather, this would be building relationships and helping our neighbors help themselves. What are your thoughts on this? What impact could these partnerships and relationships have across our community, state, and nation; and its future?

Bibliography

St. Augustine. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, Edited and Translated by R.W. Dyson, 1998.

Banerjee, Abhijit V. and Duflo, Esther. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. New York, New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume One*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1956.

Bretherton, Luke. *Christianity & Contemporary Politics*. Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination – Second Edition*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001.

Callahan, Kennon L. *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass – A Wiley Imprint, 1983.

Carson, D.A. *Christ & Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.

Daly, Lew. *God's Economy – Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Daly, Lew. *God and the Welfare State*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006.

Denver, John. *Aerie: The Eagle and the Hawk*. Greenwich Village, Manhattan: Cherry Lane Music, 1971.

Fluker, Walter Earl. *Ethical Leadership: The Quest for Character, Civility, and Community*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2009.

Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve*. New York: Seabury Books, 2007.

Gittins, Anthony J. *A Presence That Disturbs – A Call to Radical Discipleship*. Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2002.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament – A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

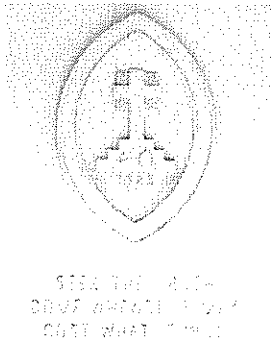
Hillman, James. *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life*. New York, New York: Random House, 1999.

Jacobsen, Dennis A. *Doing Justice – Congregations and Community Organizing*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001.

Jenkins, Willis. *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*. Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Press, 2013.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1958.

- Levenson, Jon D. *Sinai & Zion – An Entry into The Jewish Bible*. New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987.
- Lupton, Robert D. *Toxic Charity – How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help*. New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, HarperOne, 2011.
- McAdams, Dan P. *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Nehemiah 1-2, 4-5, 8-10, 13*. In conjunction with annotations in *The HarperCollins Study Bible – NRSV* (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993); *The New Interpreter's Bible – A Commentary: Volume III* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994).
- Osmer, Richard, R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Owens, Michael Leo. *God and Government in the Ghetto – The Politics of Church-State Collaboration in Black America*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Palmer, Parker J. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Saint Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions*. Trans. Sister Maria Boulding. Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997. Print.
- Sedmak, Clemens. *Doing Local Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Solomon, Lewis D. *In God We Trust? Faith-Based Organizations and the Quest to Solve America's Social Ills*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003.
- Wimberly, Edward P. *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling – The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.



NON-EXCLUSIVE THESIS DISTRIBUTION LICENSE

By signing and submitting this license you, "the author", grant to Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) the non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute your submission in electronic format via the World Wide Web, as well as the right to migrate or convert your submission, without alteration of the content, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation and/or continued distribution.

VTS acknowledges that this is a non-exclusive license; any copyrights in the submission remain with the author or other copyright holder and subsequent uses of the submitted material by that person(s) are not restricted by this license.

The author agrees that VTS may keep more than one copy of this submission for purposes of security, backup and preservation.

The author represents that the submission covered by this license is his/her original work and that he/she has the right to grant this license to VTS. The author further represents that the submission does not, to the best of his/her knowledge, infringe upon any third-party's copyright. If the submission contains material for which the author does not hold copyright, the author represents that he/she has obtained the unrestricted permission of the copyright holder to grant this license to VTS, and that such third-party material is clearly identified and acknowledged within the text or content of the submission. In the event of a subsequent dispute over the copyrights to material contained in this submission, the author agrees to indemnify and hold harmless VTS and its employees or agents for any uses of the material authorized by this license.

If this submission is based upon work that has been sponsored or supported by any agency or organization other than VTS, the author represents that he/she has fulfilled any right of review or other obligation required by contract or agreement with the supporting entity.

The author specifically acknowledges that the content may constitute an educational record under FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g) and expressly consents to the use of the content as contemplated under this agreement.

VTS will make the submission available to the public using a Creative Commons Attribution / Non-commercial / No derivative works license accompanied by a copyright statement indicating the author's continuing rights. VTS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the author's name remains clearly associated with the submission and that no alterations of the content are made.

Author Information:

Name: The Rev. James Larkin Pahl, Jr.

Signature: _____

Address: _____

City: C

Phone: _____

Email: _____



Attachment A
Identification of Content

Community Backyard Relationship-Building:
A Partnership between the Church,
Title of Content: Government, and Local Stakeholders
Author(s): The Rev. James Larkin Pahl, Jr.
Date Content was Created: October 27, 2017
Description of Content: Doctor of Ministry Project Thesis

For more information contact:

Mitzi Budde
Head Librarian
Bishop Payne Library
Virginia Theological
Seminary
Alexandria VA 22304
703-461-1733
paynelib@vts.edu