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BETHEL UNIVERSITY
BETHEL SEMINARY, ST. PAUL

FROM THE SUBURBS TO THE CITY: SEEKING THE SHALOM
OF AN INNER CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE
IN LEADING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

BY
ELIAS SOILES
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
MAY 2017

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Pastor Tom Sparling, the Journey staff, my life group, and Journey Church as a whole have encouraged and supported me in more ways than I can count. They help me

believe that the church is indeed the hope of the world. Throughout this project the great joy for me was that this was not simply an academic exercise. We are really going to try to do this together. Thank you for your friendship and your partnership in the gospel.

Lord Jesus, thank you for saving me, for filling me, for leading and guiding me and for not giving up on me. May this project be to the praise of your glory. Thanks be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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ABSTRACT

Journey Community Church, a five-year old white, suburban, college-educated, middle class church, moved into the Bell Hill neighborhood of Worcester, Massachusetts on July 1, 2015. This was a neighborhood of which Journey Church knew almost nothing and of which it seemingly had little in common. The Bell Hill neighborhood is poor, working class, culturally and ethnically diverse with whites comprising less than forty percent of the population. This project chronicles the process and strategy Journey Community Church is using to begin to get to know, understand, and build relationships of trust with residents of the Bell Hill neighborhood. The project culminates with an outline of an urban ministry model, including ministry values and action steps, that is enabling Journey Church to begin reaching its neighborhood and contributing to its holistic flourishing.

The biblical and theological review examined the role and nature of the city in Scripture. The conclusion was that the city is God's intent, the ultimate destiny of the people of God, and a critical focus of the church's mission in the present. The literature review engaged with various views of eschatology and how they impact the church's understanding of its role in the city and in the world. The researcher adopted the view that the world will not be destroyed by God but purified and redeemed. The role of the church is to be an agent of shalom and a maker of God-honoring culture.

Along with demographic research, the researcher used an action research methodology that included ethnography and case study to begin gaining an insider's understanding and perspective of the neighborhood and to work toward neighborhood change. The biblical and theological reflection, literature review and neighborhood research were all used to develop a series of values, principles and strategic priorities that would undergird Journey Church's urban ministry model.

INTRODUCTION: JOURNEY INTO THE CITY

Seeking the Shalom of the Bell Hill Neighborhood

On July 1, 2016, The Journey Community Church, a five-year old church plant primarily made up of people from white, middle class, college-educated, suburban backgrounds, took possession of the former CrossRoads Community Church building in the Bell Hill neighborhood of Worcester, MA and began making it their church home. The decision to take possession of the CrossRoads Church building did not come easy. For the researcher and for a number of key Journey Church leaders it was not the building itself but rather its location that was the deciding factor. The hope of becoming embedded in the city of Worcester and the possibility of contributing to the flourishing of the underserved Bell Hill neighborhood was what made the move compelling to the researcher. The biblical concept of shalom became the way the researcher began framing his hopes for Journey Church in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

The Hebrew word shalom, often translated as “peace” in English is a social and relational term and is expansive in its application. It speaks of wholeness, flourishing, integrity, and reconciliation in every sphere of life. It refers to material and physical wellbeing and prosperity, to justice, righteousness, and equity in the personal and public sphere, and to reconciled relationships with God, self, others and the creation. Walter Brueggemann writes:

The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature.

That persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible, and a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessing, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarize that controlling vision is *shalom*.

Shalom is the substance of the biblical vision of one community embracing all creation. It refers to all those resources and factors which make communal harmony joyous and effective.

The origin and the destiny of God's people is to be on the road of Shalom, which is to live out of joyous memories and toward greater anticipations. The vision of wholeness, which is the supreme will of the biblical God, is the outgrowth of a covenant of shalom (see Ezekiel 34:25), in which persons are bound not only to God but to one another in a caring, sharing, rejoicing community with none to make them afraid.¹

Applied to the Bell Hill neighborhood, seeking shalom meant caring about the salvation of neighborhood residents and also caring about the quality of the schools in the neighborhood. It meant reconciliation with God and reconciliation between the various races and cultures and ethnicities in the neighborhood. It meant wanting to draw neighborhood people into the life of the church and wanting them to have safe streets and decent housing, to have adequate health care and healthy families. It meant wanting to ground them in the Christian faith and wanting to help them develop necessary day-to-day life and job skills. Shalom meant caring about the holistic flourishing of people as individuals and caring about the holistic flourishing of the neighborhood as a whole. It is the vision of shalom that drives the researcher's passion and strategy for ministry in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Entering a Different World

When Journey Church moved into the Bell Hill neighborhood it moved into a world significantly different from what the people of the church were accustomed to. The Bell Hill neighborhood is an inner city, densely populated, poor and working class,

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Living Towards a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976), 15-17.

ethnically and culturally diverse community. Census data from 2012 showed that non-Hispanic whites made up less than forty percent of the neighborhood population.² No one in Journey Church lived in that neighborhood and very few people in the church lived in neighborhoods that were anything like it in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity or socioeconomic class.

A 2010 U.S. Commerce Department Report entitled “Middle Class in America” defined the middle class “less by its position on the economic scale than by its aspirations: homeownership, a car for each adult, health security, a college education for each child, retirement security, and a family vacation each year.”³ Almost all of the people who made up Journey Church held and were meeting these middle class aspirations. But while some of the people living in the Bell Hill neighborhood may have had some of the same aspirations as the people of Journey Church, most were living a very different reality and had a very different perspective on life.

Ruby K. Payne argues that there are “major differences between generational poverty and middle class-and that the biggest differences were not about money.”⁴ Payne further contends that:

Knowledge of hidden rules is crucial to whatever class in which the individual wishes to live. Hidden rules exist in poverty, in middle class, and in wealth, as well as in ethnic groups and other units of people. Hidden rules are about the salient, unspoken understandings that cue the members of the group that this

²Michael Bowen, Kathleen Hodge, David Ilacqua, and Margaret McDonough, “Environmental Injustice Exposure to Environmental Hazards,” Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 29, accessed July 17, 2016, https://web.wpi.edu/Pubs/E-project/Available/E-project-121312-135213/unrestricted/Final_Report.pdf.

³ Cited by Neal Gabler, “My Secret Shame,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 2016, 52-63.

⁴ Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Highlands, TX: Aha! Process, Inc., 2005), 1. The researcher found Payne’s book extremely helpful in terms of understanding the different characteristics of generational vs. situational poverty in the city and the ways each kind of poverty affects things like student achievement, vocational aspiration, and family dynamics.

individual does or does not fit. For example, three of the hidden rules in poverty are the following: The noise level is high (the TV is always on and everyone may talk at once), the most important information is non-verbal, and one of the main values of an individual to the group is an ability to entertain. There are hidden rules about food, dress, decorum, etc. Generally, in order to successfully move from one class to the next, it is important to have a spouse or mentor from the class to which you wish to move to model and teach you the hidden rules.⁵

The majority of the people that made up Journey Church lived under very different realities and operated under very assumptions and rules about life than the majority of the people who lived in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The neighborhood people lived in run-down apartments and did not own their own homes. Many did not own a car, had little health security, had not gone to college (or even finished high school), had no job security let alone retirement security, and never took family vacations. They did not have the stability and security to be able to plan far ahead, and did not try to save for future goals or expect to go to college, own their own homes, or even, in many cases, expect to own a car. They simply hoped to be able to pay their rent, feed and clothe their kids, avoid the gangs, drug dealers and crime, and make it through another day.

The Journey Community Church's Path Into the City

How did Journey Church, a suburban, middle class mostly white church, find its way into an inner city neighborhood in Worcester? Pastor Tom Sparling and a small group of white, primarily middle-aged suburbanites founded the Journey Community Church in 2010. Pastor Tom, the son of a pastor, grew up in suburban and rural New Jersey. All of his church experience growing up was in Baptist, theologically conservative, fundamentalist, very white, suburban and small town environments. He began ministry as an itinerant evangelist and worship leader, became a youth pastor and an associate pastor at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, was the

⁵ Payne, 9.

Director of Worship Renewal with Vision New England, and then became the Senior Pastor of Chapel of the Cross, in Westborough, Massachusetts.

In 2009 Pastor Tom, after a period of conflict, stepped down as Senior Pastor of Chapel of the Cross. His plan was to rest, re-evaluate his ministry gifts and passions, and then find another pastorate. Up to this point, apart from some of his travels as an itinerant evangelist, all of his ministry experience had been in suburban middle/upper middle class communities. His expectation was that he would find another senior pastorate in a similar setting to where he had been in his past.

For the next several months he and a small group of friends met in his home to pray, study the Scriptures, and reflect together. Initially the group met primarily to support, encourage, and give counsel to Pastor Tom as he sought God's direction. But the end result of these months of reflection and wrestling with God was that a vision was birthed for planting a new church. At this point a "Founding Team" of 11 people joined Pastor Tom and his wife, Vitalina, in the planning to start a new church. In July 2010 a "Launch Group" of about 40 people began meeting weekly for worship, teaching, prayer and planning. As the vision for planting a church developed, it began to take shape as a desire to plant a church in Worcester. This was not because Pastor Tom and his prayer/discernment group had significant familiarity with Worcester. No one in the Launch Group had ever lived in Worcester or spent much time there. And, it was not because they did any research about church-planting needs in Worcester. It simply seemed to them that Worcester was where God was leading them. So, they began to look for a site to rent in Worcester. However, finding an appropriate and affordable site in Worcester proved difficult. Eventually, Pastor Tom found a space to rent in the Veterans,

Inc. facility in Shrewsbury, MA, an affluent, suburban town east of Worcester. The Journey Community Church had its first public worship service there on October 24, 2010. One hundred thirty people came to this Launch Service and within weeks averaged about 70 people. After several months the church grew to over 100 people in worship service attendance. When this happened Veteran's Inc. asked Journey to find another location.

There were other possible places to rent in Shrewsbury and from a church growth perspective staying in Shrewsbury seemed like the wise move. But the sense that God had called them to plant a new church in Worcester remained strong. So, Pastor Tom and the church leaders renewed their search for a new church home in Worcester. In 2011 the door was opened (remarkably and in the very nick of time) to meet at the Worcester Technical High School (WTHS). When Journey Church moved to its Worcester location at WTHS about 50 people who had been part of the church when it was in its Shrewsbury location chose not to come. This was even though the new Worcester location was only 6.3 miles/12 minutes away from the Shrewsbury location. It was not the distance that caused people to stop attending Journey Church in its new location. It was because they did not feel comfortable meeting in Worcester.⁶

The irony is that WTHS is a new, beautiful, technologically sophisticated building within a half-mile of the border to the town of Shrewsbury and is also at the edge of Green Hill, Worcester's largest municipal park. The park extends over 480 acres and contains two ponds, a zoo, picnic grove, playground, Little League field, golf course, and

⁶ In a conversation with Pastor Tom Sparling, founding pastor of Journey Community Church, in March 2016.

handball courts.⁷ Both the WHTS and the neighborhood right around it, in terms of architecture and aesthetics, could have easily fit in Shrewsbury or in any of the suburban, middle class communities that the congregants of Journey Church had come from. But the stigma they attached to Worcester kept them away.

Journey Church met at the Worcester Technical High School for the next four years. During that time the church grew and prospered. Most of the people who helped start the church eventually left and returned to churches in the suburbs but new people who lived in Worcester began to attend, including a significant number of college students. The new people found Journey Church primarily because of its robust web presence but remained at Journey because of its strong biblical preaching and teaching, its worship style, its friendliness, its welcome and inclusion of Millennials, and by the personal hospitality and authenticity of Pastor Tom.

Journey Church conceivably could have continued meeting at WTHS for several more years because of WTHS's state of the art auditorium, plentiful parking, and abundant classroom space for its Sunday Children's Ministry. But in February 2015, Pastor Howard Moffatt of Crossroads Community Church @ BSBC approached Pastor Tom about turning over their church building to The Journey Community Church and thus began a process that brought The Journey Community Church to its current home at 25 Belmont St in the Bell Hill neighborhood of Worcester. Again, the impetus to move into the Bell Hill neighborhood was because of Pastor Tom's sense that God wanted Journey Church to reach and bless a distressed and underserved area of Worcester.

⁷ "Green Hill Park," City Parks, City of Worcester, MA, accessed March 6, 2016. <http://www.worcesterma.gov/dpw/parks-rec/city-parks/green-hill-park>.

The Melding Together of Two Congregations

Pastor Howard led CrossRoads in a “28 Days of Prayer” initiative through all of February 2015. The result of this prayer was that most of the remaining CrossRoads church body concluded that it was God’s time for them to shut the doors of their church. But they did not want to sell the church building and watch it become converted into condos. Instead, they wanted to find a way to ensure that their beloved building would remain a church and that its 130-year legacy would continue in some form. During their month of church-wide prayer, the idea arose to give their building to another church so that ministry would continue in that building. So, in late February 2015 Pastor Howard approached Pastor Tom of The Journey Community Church about taking over the building from CrossRoads Church and making it the new home of Journey Church.

Pastor Moffatt approached Pastor Tom because there were already five or six families at Journey Church that had formerly been members at CrossRoads Community Church @ BSBC. The hope was that just as these former CrossRoads families had successfully been grafted into The Journey Community Church, so might the remaining families at CrossRoads Community Church. The willingness by the leaders of CrossRoads Community Church to approach Journey about giving Journey their beloved building says much about their earnest desire to honor God, their deep concern for assuring pastoral care for their remaining members, and their profound generosity of spirit. Rather than seeing Journey as a competitor who had “stolen their sheep” they chose to see Journey as a possible answer from God to their prayer for church revitalization.

Over the next several months both congregations talked, prayed, and met together. In July 2015 CrossRoads Community Church gave their building to The Journey Community Church (along with a substantial sum of money to help The Journey Church make some needed repairs and renovations to the building. Along with the building came 40 Crossroads Community Church people who have joined and invested in the Journey congregation and its ministry. In that capacity, as fully invested participants in Journey Church, they are fulfilling and even extending the vision of the people who founded the Swedish Baptist church in 1880. They are part of a mission to build “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56.7)⁸ and to contribute to the peace and prosperity, that is, the shalom (Jer. 29: 7), of their neighborhood and city.

Setting Roots in the Neighborhood

While the Worcester Technical High School had provided an excellent Sunday morning worship space, it had not served The Journey Community Church’s developing vision to establish deep roots in the city and become a relational, incarnational presence in a city neighborhood. The Journey Community Church’s vision, at that point still mostly in theory and held primarily by its senior pastor and its key lay leadership, was not to be a generic, evangelical church indistinguishable from many successful suburban churches, but instead to become an intrinsic part of the city of Worcester, and so to both shape and be shaped by the city to the glory of God. Therefore, an explicit reason for the move into the former CrossRoads Church building was the desire to become an intrinsic part of this inner city neighborhood and to contribute to the welfare of the neighborhood and of the city as a whole.

⁸ All Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Biblica Inc., 2011.

When The Journey Community Church moved into 25 Belmont Street it was a church of about 250 people, with more than half under the age of 35. The church had some ethnic diversity that came from attracting college students but it was over 80 percent white. While most of its congregants lived in Worcester, none of them lived in the neighborhoods around 25 Belmont Street, and only a handful (again, mostly college students living in off-campus housing) lived in neighborhoods that were in some way like the neighborhood around The Journey Community Church's new home. So, almost no one was familiar with the new neighborhood of the church or knew anyone who lived in the neighborhood. Almost no one came from a neighborhood like the neighborhood around the church. Very few people looked like or spoke the languages of the people who lived in the neighborhood, and very few people could personally relate to the life experiences, issues, problems, and hopes of the people who lived in the neighborhood. But, despite not having experience with inner-city ministry, a knowledge and understanding of the neighborhood and its characteristics, or a well-developed strategy to reach and serve the neighborhood, the vision was to become embedded in the Bell Hill neighborhood and contribute to its flourishing in the name of Jesus.

This researcher, a part-time member of the staff of the Journey Community Church and under the authority of Senior Pastor Tom Sparling and The Journey Community Church Council, was given the opportunity to help develop the competencies, understandings, strategies, and relationships that would enable The Journey Community Church to become a welcome member of the community and a partner with the community in seeking its flourishing. This paper describes the theological foundation, research methodology, ministry process, and strategy that The

Journey Church has been developing and implementing over the past year. It describes what was done, what was learned, and what next steps might be taken.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING:
HOW DO PEOPLE MOVE FROM OUTSIDERS TO INSIDERS,
BECOME GOOD NEIGHBORS AND SEEK THE SHALOM OF THE
NEIGHBORHOOD TOGETHER?

Statement of the Problem

The problem was that The Journey Community Church, a suburban, white, middle class congregation, moved into a neighborhood, Bell Hill, with which it seemed to have little in common. The hope of Journey Church was to become a welcomed and integral part of its new community and to be a good neighbor. Journey Church wanted to contribute to the holistic flourishing, the shalom, of the neighborhood in a way that served the best interests of the people in the neighborhood and in a way that was sustainable for the long haul.

In response to this problem this researcher (a) developed a theology and missiology of the inner city, (b) reviewed the literature related to understanding the role of the church in the world, the nature and development of cities, and the seeking of shalom for inner city neighborhoods, (c) produced a demographic and ethnographic profile of the neighborhood that is helping The Journey Community Church understand the make-up and needs of its neighborhood (in other words, identifying the areas where shalom was missing), and (d) developed a (still tentative and experimental) ministry model that Journey Community Church is using both to sustain and deepen its own growth and vitality, and to holistically serve and contribute to the flourishing of its neighborhood while avoiding the practice of “toxic charity.” Ministry practices that

create unequal power dynamics and unhealthy dependencies where people are divided between those serving and those being served rather than being seen as equal partners serving one another in different ways do more harm than good. This is toxic charity not shalom seeking.¹

Definition of Terms

Gatekeepers: Persons of influence and trust within the community (insiders) who know and understand the community well and who are willing to welcome this researcher and introduce him to the community.

Insiders: Residents of the neighborhood who know the neighborhood, are known by the neighborhood, and are viewed as part of the neighborhood by the other residents of the neighborhood. Generally, in addition to having lived in the neighborhood for some time, insiders tend to reflect the demographics, perspectives, worldview and values of the neighborhood. John Fuder defines an insider as “a person who has won the trust of the community and learned how to build relationships in the area.”²

Outsiders: Those relocating into inner city Worcester from a culture that is significantly different than that which they are coming into. In general this is used to describe someone who is white, college-educated, and from a suburban or rural background who relocates into a poor inner city community made up primarily of people of color.

Toxic Charity: Charity programs that make the charity givers feel better about themselves but do not actually help people out of poverty or empower the

¹ Robert D. Lupton, *Charity Detox: What Charity Would Look Like If We Cared About Results* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 3-8.

² John Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to make Your Church Invaluable to the Community* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 49.

disenfranchised. Toxic charity operates under the assumption (often unconscious) that the charity givers have all the power, resources and skills and the charity receivers have little or nothing to contribute to their own welfare. It focuses on activities rather than results. It causes more harm than good because it makes people dependent on others and takes away their incentive to be contributors to both their own welfare and to the common good. Toxic charity does not promote shalom because it assumes unhealthy distinctions between people and divides rather than reconciles them to one another. It works against shalom because it robs the poor of the dignity that comes from using their God-given gifts and abilities in service to Him and others. It is counter to shalom seeking because it inhibits the flourishing, prosperity and growth that comes from the opportunity to practice personal responsibility and maturity. Toxic charity is in contrast to community development.

Community Development: The process of partnering together with one another in a community to solve community problems so that the whole fabric of the community, the social, economic, political, and environmental fabric, is strengthened over time. One definition of community development:

Effective community development results in mutual benefit and shared responsibility among community members. Such development recognizes: (1) the connection between social, cultural, environmental and economic matters (2) the diversity of interests within a community, and (3) its relationship to building capacity. Community development helps to build community capacity in order to address issues and take advantage of opportunities, find common ground and balance competing interests.³

³ “What Is Community Development,” PeerNetBC, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.peernetbc.com/what-is-community-development>.

Refugee: an individual who has fled his or her country of origin because of a credible fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, political opinion, national origin, or social group.⁴

Environmental Justice: The Environmental Protection Agency defines economic justice as:

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or a socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies.⁵

Delimitations of the Problem

The development of a biblical theology of the city focused on key themes in Genesis 1-19 and further explored the development of these themes in portions of Isaiah, Jeremiah 29, the Gospels, and Revelation 21-22.

The literature review focused on views of eschatology as they related to the role of the church in the world, on the nature of the city, and on key inner city neighborhoods.

The action research focused on developing an insider's perspective of the Bell Hill neighborhood and on developing trust relationships with community advocates, refugees and the Belmont Street Community School community.

⁴ United Nations High Commission on Refugees, "What is a Refugee?," accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>.

⁵ "Environmental Justice," Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences: University of Washington, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://deohs.washington.edu/environmental-justice>.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that God cares about cities and urban neighborhoods and wants them to flourish. The gospel of the kingdom of God is about much more than individual, personal salvation. It is about the expansion of God's reign in all spheres of human life and in all areas of creation to bring about God's good purposes. Therefore, neighborhood outreach must engage and serve both the individual and the community as a whole. Individual human flourishing can only be sustained in the context of community flourishing.

The second assumption, related to the first assumption, is that effective outreach must be holistic; it must engage the total person and his or her physical, relational, emotional/psychological and spiritual needs.

The third assumption is that though the church is God's chief agent of human flourishing, it is not the only agent of human flourishing and cannot address systemic structures of injustice on its own. So, the church must seek partnerships with other civic stakeholders and seek to build relationships of trust and friendship with all those seeking the good of the city and neighborhood.

The fourth assumption is that the church should not assume a priori what the community wants or needs. Nor should the church determine the goals and objectives for the community. Instead, the church should listen carefully to what the community says it wants and needs, and be willing to allow the community to define its own needs and determine its own goals and objectives. The community must articulate what it needs and what it wants to become. Journey Church cannot determine for the community what its needs are.

The fifth assumption is that outreach and service to the neighborhood must be generous and freely given with no strings attached. The church must not serve the neighborhood with the quid pro quo expectation that neighborhood residents will join the church.

The sixth assumption is that outreach must be grace-filled, relational, patient, and persevering in meeting people where they are and in walking with them as they struggle with the brokenness of their lives.

The seventh assumption is that ministry in the Bell Hill neighborhood of Worcester must be cross-culturally open, welcoming, sensitive, and competent.

The eighth assumption is that the long-term effectiveness of outreach to the Journey Community Church neighborhood will be greatly aided if the staffing and leadership of the church reflects the diversity of its neighborhood. Therefore, The Journey Church must both develop leaders of color from within the church and also recruit leaders of color from outside the church to diversify its leadership. This will demonstrate that the church affirms the intrinsic dignity of all persons of color and values the voices of people from all cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. It will also display The Journey Community Church's commitment to becoming a truly inter-cultural church body.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was the lack of biblical theology and missiology for the inner city that focused on seeking the shalom of the city. The researcher developed this as he created Chapter Two. The second subproblem was the church's lack of understanding of how to offer positive community development and avoid toxic charity in the Bell Hill

neighborhood. The researcher addressed this by reviewing the literature related to understanding the nature of cities and seeking the shalom of inner city neighborhoods. The third subproblem was the lack of a demographic and ethnographic profile of the neighborhood, including the demographic trends of the neighborhood. The researcher produced this in the course of his research. The fourth subproblem, the lack of a model for engaging the new community, was addressed when the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data from all the above research to develop a model of ministry that Journey Church is using to reach, serve, and contribute to the shalom of its neighborhood.

Setting of the Project

On September 20, 2015, The Journey Community Church, a five-year old church plant with a suburban middle-class background, mindset, and values, and white leadership moved into a new church home in the Bell Hill neighborhood, a densely populated, poor, and very ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood, of Worcester, Massachusetts.

The City of Worcester

Worcester is the second largest city in New England (after Boston) and the 130th largest city in the U. S. with a 2015 population estimate of 184, 815, (an increase of 2.086 percent from the 2010 census), 37. 4 square miles of area and a population density of 4,845 per sq. mile.⁶ It is called the “heart of the Commonwealth” because of its location in the center part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, about 40 miles west of Boston and 38 miles northeast of Springfield, MA.

⁶ Susan Strate, Katherine Paik, and Pauline Zaldonis, “Summary of U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 Population Estimates for Massachusetts Cities and Towns,” University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute Economic and Public Policy Research Population Estimates Program, May 19, 2016, accessed July 17, 2016, <http://www.massbenchmarks.org/statedata/data/mdc2015/UMDI%20Summary%20US%20Census%202015%20MA%20MCD%20Population%20Estimates.pdf>.

Worcester is also called “Wormtown,” a name originally coined with affection by a local musician to describe the underground music scene in Worcester, but which is used derogatorily of Worcester by those who live elsewhere, and even by some who live in Worcester. Many long-time residents of Worcester have a chip on their shoulder when it comes to how Worcester is perceived and described. Dan Sullivan, in a Los Angeles Times column almost thirty years ago, captures this perfectly. He writes:

When Bruce Springsteen began his last tour here in February [1988], the New York Times couldn't understand why the Boss would want to play “a gritty central Massachusetts mill town” whose only attraction was “its close proximity to Boston.”

In July of '87, the same newspaper declared that Worcester “can be considered Massachusetts' utility closet.”

Well, stuff it, New York Times. You should live in as pleasant a city. . . . Gritty mill town, eh? Well, at least they're not scraping medical waste off the beaches. Worcester may no longer be “the largest industrial city not on an inland waterway in the United States” (as the Chamber of Commerce once cautiously boasted), but neither is it anybody's broom closet.

It's still the Heart of the Commonwealth—“r” not pronounced. Boston is lucky to be close to *us*.⁷

Sullivan's bluster demonstrates a deep pride in and affection for Worcester but also reveals a sensitivity conditioned by an underlying sense of inferiority relative to Boston. Boston is a world-class city, the educational and cultural bastion of New England, and renowned globally for its colleges and universities. It's cool. It has cultural cachet and political clout. It gets disproportionate attention and resources (at least in the eyes of Worcesterites). To use biblical imagery, Boston is Jerusalem. Worcester, on the other hand, is Samaria. It is a place a lot of people in the region look down on and avoid. Many see Worcester as too gritty, too violent, unsafe, “unhip,” ugly, depressing and

⁷ Dan Sullivan, “The Real Heart of the Commonwealth: A 3-Decker Salute to That 'Gritty Mill Town' of Worcester, Mass.” *LA Times*, August 07, 1988, accessed September 21, 2016, http://articles.latimes.com/1988-08-07/entertainment/ca-324_1_gritty-mill-town-of-worcester.

diverse in “all the wrong ways.” But Worcester has a wonderful art museum, several great concert and theater venues, excellent restaurants and other cultural amenities. The Worcester area also has 13 colleges and universities that serve over 36,000 students. So, while Worcester does not have the social cachet that Boston does, it is an important city in Massachusetts with much potential to bless its residents and region. As the Apostle Paul demonstrated in the first century, when the people of God reach the cities for Christ, they reach the surrounding communities as well. If the spiritual climate of Worcester is transformed, it is likely that the spiritual climate of Worcester County with its over 800,000 people will also be transformed.

Worcester’s inferiority complex has often inhibited the city from marketing itself aggressively to investors, from taking risks to enhance its tourist potential (in contrast to downtown Providence, Rhode Island, or Portland, Maine), and from pursuing creative growth and development strategies. However, there are signs that this is beginning to change. The city, a former manufacturing center, after several decades of decline is now trying to escape the shadow of Boston by reinventing itself as a health services, bio-tech, and education hub and there are several major development projects currently going on to revitalize the downtown and to attract major employers.

It is an ethnically, racially, culturally and socio-economically diverse city. About 40,000 of Worcester’s 185,000 residents are foreign-born and Worcester has the highest number of refugees of any city in Massachusetts.⁸ Worcester is also a very divided city with a very long history of racism. Janette Thomas Greenwood chronicles the mixed history of Worcester in terms of how it treated former slaves and their descendants who

⁸ George Barnes, “Worcester is State’s Top Destination for Refugees,” March 13, 2015, accessed July 26, 2015, <http://www.telegram.com/article/20150312/NEWS/303129577>.

migrated to the city in search of jobs and equality. For most of the nineteenth century Worcester was a hot bed of abolitionist sentiment and during the early part of the Reconstruction movement advocated for former slaves who came to the city. But beginning in the late 1860s white hostility toward these African American migrants began to increase. Greenwood provides evidence that strongly suggests that beginning in the late nineteenth century and for decades to follow, white employers in Worcester made a pact with one another not to hire African Americans in their factories or other places of employment as a way of keeping them out of the city.⁹ A key result of this is that Worcester, to this day, has a much smaller African American population than comparable cities in New England. In the late spring and early summer of 2015, spurred by the tension and violence in many cities in the aftermath of the Ferguson shooting, and to confront its own race issues, the city of Worcester invited the U. S. Justice Department to lead a seven-week series of “Community Dialogues on Race.”

After a major drop in its population from the 1950s to the 1980s, Worcester’s population has been slowly increasing. Much of that population increase has been due to an influx of new immigrants and refugees. According to the Worcester Research Bureau, “In 2000, 25,097 Worcester residents were born in a foreign country. By 2010, that number had increased to 35,304. Although the overall population of Worcester has decreased by 10.7 percent since 1950, the number of non-white residents has increased dramatically. Whites represented 94 percent of the population in 1980.”¹⁰ By 2010, non-

⁹ Janette Thomas Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 147-151.

¹⁰ “The Bureau Brief: The Changing City – Starting a Conversation,” Worcester Research Bureau, November 2014, Brief 14-04, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.wrrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/WRRB-Bureau-Brief-The-Changing-City-November-2014.pdf>.

Hispanic whites represented about 59 percent of the population¹¹ and that number includes new immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Balkans (particularly Albania) who are struggling to get settled and set down roots in their new home. Over 21 percent of Worcester's residents are Hispanic (and this percentage is growing), 11 percent are African-American, about 6.5 percent are Asian (mostly Vietnamese but also a sizable number of Nepalese and Bhutanese), the rest are a mix of ethnicities, particularly Africans (primarily from West Africa – Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria – and also in the last five years, an influx of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic). There have also been an increasing number of refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria fleeing the trauma of their homelands.¹²

English is not the first language for over 40 percent of the student population and over 100 languages and dialects are spoken in the Worcester Public School system.¹³ Almost 32 percent of Worcester's public school students are unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English and many live in "linguistically isolated households."¹⁴ The median family income is about \$47,000.00¹⁵ and the median age of the city is 34.4.¹⁶ The

¹¹ "Quick Facts, Worcester City, Massachusetts," United States Census Bureau, accessed October 16, 2016, www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2582000.

¹² "Worcester's Demographic Trends: 2010 Census," Worcester Regional Research Bureau, (Report 13-01, February 2013), 5-6.

¹³ "The Worcester Compact - Challenges and Opportunities for the Worcester Public Schools after The First 100 Days," *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*, posted October 16, 2016, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.telegram.com/opinion/20161016/editorial-worcester-compact---challenges-and-opportunities-for-worcester-public-schools-after-the-first-100-days>.

¹⁴ "The Changing City."

¹⁵ "Worcester's Demographic Trends," 15.

¹⁶ "Worcester's Demographic Trends," 10.

percentages of the poor, the immigrant and the refugee, and the non-English-speaking are much higher in the neighborhood around Journey Community Church than in the city as a whole.

Although Worcester's economy as a whole has been growing, the job growth and prosperity has not extended to the lowest socio-economic sectors of the city. These are the areas of Worcester where most of the new immigrants and non-white minorities live and they are under-served by the city and its civic leaders, by the schools, and by the social and economic policies of the city of Worcester and the state of Massachusetts. There is still a significant marginalized population in Worcester mostly localized in the Great Brook Valley, Main South, Grafton Hill, Bell Hill, Chandler Street and lower Pleasant Street areas of the city.¹⁷ These areas are characterized by a higher crime rate, high unemployment and limited job opportunities, and lower high school graduation rates than the more affluent neighborhoods of Worcester. There is also a significant and growing gang activity and gang violence issue in these areas of the city.¹⁸ From January to June 2015 there were nineteen shootings and twenty-seven victims in Worcester.¹⁹ Despite efforts by public and private partnerships, particularly partnerships between city government and the academic community to address those needs, the problems in these neighborhoods remain acute.

¹⁷ Zeke Wright, "Worcester's Most Dangerous Neighborhoods," *Go Local Worcester*, December 10, 2013, accessed November 10, 2014, www.golocalworcester.com/news/worcesters-most-dangerous-neighborhoods.

¹⁸ Scott J. Croteau, "Shootings in 2014 Could Top Worcester Record," *Worcester Telegram*, November 10, 2014.

¹⁹ Samantha Allen, "Engagement, Not Recruitment," *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*, Monday, July 27, 2015.

There are a number of growing, seemingly healthy churches in the city, including many new churches planted by recent immigrants in the most distressed parts of Worcester, but the Church has had limited systemic impact on the city of Worcester as a community. The Church in the city has been very generous in meeting immediate needs through providing things like food, clothing, and temporary shelter. But the Church has not yet fostered widespread spiritual awakening and systemic, holistic transformation. It has not provoked social and economic justice that extends to all the city's peoples.

Individual churches (mostly the churches in the poorest, most-afflicted areas of the city) have made their own attempts to meet needs in the city. These attempts have tended to be piecemeal efforts to meet immediate physical needs. They have sought to alleviate the symptoms of brokenness in the city. They have been less successful in identifying and addressing the reasons behind that brokenness. Because they have failed to get at the root causes of environmental, social and economic injustice, these churches have had marginal impact in effecting positive systemic change in the structures of the city.

Historically, the people of God in Worcester have tended to reflect the division and distrust of the city as a whole. They have been largely isolated from one another and have not partnered together to reach and bless the city to bring about community transformation. However, over the last few years the Church in Worcester has begun to experience winds of change. Pastors have come together in John 17:23 pastoral support groups. The Kingdom Network of Worcester (KNOW) has been developing a citywide movement of prayer. Convoy of Hope/Hope for Worcester has brought Christians from across the city together to provide services and resources to the Main South area of

Worcester. The Worcester Alliance for Refugee Ministry (WARM) has connected urban and suburban churches together to welcome refugees pouring into Worcester. Clearway Clinic is being used of God not only to provide help to pregnant women but also to bring together evangelical, Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers who share a concern for the lives of the unborn.

Importance of the Project

Importance of the Project to the Researcher

The researcher grew up in a neighborhood very much like the neighborhood surrounding Journey Community church and in a family and life situation that mirrors that of many of the residents of the Journey Church neighborhood. The researcher's parents emigrated from Greece, in the aftermath of World War II and the Greek Civil War, to Lowell, Massachusetts, had four children, raised a family, and made a living there, but they never adjusted to or felt comfortable in their new country. They never became fluent in English, never made any real friends outside the Greek community in Lowell, and, though they were proud of becoming American citizens, always identified themselves as Greek, not American. The neighborhood the researcher grew up in, the Acre, was poor and working class, diverse ethnically and culturally, hard and tough. The researcher did not learn any English until he started school and he struggled to fit in and to make friends in school. He got ridiculed for his accent, for his old hand-me-down, out of style clothes, and for his ignorance of American sports and American pop culture. He never played baseball and did not start playing basketball or football until he was 11 years old. Because the researcher's family did not have a TV or a radio or go to movies, he did not have a shared cultural base with his school peers that enabled him to fit in or

easily make friends. As a result, the researcher became angry, frustrated, insecure and emotionally closed-off.

If it had not been for the encouragement of a few teachers in school the researcher would not have applied to college outside of Lowell and he might never have gone very far outside of the neighborhood he grew up in. When he was 17 years old, the researcher left Lowell behind, entered Tufts University (with a near-full scholarship), and proceeded to re-invent himself and to forge a new path for his life. He lost his accent and got exposed to a much larger world than the walking distances around his home in Lowell. His parents never had a car so almost all that his family experienced came from whatever they could walk to. During this time, the researcher vowed to himself that he would “escape Lowell” (escape all that Lowell represented) and never come back. What the researcher now regrets about his post high school life is that, for a time, he suppressed his ethnic and cultural background in order to fit in and did not maintain ties to his Greek community. In doing so, he impoverished both his children and himself.

In college, largely through the ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the researcher was introduced to Jesus and drawn to faith in Christ. Jesus began to drain the anger out of him and to allow him to forgive the people in his past that had hurt him. Jesus began to sanctify the anger and outrage he felt over prejudice, racism, classism, and economic, political, and social injustice.

Much of the neighborhood around Journey Church is very much like the neighborhood the researcher grew up in. He knows something about the isolation, anxiety, frustration, confusion and shame that many of the people in that neighborhood experience. He knows how critical it is for them to have people come alongside them to

hear them, value them and their culture, and advocate for them just as people did for him. So, the researcher has a personal and emotional stake in participating in the renewal and flourishing of Journey Church's neighborhood.

This project enabled a convergence of (1) the researcher's family background and experiences as a member of a poor, immigrant family, (2) his conversion to Christ which imbued in him a desire for Christ's glorious character to be revealed in the inner city, and (3) his commitment to social justice as an expression of God's character, as a demonstration of the good news of the Bible, and as an extension of God's kingdom. It also allowed him to express and, on some level, defend and prove his conviction that, as Bill Hybels often says the "local church is the hope of the world."²⁰ In this context, this project allowed the researcher to fully use his gifts as a culture-crosser, bridge-builder, and encourager and thus to fulfill God's call upon his life. Finally, this project gave the researcher opportunities to partner with other churches and so to help unite the Church in Worcester. Nineteenth century Puritan preacher Thomas Manton has been quoted as saying "Division in the Church breeds atheism in the world."²¹ This project allowed the researcher to invest in both the renewal and unity of the church in Worcester and to partner with civic stakeholders for the holistic transformation of the city of Worcester. For the researcher, church renewal and city transformation are inextricably linked. He does not believe that the city of Worcester will be transformed apart from full-orbed, united engagement by the whole church in the city with the city. The problems of the city are too many, too big, and too complex to be solved without the resources of the churches

²⁰ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership: Field-Tested Strategy for the 360° Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 15.

²¹ Mac Pier, *Spiritual Leadership in the Global City* (Birmingham AL: New Hope Publishers, 2008), 246.

in the city. The city needs the sacrificial investment of its churches to grow and prosper, and to ensure justice and peace and opportunity for all. The church must seek the shalom of the city.

The researcher wants to invest in both the renewal of the church in Worcester and the transformation of the city of Worcester. The city needs the sacrificial investment of its churches to grow and prosper, and to ensure justice and peace and opportunity for all. The church, by the same token, needs the city. The researcher does not believe that the church will experience deep renewal unless it engages in God-sized, God-directed mission in behalf of the city.

For the church to exist in Worcester but to ignore the needs of the people of Worcester is a violation of both the Great Commandment to love God and to love our neighbors and a violation of the Great Commission to go out of our comfort zones and seek to make disciples of all peoples. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, the church must “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (Jer. 29: 7) in the name of Jesus. It is only as the church practically expresses the love of God and passionately commits itself to the mission of God that the church experiences the life of God flowing in and through it. The church will experience the shalom of God as it seeks the shalom of God for the city.

Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

In a recent study, the Pew Research Center, using four common measures of religious observance (worship attendance, prayer frequency, belief in God and the self-described importance of religion in one’s life), ranked Massachusetts as tied with New

Hampshire as the least religious state of the United States.²² The New England region as a whole is the least religious region of the United States.²³ Clearly there is a need in New England to develop vibrant, healthy, churches that can teach their communities.

Worcester has a large Roman Catholic population and thus is more churched (nominally churched – many Roman Catholics will claim affiliation with a Catholic parish but attend just a few times a year) than most of New England but the percentage of people with a vibrant, biblical faith remains quite small. Most of the churches in the city are not growing. In recent years there have been a number of attempts to start evangelical church plants in Worcester including some church plants among the non-Caucasian and immigrant communities of Worcester. Some of these new church-planting efforts have thrived and are growing. Others have become stalled and are struggling to survive.

Worcester has a few more established churches that are relatively healthy, are growing, and are trying to reach their neighborhoods. These churches are doing good deeds in their neighborhoods and in the city as a whole and are making a difference in the lives of individuals. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that the church in Worcester is being effective in bringing about systemic social and structural change. On issues like racism, drug addiction, homelessness, generational poverty, job creation for the hard to place, human trafficking and prostitution, school performance, crime and violence, and domestic abuse the church has not had much impact in the city of Worcester. Part of the reason for this is that these are complex, multi-faceted problems that defy easy or quick

²² “How Religious is Your State,” Pew Research Center, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/?state=massachusetts>.

²³ The Pew Research Center study ranked Connecticut as the forty-seventh least religious state, Maine as the forty-eighth least religious, and Vermont as the forty ninth least religious. Rhode island was ranked thirty-fifth.

solutions. But another part of the reason is that much of the evangelical church in the city has not seen itself as having a God-given responsibility to try to address the systemic causes underlying the brokenness in the city. The hope of this researcher is that this project will produce a theology of urban ministry and a model of ministry that enable local churches to have a greater impact in the neighborhoods where they are located and to see the necessity of partnering with other churches to work together in trying to solve the systemic social and economic problems in Worcester.

One of the most troubling issues in Worcester is the history of racial and ethnic conflict. In the summer of 2015 the mayor's and the city manager's offices of Worcester invited the U.S. Justice Department to lead a seven-part series of "Community Dialogues on Race." While the dialogues were very frank and put a number of key issues on the table there remains much work to do in promoting equal justice, effecting significant social and structural change, and fostering racial and ethnic reconciliation. Part of what was striking about these dialogues was that the people participating in them did not look to the church as an agent of healing and transformation. They saw the church as both irrelevant and impotent and as racist, unjust, intolerant and dangerous. Journey Community Church learning how to listen to, understand, sacrificially serve, and partner with its neighborhood to bring about the flourishing of its neighborhood would both witness to the entire city of the goodness of God and provide a model that other churches in the city could adapt to their own context.

Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The city of Worcester experienced a lot of white flight in the Post-World War II period and this included a lot of white Christians. The reasons for the flight to the suburbs

were many but the result was that the city lost a lot of leadership, skills, experience and resources. The vitality and mission impact of these urban churches suffered as their members abandoned the city. Journey Community Church moved into the Crossroads Community Church building with the intent to invest in the neighborhood in which its new church home is located. Many old urban churches are in decline and many old church buildings have been torn down or turned into condominiums or restaurants. Journey Church succeeding in embracing and serving its new neighborhood and learning how to contribute to the flourishing of its neighborhood may provide both encouragement and new insight to many other historic churches in old industrial cities throughout the United States.

Much of the literature concerning urban ministry and cultural transformation focuses on megacities or on neighborhoods in large cities like Tokyo/Yokohama, Sao Paulo, Seoul or on elite culture-shaping or economic powerhouse cities like London, New York, Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, the Washington D. C. metro area.²⁴ They are distinguished by their immense size or broad global influence. Cities large and small, renowned or unknown, face many of the same issues and challenges. All of them must maintain and upgrade their infrastructure (roads, bridges, mass-transit systems, water, gas, oil, and electric systems, sewer and sanitation systems, schools, parks and recreation areas, hospitals, police and fire departments, and housing) and serve the public good. All of them must strive to protect their residents, provide the structures and systems to meet their basic needs, educate their populace, and house their people. But large and/or

²⁴ Joel Kotkin, "The World's Most Influential Cities," accessed March 26, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2014/08/14/the-most-influential-cities-in-the-world/2/#3768d8fa22d5>.

influential cities tend to have more power and resources at their disposal than smaller and less well-known cities. It is easier for these cities to attract entrepreneurs and venture capital, start new businesses, and create more jobs.

The Boston metropolitan area with a population of about 4.8 million is not a mega-city but is considered a world-class city because of its world-renowned colleges and universities, its research institutions, and its cultural amenities. Boston is the only world-class city in New England. It attracts bright, ambitious, creative people, has access to substantial financial resources, and has disproportionate political power (at least in the view of many Massachusetts residents who live outside the Boston metro area). No other city in New England has the kind of clout that Boston does. So, while all cities have elements in common, the case can be made that Worcester is much more representative of New England cities and towns than Boston. Therefore, effective ministry models to reach and contribute to the shalom of one of Worcester's underserved neighborhoods may have wide applicability throughout New England's larger cities and beyond New England to other mid-sized cities in the United States.

Research Methodology

The ultimate goal of the research was to gather data and develop insight that would enable the researcher to produce an urban ministry model Journey Church could use to seek the shalom of the Bell Hill neighborhood. The goal was not to gather data for its own sake but to gather data and build relationships and partnerships that would lead to holistic change in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Given this goal, the researcher chose action research as his research methodology.

The researcher used an action research methodology and a mixed-methods research approach to gather and analyze data to get to know the people in the neighborhood and to build trust and partnership with them. The research methods included demographic research, personal observation, case study, interviews, surveys, autoethnography and ethnography.

Project Overview

The first step was to develop a theology and missiology of the city with an emphasis on seeking to understand the implications of God's ultimate intent for the city: the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. In this context, attention was given to the role of the church in the city. Primary focus was given to the Book of Genesis, particularly the first twelve chapters, to portions of Isaiah 58-65, to Jeremiah 29, to Luke 4, and to Revelation 21-22. These passages were chosen because of the researcher's interest in exploring the biblical concepts of culture making and shalom. Genesis 1: 1-2 shows us a perfect but incomplete creation. God placed the first man and first woman in the Garden of Eden and called them to cultivate that garden and bring out its fullest potential. The fall of humankind in Genesis 3 complicates but does not void God's call to Adam and Eve to be culture makers. Revelation 21-22 shows what the LORD God intended culture making to become: The Garden of Eden becomes the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah 29, and in Luke paint a picture of the relational values and ambitions that are to undergird God-honoring culture making. God-honoring culture making seeks the peace, prosperity and reconciliation of all its people. It has the desire for shalom at its heart.

The second step was to review and interact with the key literature related to the eschatology and ecclesiology related to the church's role in the world and to the seeking God's shalom for inner city neighborhoods. This included literature related to the nature and effects of poverty, to immigration and refugee issues, to racism, bias and structural injustice, and to holistic community development.

The third step was to employ an action research methodology to get to know and build trust and partnership with some of the Bell Hill community advocates. The action research methodology enabled the researcher to gather data and to seek the shalom of the Bell Hill neighborhood at the same time.

The fourth step was to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to produce a demographic profile of the Bell Hill neighborhood, an ethnographic profile of a kindergarten class at Belmont Street School, and a case study of Belmont Street Baptist church/Crossroads Community Church.

The fifth step was to analyze the data from the above steps to develop a ministry model and strategy that Journey Community Church will use to seek the shalom of its neighborhood.

Subproblem Treatment

Subproblem One

The first subproblem was to develop a theology and missiology for the city focused on God's intent for the city and God's call to the church in the city. The researcher gathered exegetical and missiological insights from biblical scholars and theologians, urban ministry practitioners, his own exegesis of Scripture, and reflection on his own urban ministry practice.

Subproblem Two

The second subproblem was to interact with significant literature related to the role of the church in the world and in the city, and to major issues related to ministry in distressed urban neighborhoods. The issues the researcher focused on were those dealing racism and racial reconciliation, the effects of poverty, the problem of “toxic charity”, and the necessity of engaging in spiritual warfare. The data was derived from the Bible, acknowledged scholars, and urban ministry experts.

Subproblem Three

The third subproblem was to produce a demographic and ethnographic profile of the Bell Hill neighborhood. The researcher used the demographic data to get a big picture of the makeup of the Bell Hill neighborhood - the ethnic, racial, and cultural composition of the neighborhood, the countries of origin and languages spoken, household income, type of housing, and education levels. The researcher used the ethnographic research to begin to understand the values, perspectives, beliefs, and hopes of the people in the neighborhood. The analysis of the demographic and ethnographic data gave the researcher insight concerning the development of contextually appropriate ministry in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The ethnographic data was primarily gathered in the course of the researcher’s participatory action research. The researcher’s primary venues for this research were the Bell Hill Neighborhood Association, the Bell Hill Task Force, the Belmont St School Site Council, and the Worcester Alliance for Refugee Ministry. Participatory action research enabled the researcher to begin building trust with key leaders and stakeholders in the neighborhood. It also allowed the researcher to begin gaining an insider’s perspective on the community. This insider’s perspective helped the

researcher to identify some of the neighborhood's assets and strengths and to become aware of some of the felt needs and hopes of people in the neighborhood for their own lives and families and for their community. This insight is helping to guide Journey Church's shalom-seeking initiatives and relationships in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Subproblem Four

The fourth subproblem was to develop a model of ministry that Journey Church would use to seek the shalom of its neighborhood. The researcher collected, organized, analyzed and interpreted the data from all the above to develop a biblically and theologically informed and contextually appropriate model of ministry that Journey Community Church is using to get to know, understand, engage with, serve and partner with the people and groups in its neighborhood in order to contribute to the holistic flourishing, the shalom, of the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Summary

The researcher is convinced that God has called local churches, both singly and working with one another in partnership, to seek the shalom of the city. Cities, even in their most rebellious, idolatrous, and broken state, matter to God and He is actively at work to redeem them. The church is the primary channel of God's presence, redemption and reconciling grace. The call of God to Abram "I will bless you . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12: 2-3) is a call to all of God's people.

God's charge to the exiled people of Israel living in sinful Babylon (Jer. 29: 4-7) is also God's charge to His church. The church is to seek the peace and prosperity, the shalom, of our cities because if our cities prosper, the church will prosper as well. The

cities of our world are where fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment can bear the greatest fruit.

CHAPTER TWO: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND MISSIOLOGY FOR URBAN MINISTRY

Introduction: The Intent of God and the Call of the Church

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He created something out of nothing, order out of chaos, light out of darkness, beauty out of barrenness. He filled the earth and the sky and the seas with life. God created and He called what He created good. Then God created the first man and the first woman. He created them in His own image, “in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1: 27). He created them in His image, told them to be fruitful, to increase, to fill the earth, and to rule over and subdue it (Gen. 1: 28). Charles Sherlock points out that while Scripture does not quite define what the image of God is, it does make clear that being made in the image of God involves “living in a series of relationships”¹ Those relationships are with God, one another and all of creation.² David Atkinson concurs and adds:

First and foremost it is about the particular relationship in which God places himself with human beings, a relationship in which we become God’s counterpart, his representative and his glory on the earth.³

To fulfill God’s call to become His counterpart, His representative and His glory on the earth is to stand before God in worship and obedience and to reflect His character

¹ Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, (Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 37.

² Sherlock, 37-38.

³ David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 37.

and purpose in the world. Kevin Vanhoozer links the human living out of the image of God with God's giving of authority to humankind. He argues:

No sooner do humans appear on the scene than God appoints them his vice-regents on earth: "The most basic office we hold is indeed that of divine image." Human beings have been divinely authorized to act as authorities in the world—to have dominion over acreage in Eden—and we image God when we exercise authority rightly.

Adam and Eve were authorized and answerable agents, charged with ruling the earth in God's place. They were free to do what they wanted as long as they respected the belief-guiding and action-guiding words of God. Authority over earth has nothing to do with imposing one's will to power on creatures or creation. . . . The creation mandate authorized Adam and Eve to preserve the integrity and develop the potential of the created order.

God's Word authorizes certain ways that human beings are to live together before him in order to flourish. This is worth pondering: the primary purpose of authority is to provide persons with what is needed to help others to flourish.⁴

Genesis 2 fills in the narrative of creation given in Genesis 1 with a focus on this first man and woman: "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2: 7). God took this man and placed him in a garden in Eden, a garden that God had carefully and lavishly prepared especially for him, a garden where he could flourish in body, mind, soul, and spirit. The LORD God put the man in the Garden of Eden and told him to work the garden and to take care of it (Gen. 2: 15). God created the cosmos to be a place where humanity would flourish. To be made in God's image and to function as God's image bearer is to use one's God-given energies and abilities to help others flourish.

The man was to be a cultural gardener, someone who ruled over the earth the way a gardener rules over a garden. He was to manage the earth and bring out its fullest potential in line with God's character and purpose. He was to work and develop the world

⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 86-87.

God had given him to manage in a way that unleashed its fullest potential. He was to do this as an act of worship to his Creator. God’s mandate to him was to develop the earth, to be a culture maker. He was to reflect God’s character and bring God glory in his culture making.

But in this garden, beautiful as it was, man was missing something. “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18). So God made the first woman out of the man, perfectly compatible but wonderfully different. And the man and woman became one flesh and were naked before one another with no shame. There was nothing hidden, nothing held back, no shadow or hindrance in their relationship. The man and the woman were before one another in full trust, full integrity, full access, full sharing, and mutual joy. They were equally made in the image of God, equally given the mandate to rule over and cultivate the earth, equally sharing love and companionship with one another, and equally sharing profound friendship with the LORD God who made them.

They were perfectly attuned to God, their selves, one another, and all the rest of creation. The Old Testament word for this is *shalom*. Cornelius Plantinga gives this definition of *shalom*:

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. We call it peace, but it means far more than peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, *shalom* means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things ought to be.⁵

⁵ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 10.

Sin entered the world and the world is now scarred and broken. It is not the way God created the world to be, not the way it is supposed to be. But the way the world is now is not the way the world will always be. Our God will renew and remake our world. He will make all things new again. The world will be cleansed, healed, restored, made whole when Jesus returns and secures his kingdom (Rev. 21: 1-4; 22: 1-5).

The apostle John set the stage for the church's mission in the in-between-time, the time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension and the time of his return, in John 20:19-22:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus was dead and the disciples' dreams of a new world were shattered. They were in a room with the doors locked, hiding in fear. They were afraid that what had happened to Jesus would happen to them. They were afraid that they would be killed. In the midst of their horror, and terror, and despair Jesus came to them. He came to them in their fear and confusion and pain. He came to them where they were. The Roman Empire, the Jewish religious leaders, the locked doors could not keep Jesus from coming to his disciples.

Jesus came to those first disciples and spoke to them. "Peace be with you!" he said. Jesus came to them to give them his peace. Jesus wants peace for all his followers. Then Jesus showed them his hands and his side. He showed them his hands that were nailed to a cross for them. He showed them his side where a Roman spear had pierced him. He wanted them to know that he really was with them. They were not dreaming, or hallucinating, or deluded. He wanted them to know the price he was willing to pay for

them because he loved them. He wanted them to know that he was bigger than their fears, bigger than their sin, bigger than the devil, bigger than death.

Then Jesus said to them again “Peace be with you!” But Jesus did not stop there. He continued: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20: 21-22). In essence, Jesus said that the mission the Father gave to him is the mission Jesus is giving to the church. The goal Jesus pursued in mission is the goal the church is to pursue. The way Jesus engaged in mission is the way the church is to engage in mission. The power of the Holy Spirit that energized Jesus’ mission is the power that Jesus gave to the church to energize its mission.

Luke 4: 18-19, 21 records what Jesus said when he inaugurated his ministry. In this passage in Luke 4, Jesus adapted language used in Isaiah 61: 1-2 and Isaiah 58: 6. In Luke 4: 18-19, Jesus tells his audience what he was sent to do. And in verse 21, Jesus tells them that he has fulfilled what God sent him to do.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
 because he has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
 and recovery of sight for the blind,
 to set the oppressed free,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.
 Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom, a kingdom of justice, righteousness, reconciliation, and wholeness. Ruined cities will be renewed and places long devastated will be restored (Isa. 61:4). The call of God is to be “Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings” (Isa. 58:12). This is a picture of shalom being extended to the broken cities and neighborhoods of the world. The rule of the Messiah is characterized by

shalom. Everything Jesus did and said promoted shalom. That is what he was sent to do. What Jesus was sent to do by his Father is what Jesus sends his church to do. The church is to proclaim by word and deed good news to the poor, freedom to those unjustly imprisoned, recovery of sight to the blind, the Lord's favor to those who are oppressed. God's people "will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations" (Isa. 58:12).

Jesus died on the cross for his disciples and he gave them his peace. Jesus is the Peace Maker and the Peace Giver but making and giving peace does not come cheap. The peace he gave them was bought by the shedding of his blood. Jesus laid down his life so that his disciples might live. But he did not shed his blood just for those first disciples but for the world. He gave them his peace and gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could bring his peace, his Shalom peace into the world.

Jesus issued a call: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that call, Jesus gave them the power to accomplish it. He gave them his Holy Spirit. Those disciples, hiding in a room, doors locked, in fear, heard Jesus' call. They embraced his peace and received his Holy Spirit. They left that locked room, left their comfort zones, and went out in to the world with the message and vision of Shalom in Christ. They preached the gospel, cared for the poor, the sick, the widow, the orphan. They loved their enemies and did good to those who were against them. And they changed the world. Ordinary people, weak and frail, but filled with God's Spirit and upheld and entranced by God's peace, changed the world. So can God's people today. Jesus told his disciples: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33).

Urban ministry is tough. It is complex, often uncomfortable and painful, and sometimes dangerous. Like the first disciples, Jesus' disciples today sometimes want to hide behind doors to escape the troubles of the city. The church needs to believe that Jesus comes to his people wherever they are, in whatever state they are, regardless of who or what opposes him. Nothing can keep Jesus from coming to his people when they need him.

We have been reconciled to God and now have peace with Him because Jesus laid down his life for us. Because we have peace with God, we can now have peace with our own selves. Having peace in ourselves, we can extend shalom peace to one another. We can seek shalom peace for our neighborhoods and our cities and the world. We can cultivate shalom beauty and wholeness and flourishing in Jesus' name by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Seven Reasons Journey Church Needs a Theology and Missiology for Urban Ministry

The City is God's Idea

First, a theology of the city is necessary because God is the Inventor of the city and the city is His ultimate end.⁶ Hebrews 11:10 says that Abram left the city of Ur and spent the rest of his life living in tents as a pilgrim because “he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” That city with the foundations is the “Holy City, the new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2). Tim Keller argues:

God began history in a Garden, but he will end it in a city. In the beginning, God put Adam and Eve in a garden with a river and the Tree of Life. But they were not to rest content with this paradise. God told Adam to multiply and develop a civilization that would glorify him (Gen. 1:27-28). Adam fails, and through

⁶ Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 86-89.

Christ, the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:22) God does get a civilization that glorifies him, but Hebrews and Revelation 21 show us that this world is depicted as urban. “*For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb. 11:10).

The climax and purpose of Christ’s redemption is the building of a city. “*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...*” (Rev. 21:2) When we examine this beautiful city, shining with the glory of God (Rev. 21:10-11), we see that it contains a crystal river and the Tree of Life on its main street (Rev.22: 1-3), bearing fruit and leaves, which heal the nations of the effects of the divine covenant curse. Thus the New Jerusalem city *is* in a sense, the Garden of Eden, remade. The City is the fulfillment of the purposes of the Eden of God.⁷

Given that he sees the New Jerusalem as the fulfillment of God’s purposes begun in the Garden of Eden, Keller argues that the description of the New Jerusalem is not simply or only an extended metaphor to speak of the people of God and their eternal future. Keller believes God will build a literal city, the New Jerusalem, where God’s people will dwell with Him for all eternity.

Mark Dever agrees with Keller. He writes:

In Revelation, creation is re-finished, refurbished, and re-presented in a new heaven and a new earth, all of which tends toward the great end of the Bible and world history - the glory of God himself. That is no Platonism or Gnosticism!

Really, Revelation presents the Garden of Eden restored, only better. Now it is a heavenly and perfect city, a city that works not because the sewers are good and the taxes are low but because God abides with his people.⁸

The New Jerusalem is a metaphor for the people of God but it is also a description of an actual city to come. Just as Jerusalem was both a metaphor for the people of Israel and an actual city, so is the New Jerusalem. Just as God Himself prepared the Garden of Eden to be a suitable dwelling place for the first man and the woman, so He will prepare

⁷ Tim Keller, “Understanding the City,” accessed February 24, 2015, www.newcityindy.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/.../understanding-the-city.keller.doc.

⁸ Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 39.

the New Jerusalem to be a dwelling place for all his people. Just as the Garden of Eden was perfect but incomplete, the New Jerusalem will be. Just as the first man and woman experienced perfect shalom before the fall so God's redeemed humanity will experience shalom. Human culture making will continue but purged of sin and forever free from the machinations of Satan. Material beings need a material universe in which to flourish. The New Jerusalem community of God's people need the holy city, the New Jerusalem, with God in their midst, to flourish.

In the holy city, the New Jerusalem, God will dwell in the midst of His people and His people will live together in community with Him and with one another as the bride of Christ. G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim argue:

Why does John equate the new cosmos with the arboreal city-temple? God's original purpose was to expand the boundaries of the temple to fill the earth. Adam's call in the sanctuary of Eden was to expand its boundaries until it encompassed the earth, so that the earth would be completely filled with the glorious presence of God (Gen. 1:28).⁹

Beale and Kim continue: "In Revelation 21:1-22:5, God finally fills all of the heavens and earth with his glorious presence and establishes his dwelling place throughout all of the cosmos."¹⁰

In the holy city, which is spread throughout the cosmos, the people of God will love God with all their heart and mind and soul and love one another as Christ loves the church. In this New Jerusalem it seems likely that the people of God will continue fulfilling the mandate given to the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden. They will engage in the joyful work of filling the city and developing it. They will continue to

⁹ G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 138.

¹⁰ Beale and Kim, 139.

engage in culture building. They will experience God's shalom in which they will be perfectly reconciled with God, their selves, one another, and the new, renewed creation.

Adam and Eve and their descendants, were called to steward and develop the earth, to cultivate it and bring out its fullest potential. They were called to be culture makers and agents of shalom. They were to till the earth, build marriages and families, design buildings, and develop new technologies, and new structures of human organization. All of this was to be done in the presence of God and as an act of worship.

The fall of humanity scarred the universe and twisted the human heart. God-ordained labor too often became painful toil. Yet it remained part of God's good and gracious gift to humanity. Human culture making too often became idolatrous. But like work, it retained its potential to honor God. The intent of God for His material universe and His embodied humanity did not change.

Human sin did, however, create a barrier between humanity and God. The man and the woman were expelled from the Garden of Eden and no longer had unfiltered access to God's presence. But God provided the tent of meeting, the tabernacle and the temple, the law and the priesthood as interim measures to maintain His people's access to Him. When the time was ripe God sent His Son, in human flesh, to dwell among His chosen people. The Son of God, through his life, atoning death, resurrection and ascension inaugurated his eternal kingdom. He created a new humanity, Jew and Gentile made into one holy people, the church (Eph. 2:14-22). He gave the church the gospel and the Holy Spirit and sent her into the world as his ambassadors and regents (2 Cor. 5:11-21, Matt. 28:18-20). He told them he was preparing a place for them and that he would come and get them (John 14:1-3). That place is the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

An implication for God's people now is that we are to value the cities of this world also. Tim Keller writes:

So if God is a citybuilder who is building a spiritual city, that means that, though the earthly city is an institution corrupted by sin, we are to seek to redeem and rebuild human cities. As we are to redeem human families by spreading within them the family of God, so we are to redeem human cities by spreading within them the city of God. We know that the power of family is such that, as your marriage goes so goes your life. So the power of cities are such that, as the city goes, so goes society.¹¹

Jonah 4:11 records God's rebuke to Jonah for his hardheartedness toward Nineveh: "And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left - and also many animals?" If God has concern even for wicked Nineveh, it is fair to assume that God has concern for all the cities of the world? The church should share God's concern by engaging the cities of the world with God's "kindness, justice and righteousness" (Jer. 9:23).

Many people at Journey Community Church have not thought much about eschatology, about God's intent for the universe at the return of Christ. Most believe in a heaven and hell but have vague notions of what this means. Those who come out of church backgrounds tend to believe that people die and go to heaven or hell, somewhere up in the sky or below in the depths. Along with this they believe that this world will be destroyed because everyone will be in a non-earthly heaven or hell. Therefore, some believe that this world does not matter and to invest in making this world better is a distraction from preaching the gospel. The only thing that matters is getting people "saved." Others, mostly out of a deep sense of compassion towards

¹¹ Keller, "Understanding the City," 2, emphasis in the original.

suffering people or a sense of outrage toward those who are discriminated against or oppressed, believe that the church should engage with our city and with the world.

Only a few at Journey Church have thought much about what God intends the new earth to be. Nor have they thought much about what God will have His people do when Christ returns as King. They know that Jesus was bodily raised from the grave and is now their eternally embodied King. They also know that the people of God will be bodily raised from the dead to worship their embodied King Jesus. An embodied people worshipping before the throne of their embodied God implies that the New Jerusalem will be a physical, material city.

The idea that there will be an actual material city, the holy city, the New Jerusalem in our eternal future is a radically new concept for many. The idea that God's people will engage in God-glorifying, joyful, soul satisfying, culture-building work in God's presence for all eternity seems strange to them. The implications for our present lives of this kind of vision of eternity have yet to be well explored. But trying to understand what God intends for the church's future in eternity should determine how the church sees its role in the present. Understanding what God values in eternity ought to affect what His church values in the here and now. The church, in the here and now, has the privilege of being a "first-fruits" demonstration to the world of what God intends for His people for all eternity. The people of God will experience the fullness of shalom in the New Jerusalem. They have the opportunity to be agents of shalom in their cities today.

The World Is Predominantly Urban

A second reason a theology of the city is necessary is that the world has become predominantly urban. According to the United Nations, over 53 percent of the world now lives in cities/urban areas and by 2050 over 70 percent of the world will be urban.¹² The Northeast Corridor from Boston to Washington D. C. (often referred to as BosWash) is among the densest in the United States.¹³ The sheer fact of the matter is that the presence, impact, and influence of cities are inescapable for the church. This is especially true for the church in dense urban areas like the Northeast. Despite this inescapable fact, many Christians in the United States continue to neglect the city as a distinct arena for theological reflection. Many seminaries have substantially expanded their course offerings, and even added degree tracks, related to urban theology and missiology. Yet it is still quite possible for pastors to graduate from seminary without doing much theological reflection about the meaning of the city and its implications for the work of the church. It is also quite possible for Christians to sit in weekly church services for decades and rarely if ever hear sermons about the meaning of the city and the theological implications of urbanization.

From September 14, 2014 through October 19, 2014, The Journey Community Church did a six-week series preaching and teaching series on the Kingdom of God. This series was followed by a nine-week series on the Book of Jonah (October 26, 2014-December 21, 2014). Then from March 6, 2016-June 19, 2016, Journey Church did a

¹² Somini Sengupta, "U.N. Finds Most People Now Live in Cities," *The New York Times*, July 10, 2014, accessed on February 23, 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/11/world/more-than-half-the-global-population-growth-is-urban-united-nations-report-finds.html?_r=0.

¹³ "Urban Area," *National Geographic Society Encyclopedia*, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/urban-area/>.

fifteen-week series on the Book of Nehemiah. Each of these series emphasized urban applications and specifically emphasized applications to the city of Worcester. The themes of God's compassion for the city, of Jesus' teaching about justice and about concern for the poor, the disenfranchised and the marginalized were highlighted.

During each of these preaching and teaching series some people left Journey Church. They interpreted Journey's teaching about social justice, racism, and structures of systemic injustice in Worcester as Journey "turning liberal" in its theology. As criticism about Journey Church's theology and preaching mounted and some people left the church, the temptation to back off from talking about the city became strong. The Journey Church leadership stayed the course because of the conviction that God called Journey Church to the city to be an agent of God's shalom. Some of those who remain part of Journey are beginning to get a bigger picture of what it means that the kingdom of God, in an already-but-not-yet stage has come. They are beginning to get excited about being agents of shalom in the Bell Hill neighborhood and in Worcester as a whole.

Many Christians Have an Anti-Urban Bias

This leads to a third reason a biblically robust theology of the city is necessary. Many Christians have an anti-urban bias, in many cases based on a few proof texts or illustrations about sinful Sodom and Gomorrah, wicked Nineveh, and arrogant, rapacious Babylon. From these biblical passages they draw the hasty and incomplete conclusion that cities are preponderantly and intrinsically places of evil and temptation. They see cities as the devil's playground: corrupt, fallen, a cesspool of sin, beyond hope, abandoned by God, and fated for complete destruction. This researcher has been actively involved in five churches over the course of his Christian life and experience spanning

the period from February 1975 to the present. The people of three of these churches had a very strong anti-urban bias and fear of the city and avoided the city whenever possible. The people of the fourth church ventured into the city to work or to access the city's cultural and recreational amenities and then retreated back to the suburbs to escape the city's perceived problems—noise, crime, violence, and sub-par school systems. The fifth church (The Journey Community Church) is now beginning to learn how to engage its urban community but remains ambivalent about the city itself. It is seen more as a mission field than as a desired home. J. M. Tiersma Watson notes that this anti-urban bias is nothing new. Nor is this bias limited to the church:

This anti-urban bias can be traced back to the Roman Empire, but it took on stronger forms in the founding of the United States. Already in the 1780's, Thomas Jefferson considered cities a pestilence. The American dream has not been an urban dream. . . . Theology has shared in this bias, resulting in what has been called theological anti-urbanism. This has caused some to say that the greatest barriers in urban mission are not within the city but within the church.¹⁴

Andy Crouch was one of seven judges asked to rate 34 Christian novels that had been nominated for the 2002 Christy Awards. In an article for *Christianity Today* Crouch wrote an essay describing the worldview he found in these novels. One of the things he identified was a common character, “an urbanized or suburbanized professional who must shed the trappings of her successful life and return to the small town of her roots.” Crouch came to the conclusion that in these books,

The Big City contains little but religious compromise, political machinations, empty wealth and death for one of true faith. . . . You could read a lot of Christian fiction and never encounter Luke's much more enthusiastic picture of the city, the place where the gospel spreads like tongues of fire (Jerusalem), crosses ethnic and language boundaries (Antioch), and leaps into the wider world (Rome)—the place

¹⁴ J. M. Tiersma Watson, “City, Theology of the,” *Global Dictionary of Theology*, eds. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 186-189.

where Christians first receive their name.¹⁵

The big city was seen in these contemporary Christian novels as the place where one's soul dried up and where one's ability to recognize and hear God withered.

The church's anti-urban bias shapes its expectations of where and how to meet and know God. Too often, it prevents Christians from seeking the presence of God in the city and it blinds them from noticing the activity of God in the city. The researcher has been on dozens of church-initiated retreats where the exhortation has been to "get away to get with God." To get away has always meant to go to a rural spot. He has yet to be invited to get away to meet with God in the midst of the city, or to listen for the voice of God in the chatter of the city.

The church proclaims that God is Sovereign LORD over all creation. The church affirms that God is omnipresent and always available to His people wherever and whenever they call upon Him in faith. But in practice, the church often acts as if God is absent from the city. In practice, too much of the church has ceded the city to the devil. This anti-urban bias has inhibited the church from developing spiritual formation practices and a spiritual rule of life that can be practiced within the day-to-day rhythms, noises, and energy of the city. In a sense, the church needs to develop a spiritual formation model for an urban monasticism that helps people deeply engage with God, plant deep roots in Him, and maintain a profound and abiding sense of God's presence - all in the context of living and worshiping in the city. The church needs an urban spirituality so that it can withstand the rigors of city life and can advance God's kingdom shalom in the face of Satan's resistance.

¹⁵ Andy Crouch, "Pastel Covers, Real People: What I Learned from Reading 34 Christian Novels," *Books and Culture*, July/August 2002, 33.

The church's anti-urban bias has shaped its perception of what ministry in the city should look like. If the church sees the city as only a sinful wasteland, then ministry in the city is geared toward helping individuals but not toward exposing and changing structures and systems of sin. Ministry becomes focused on helping to alleviate symptoms of sin and brokenness. It means giving a homeless person a sandwich and some clean socks. It does not try to understand why that person is homeless. It does not seek to unearth the root causes and enabling factors of that homeless person's sin and brokenness. Is that person homeless because of untreated mental health or addiction issues due to inadequate drug treatment and mental health facilities? Is that person homeless because of sub-standard and unaffordable housing options? Is that person homeless because structural racism and economic injustice prevent that person from finding living wage job?

If the church does not believe that the city is God's idea and that the city can be a place of human flourishing, the church will not strive to make it a place of shalom. Instead, the church will venture into the city to "do ministry among the poor" and then go back to its homes in the suburbs. The church will see people as projects, as objects of its benevolence, but it will not take the time to get to really know them. The church will not live with them, sit with them, and strive with them in partnership to redeem and transform their home, their neighborhood.

Deep, practiced spirituality flows out of clear, coherent, contextualized theology. A biblical theology of the city reveals cities as arenas where God's presence can be experienced, God's voice can be heard, God's glory can be revealed, God's love can be demonstrated, and God's kingdom rule and agenda can be embraced and advanced.

God's people can rightly expect to find God in the city. They need to look for God in the city. They can practice the presence of God in the city and can submit to the rule of God in the city. They are called to reveal the gracious activity of God to the city and to demonstrate the love of God for the city. The church has the privilege and opportunity to people in the city to the God in their midst. God's shalom is not just for the suburbs; it is for the city, too.

Many Christians Read the Bible Through a Rural Lens

Adding to this historic American anti-urban bias is the observation by Ray Bakke that many Christians read the Bible through a rural lens only.¹⁶ This researcher has not yet been able to find research data that verifies that most Christians in the United States read the Bible through a rural lens. Stephen Um and Justin Buzzard, in *Why Cities Matter*, and Robert Linthicum, in *City of God, City of Satan*, quote Ray Bakke's *Theology as Big as the City*. However, the researcher's very limited research sample supports Bakke's observation.

Clearly the Bible acknowledges and speaks to rural environments, conditions and issues. There are contexts where it is appropriate to apply a rural lens to one's reading of Scripture. The Bible is not anti-rural in any way. The point here is that the Bible also addresses urban realities. And given the increasingly urban nature of the world, the Bible's urban perspectives and teachings must be seen, understood and applied in the urban centers of the world. Reading Scripture through an urban lens is still not common for many Christians. The researcher talked to thirty people at Journey Church. In each case, the people this researcher talked to were not aware of the sheer number of times and

¹⁶ Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 14.

the variety of ways the city or city-related illustrations were used in the Bible. They knew of some references to Jerusalem, knew about Jonah and the city of Nineveh, and were somewhat familiar with Babylon.

They rightly saw Abraham as a pilgrim but forgot that he came out of the cosmopolitan city of Ur, and “was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11: 10). They knew that Moses spent forty years in the wilderness of Midian and then another forty years leading the Israelites out of Egypt through the wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land. They had not often reflected on the implications of Moses’ urban upbringing in the courts of Pharaoh. They knew David was a shepherd as a youth but did not take stock of the fact that most of his adult life was spent in Jerusalem. They were very familiar with the image of God as Shepherd (Psalm 23: 1; John 10:11, 14) leading His people through the wilderness. But they were completely unaware of the image of God as urban metalworker purging away the dross from His people so that Jerusalem might be purified and called “the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City” (Isa. 1: 25-26). They knew that Paul focused his missionary endeavors in cities and that Paul wrote letters to cities but had not reflected on what might say about God’s view of the city. They had not recognized that Jesus used many urban-related illustrations and metaphors in his teaching. They had no theology of the city because they had almost completely missed the references to the city in the Bible.

Most of the New Testament takes place in urban centers - Jerusalem, Antioch, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. People know that Jesus grew up in the small town of Nazareth. An hour’s walk from Nazareth was the rich, diverse, and cosmopolitan city of Sepphoris. Jesus may have worked as a carpenter there from time to time, and was

exposed to its diverse culture and religious pluralism. Luke highlights the fact that Jesus spent much of his ministry preaching in the cities and towns of Galilee. Paul clearly focused his ministry on cities.

The church's anti-urban bias has conditioned us to read the Scriptures through a rural lens that diminishes her capacity to notice how much of the Bible reflects urban locations and urban realities. This is a fourth reason for the necessity of developing a biblically faithful theology of the city that is taken into the pulpit. Robert Linthicum writes:

We enter the city equipped with an urban sociology and urban tools for ministry, but we carry with us the baggage of a theology designed in rural Europe. Even the way we formulate theological questions and the frameworks we use to construct our theological thought have been forged from our rural past [and our Western individualism and Enlightenment philosophy.] What we are in need of is a theology as urban as our sociology and missiology - a theology, as Ray Bakke puts it, 'as big as the city itself.'¹⁷

Stephen Um and Justin Buzzard echo Linthicum's statement and illustrate how it works out for the people in their churches:

Many urban folks that we know often think thoughts like: "I know I'm supposed to be here because our church always emphasizes that we're city positive. But I'm getting worn out. There's so much pollution and noise and stress in the city that I'd like to move to the mountains of New Hampshire or Lake Tahoe. It's so quiet and beautiful there, maybe I'd be more happy there." By default, we assume that being outside the city is good and living inside the city is bad. Indeed, "most Christians read the Bible through rural lenses."¹⁸

Many Christians, even those in churches with a demonstrated commitment to the city, continue to be shaped, consciously and unconsciously, by an anti-urban bias and a Christian spirituality forged in a rural world. The temptation for many is to escape the

¹⁷ Robert Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 20.

¹⁸ Stephen T. Um and Justin Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture, and the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 88.

city whenever possible. When escape from the city is not possible, they often fall into survival mode. They endure the city, particularly the underserved and distressed city, rather than enjoy it. Because of the challenges, stresses, and needs of the city, a vision for loving the city, engaging the city, and thriving in the city still seems counter-intuitive and elusive to them.

We are now in an era where the city is receiving substantial theological and missiological attention. Many Christians and churches now are actively working to engage the cities of our world and, in the name of Jesus, are making significant contributions to the flourishing of their cities.¹⁹ Clearly, urban ministry has regained prominence in the eyes of many Christians. The Book of Acts and the early history of the church show that the cities were very prominent arenas of ministry in the early centuries of the church. Norris Magnuson makes the case that during the 19th century AD there was a great surge of city ministry by the church both in Europe and in America.²⁰ However, as Ed Stetzer, in the Foreword to *Serving God in Today's Cities* notes:

“The city” is an emerging phrase that seems to be embraced by a growing number of Christians. I intentionally say they are embracing the phrase, because I do not think that all are actually embracing the city. *Rather most are simply embracing the idea of embracing the city [emphasis mine].*

Whatever it is that we say about the city, the truth is the church is often absent from the urban context. Tim Keller, ... Says that people are moving into the cities faster than the church is.²¹

Reading the Bible through a rural lens contributes to the fact that we miss much

¹⁹ See <http://movementday.com> for some examples of what churches and Christian ministries are doing.

²⁰ Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920*, Wipf and Stock, 2004.

²¹ Patrick Johnstone with Dean Merrill, *Serving God in Today's Cities: Facing the Challenge of Urbanization* (Colorado Springs, CO: GMI, 2015).

of God's redemptive vision for the city. Reading the Bible with an anti-urban bias means we miss God's concern for the city and we justify our abandonment of the city. Because the church has seen the city as irredeemable and has fled the city, the church has missed our call to the city as an arena to display God's goodness and glory.

Reach the City and You Reach the Nations

A fifth reason that a theology of the city is needed has to do with the missional importance of the city. The nations are being drawn to the city. In the cities of the world are people from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7: 9). God is bringing into our cities people that could not easily, if at all, be reached if they were in their homes of origin. God has brought the peoples of the world into our cities so that we can reach them with the gospel. The church in the city has the opportunity, because of its access to the nations and peoples of the world, to demonstrate the love of God for all peoples, to proclaim the truth of the gospel to all nations, and to reflect, in embryonic form, the Revelation 7 vision of the church, people from every nation, tribe, people and language gathered together as one united, fully reconciled people before the throne of God. This coming together of the diverse peoples of the world in urban churches may be the most powerful apologetic for the truth and goodness and power of the gospel that the world will ever see and hear.

Worcester has the largest refugee population of any city in New England. In addition to that, 21 percent of Worcester's population is foreign-born with people coming from over 85 countries.²² Over one hundred different languages and dialects are spoken

²² Michael D. Goodman, David R. Borges, Michael P. McCarthy, Jason D. Wright, Trevor V. Matos, Jawanza Foster, "The Foreign-Born Population of Worcester, Massachusetts: Assessing the Challenge and Contributions of a Diverse Community," *The Public Policy Center* (2015), accessed October 6, 2016, www.sevenhills.org/uploads/ForeignbornStudy.pdf.

in the Worcester public school system. Apart from team sports to some degree, there is no place in Worcester where people come together across ethnic, racial, cultural, and socio-economic differences as friends and partners. They have no compelling reason to come together.

Only the church has compelling reasons to cross the human barriers that divide people: The church believes there is one God who created all human beings in His image. Since all people are created in God's image, the church must treat all people with dignity and respect even if these people despise God and His church. The church is called by God to love even its enemies.

The church believes God has called His people to be one body, one church. Therefore, not only are the people of God to treat one another with dignity and respect; they are to treat one another as family. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). John Calvin contends that:

The meaning (of Gal.3: 28) is, that there is no distinction of persons here, and therefore it is of no consequence to what nation or condition any one may belong: nor is circumcision any more regarded than sex or civil rank. And why? Because Christ makes them all one. Whatever may have been their former differences, Christ alone is able to unite them all. Ye are one: the distinction is now removed.²³

The church believes, therefore, that all who are in Christ are brothers and sisters to one another, called to love and serve one another. The Apostle John writes: "We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. (I John 4: 19-20).

²³ John Calvin, *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, "Christian Classics Ethereal Library," accessed March 19, 2017, http://www.ccel.org/study/Galatians_3:27-28.

The church has the mandate from God and the power of God to confront racism and prejudice, catalyze repentance, and bring about reconciliation. The Holy Spirit equally indwells all who are in Christ. The church, then, has been given supernatural power to be a reconciled and reconciling community that can overcome the divisions caused by any and all earthly differences.

It is in the cities of our world, Worcester among them, that the church has the opportunity to live out this vision and calling from God. The church is called to be a visible demonstration of what God in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can do. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can love its enemies and can live as loving family within the body of believers despite every ethnic, cultural, political, socioeconomic, and class barrier. In God's kingdom, the shalom of God rests on all God's people and brings them together as one.

Millennials, the Lost Generation of the Church, Are Found in the City

A sixth reason that a theology of the city is needed is that cities are the battleground where the future of the church (from a human perspective) may be forged. Data shows that Millennials, the generation born between 1982 and 2002, are now the largest living generation in the United States.²⁴ The Barna Research Group has released studies indicating that these Millennials are leaving the church at a high rate: “Nearly six in ten (59 %) young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away, and the unchurched segment among Millennials has increased in the last decade from 44% to

²⁴ Richard Fry, “Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America’s Largest Generation,” *Pew Research Center*, April 24, 2016, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>.

52%.”²⁵ Preston Sprinkle argues that they may not be coming back to the church. He

writes:

Even though 18-29 year olds often have the lowest rate of church attendance, things are different today. First, millennials are dropping out of church at a much higher rate than ever before. Second, the way 18-29 year olds live their lives is much different than previous generations. Fewer are getting married, even less are having kids. If we’re waiting for them to settle down and return to church, we may be waiting for a while since fewer are actually settling down in the *Leave It to Beaver* sort of way. Third, our millennials, unlike previous twenty-something’s, are growing up in a world much different than previous generations. They are growing up in the age of the internet, which has produced unparalleled shifts in how people live and think. Many sociologists have compared these shifts to those that took place with the printing press back in the 15th century. Just as information and literacy spread at the speed of sound in the wake of the printing press, now information and power has spread at the speed of light with the invention of the internet. And we have little clue about the social, mental, spiritual, and civil impact this will bring. We stand right smack dab in the eye of the storm.²⁶

Millennials are leaving the church and we cannot know for sure that they will come back. But we do know where very many of them are going. They are flocking to the cities of our world looking for job opportunities, social connections, and diverse cultural and recreational options.²⁷ We know that they are flocking into the city with questions, with a longing for community and transcendent purpose, with a desire to make a tangible difference in the world, and with openness to be mentored. And when they arrive in the city, they become, for a time, spiritually and relationally open to God certainly, but also to the church if the church is authentic in its relationships, concerned

²⁵ “The Priorities, Challenges, and Trends in Youth Ministry,” Barna Research Group, April 6, 2016, accessed September 23, 2016, http://www.barna.com/research/the-priorities-challenges-and-trends-in-youth-ministry#.V-Wgezv_Reo.

²⁶ Preston Sprinkle, “Why Are Millennials Leaving the Church in Doves: Part 1,” *Patheos*, September 16, 2016, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/theologyintheraw/2015/09/why-are-millennials-leaving-the-church-in-doves-part-1/>.

²⁷ Richard Florida, “How and Why American Cities are Coming Back,” *CityLab*, May 17, 2012, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.citylab.com/work/2012/05/how-and-why-american-cities-are-coming-back/2015>.

about and engaged with its community, and rigorous but humble and curious in its thinking, teaching, and proclamation. Millennials might give the church another chance if they believe the church sees them as individuals, takes the time to hear their questions and understand their perspectives, and cares about some of the key things they care about. These things include the environment, social justice, racial reconciliation, poverty and income inequality, and tolerance, but also meaning and beauty and truth. Preston Sprinkle continues:

This means that most people who leave the church haven't left Jesus. They've simply left the church. They've left institutional Christianity. Why? Because they've seen a massive disconnect between the church and Jesus. "They sense that the established church has internalized many of 'Babylon's' values of consumerism, hyperindividualism, and moral compromise instead of living in-but-not-of as kingdom exiles." They feel "caught between the church as it is and what they believe it is called to be" (Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 77).

Many dechurched millennials—the "Dones"—were hungering for Jesus and didn't find him in the church. They longed for rich, intense, honest community. They wanted to love their neighbor and enemy alike. They didn't understand why 5% of church budgets (at best) went to help the poor when Jesus said to give it all away. And—contrary to what some of you are thinking—they actually wanted *more* Bible, *more* depth, *more* substance than what they were being fed. And here's the real convicting thing: They hungered for more intergenerational relationships and didn't experience these in the church.

They desired an honest encounter with Jesus, and they didn't find him in the pizza and games that cluttered the youth room. When they visited "big church," they didn't see much resonance with the Jesus who's revealed in the four gospels.²⁸

There is some evidence to suggest that Millennials, like previous generations, start moving to the suburbs once they get married and start having children. Some believe that Millennials will turn to the church at that point because they want some sort of moral foundation for their children. But given that Millennials tend to get married and have children later than previous generations, this means they are moving to the suburbs

²⁸ Sprinkle.

in their 30's.²⁹ So, this means that many of them have been separated from the church for a decade or more and have established patterns of life that do not include the church in any way. The time to reach them is now when they are still open, curious, flexible and when they are trying to make sense of their life. To reach them, the church needs to offer them both authentic relationship and deep theology that speaks to the issues they care about. If they are exposed to a theology that addresses the complexities of the city and a missiology that marries evangelism with social justice, some of them will return to the church.

Worcester has over 36, 000 college students spread over nine colleges and universities within the city and three others within a fifteen-minute drive of the city. Most of these students do not have a living faith in Christ but they are accessible to the church through both active ministries on their campuses and through opportunities to work with them in community service. Over the last two years The Journey Community Church has participated in “Working for Worcester”, an initiative started by two students at the College of the Holy Cross four years ago to preserve and maintain playgrounds and other recreation spaces in the city. These types of spaces are part of the built environment of every city and in many cases their neglect significantly affects human well-being. The Center for Disease Control notes:

The built environment includes all of the physical parts of where we live and work (e.g., homes, buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure). The built environment influences a person’s level of physical activity. For example, inaccessible or nonexistent sidewalks and bicycle or walking paths contribute to sedentary habits. These habits lead to poor health outcomes such as obesity,

²⁹ Gene Veith, “Millennials are Moving to the Suburbs,” *Patheos Insider*, May 23, 2016, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2016/3/millennials-are-moving-to-the-suburbs/>.

cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Today, approximately two thirds of Americans are overweight.³⁰

Millennials are passionate about preserving the natural environment. But they care about preserving the built environment as well. Working for Worcester has attracted over 1000 volunteers in each of the four years of its existence. Most of them are students who work together each spring doing things like cleaning parks, athletic fields and outdoor recreation area, putting up playground equipment, painting school buildings. Journey Church is one of only four churches to participate in this. But in the process of partnering with all these students, we have gotten to know some of them and have developed an on-going relationship with them. Joining students in caring about the built environment is giving Journey Church an opportunity to change the impression many Millennials have about the church.

Ray Bakke, in *A Theology as Big as the City*, writes about coming to the city of Chicago in the 1960s and being overwhelmed by the diversity, complexity, and multiplicity of needs in the city. However, he writes: “But the greatest crisis I faced was theological. I didn’t have a theology that addressed the world I was experiencing. My theology was not adequate for the issues I was facing in ministry or in my family?”³¹ Millennials coming into the city also get overwhelmed and confused. They also need a worldview that is adequate for all that they experience in the city. The Scriptures offer a worldview that can stand the stresses of the city and that point out a path through the brokenness of the city.

All good theology is applied theology. It is not meant to be abstract and simply

³⁰ Center for Disease Control, “Impact of the Built Environment on Health,” accessed January 25, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/publications/factsheets/impactofthebuiltenvironmentonhealth.pdf>.

³¹ Bakke, 22.

theoretical. It is meant to be specific, contextual, and earthy. It is meant to be as specific, contextual, and earthy as the God who put on human flesh, was born in a dirty, smelly stable/cave, and walked the roads and trails and streets of Capernaum, and Galilee, and Jerusalem and Judea. This God died on a cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and then rose from the dead to reign as King. He will restore all of creation to what it was meant to be and reconcile all of creation to Himself. He will return to gather His people and fully establish His kingdom. In his kingdom, Christ's people will live in the joy of His in shalom. "To dwell in shalom is to *enjoy* living before God, to *enjoy* living in one's surroundings, to *enjoy* living with one's fellows, to *enjoy* living with oneself."³² That is the kind of theology that Millennials want, need, and will receive. But they will not receive it if it only comes in words. The church must live out what it believes. The church must be a reconciled and reconciling community that brings God's shalom wherever it is.

Cities Shape the World

A seventh reason a theology of the city is needed is because the city shapes the world. Cities are the economic engines that drive the world's economy. They are the centers of technological and social innovation, of public policy formation and political activity, of education and intellectual endeavor, of the arts and entertainment and fashion. What happens in the cities of our world eventually spreads to the rest of the world. To reach and influence the city is to influence and reach the world. Tim Keller goes so far as to argue that God designed cities to *develop/transmit culture*. Cities have a divinely given ability to do "culture making." Keller makes his case by pointing out that even the worst

³² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 70.

city (Babylon in Revelation 18) had the power to draw out the creative power and culture shaping influence of its citizens:

In Revelation 18 we see that the city is a place of 1) music and the arts (v. 22a), 2) crafts and works of all arts and manufacturing (v. 22b), 3) trade and retailing (v. 23c), 4) technological advance (v. 23a), 5) family building (v. 23b). This is what the city was designed by God to do, as an instrument of glorifying him by mining the riches of creation and building a God-honoring civilization. The city, then, has a powerful magnifying glass effect. Since God invented it as a cultural mine, it brings out *whatever is in the human heart*. The density and therefore diversity of the city brings out the best (and the worst) in the human heart. It was designed by God to draw out and to mine what God made.³³ Keller's comments about the culture shaping influence of cities can certainly be

seen in Worcester. In addition to being the engine propelling the economic growth of Worcester County, Worcester is also the center of the region's educational, cultural, social, and recreational life. Its colleges and universities, museums, theaters, restaurants, concerts and festivals provide something for everyone. Worcester remains a center for research, innovation and technological development. Worcester was where the first pressurized space suits were developed and the first envelope-folding machine. The first American Nobel Prize winner, Albert A. Michelson, was from Worcester. The first Bible and the first dictionary printed in America were in Worcester by Isaiah Thomas who also printed the largest newspaper of the time, the Massachusetts Spy. The first woman to serve on a president's cabinet was Frances Perkins, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor. The first liquid fuel rocket launch was done by Worcester professor Robert Goddard. The first National Women's Rights Convention was in Worcester and among those attending was Susan B. Anthony. A radio station in Worcester, WORC, was first to

³³ Keller.

play the Beatles. Worcester was also where the first oral contraceptive was developed.³⁴ The culture shaping and innovation of the past continues to this day.

The world is moving into its cities, urban problems are becoming more acute, and the church, on the whole, has yet to fully engage the city on its own terms in a way that reflects the truth, love, and power of the gospel. In Worcester, almost all of the historic (mostly white) evangelical churches, have died, are in decline and are struggling to hold on, or have moved to the suburbs. Their theology, values, strategies, and ministry models, shaped in white, working class and middle class contexts, did not adapt to the changes in the neighborhoods around them. Their ministry methodology was not adequately contextualized to navigate the challenges of Worcester's rapidly changing demographics and changing community needs. The churches that remain continue to struggle with how to understand and reach the city of Worcester in the name of Jesus. Several of these small, struggling churches have begun to adapt their ministry strategies to the changing demographics and needs of their neighborhood and have halted the decline. The changes have come mostly because of the leadership and pastoral initiatives of new pastors who have made a long-term commitment to these churches and to the neighborhoods in which they are placed. It is also important to note that over the last six years eight new evangelical churches, including The Journey Community Church, have been planted in the city. Several of these new church plants are satellite sites of suburban churches and almost entirely reflect the culture of their hub churches (including streaming the sermons from the hub church). It remains to be seen whether these churches will grow, will

³⁴ Charles R. Grosvenor, Jr., "Famous Firsts of Worcester, Mass," WorcesterMass.com, accessed October 5, 2016, www.worcestermass.com/firsts.shtml.

develop a vision for holistic neighborhood ministry, and will become effective in reaching and transforming their neighborhoods.

Regardless of how one views the growth and expansion of cities, the sheer fact is they are here to stay. The world is becoming progressively and inexorably more urban, and the Church, to fulfill its mandate to bear witness to Christ and make disciples of all nations, must engage the city with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Cities matter to God, they matter in the Bible, they matter in our world, and they ought to matter in the Church.

Part of the essential DNA of The Journey Community Church is a strong and abiding commitment to the authority, integrity, and trustworthiness of Scripture. When the people of Journey become convinced of the biblical truth of something, they tend to accept and embrace it even when this biblical truth runs counter to their culture or counter to their personal comfort. If they believe that the Bible calls them to engage and serve their neighborhood, most will respond. The Journey Community Church needs a robust and comprehensive theology and missiology of the city in order to persevere in engaging its inner city neighborhood and not lose heart. This theology of the city must be biblically robust, realistic, relational and incarnational theology of the city. It must be robust in that it is rooted in a broad understanding of the Gospel of the Kingdom that goes well beyond a gospel of personal salvation and that unpacks the implications of God the King who reigns over His creation and is working out His cosmic salvation. It must be realistic in that it accounts for both the sovereign power of God to fully accomplish His redemptive purposes in the city, and for the activity of the demonic realm that wars against God's purposes by instigating and propping up entrenched structures and patterns

of personal sin and corporate sin and injustice. It must be relational in that it focuses on the various peoples and cultures of the neighborhood, affirms their dignity, promotes their initiative and agency, and points them to Jesus, the only true Savior and Lord. The Journey Community Church's urban theology must be incarnational in the sense that it motivates and equips its people to step out of their comfort zones and enter into the homes and lives and concerns of the people of the neighborhood as fellow travelers and equal partners.

Cities in the Bible: An Overview

The Bible is an Urban Book and Cities Matter to God

In the Bible, the word “city” or “cities” occurs 1250 times and 142 different cities are mentioned in Scripture.³⁵ The Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 37, “Towards the Transformation of our Cities/Regions,” points out the prominence of cities in the Bible:

Abraham emerged from his city of Ur and biblical figures such as Joseph influenced civic life from the centre of Egyptian civilization. Moses was an educated urban figure who confronted city powers. The exodus out of Egypt led to the Jewish settlements that would become the cities of Palestine. In the Bible, prophets such as Amos and Habakkuk speak to cities and to urban persons. They often speak from the context of cities and about urban issues. The biblical image of restoration is often typified by a city rebuilt, often by marginalized or impoverished city dwellers themselves (Isaiah 61-65). The new, rebuilt city of Jerusalem will be a place of beauty, peace and justice (Isaiah 65) built by God Himself where He will gather His people around Him (Hebrews 11)

Even when God's people were being judged and scattered, cities figured prominently. The Jewish Diaspora was primarily to cities. Cities are depicted as places of blessing in the Bible. God set aside certain urban centres as Cities of Refuge (Numbers 35) where the accused could hide from retributive violence, and the city is depicted in salvific terms for a people wandering in the desert (Psalm 107). Whole books of the Bible are written using the narrative infrastructure of particular cities, including Jonah, Nehemiah, Joshua, Ezra, Ruth, Esther, Deuteronomy and many Psalms. Paul's letters are directed to churches in specific cities. City systems are addressed and often confronted in the Bible. The city is

³⁵ Glenn Barth, *The Good City: Transformed Lives Transforming Communities* (Tallmadge, OH: S.D. Myers Publishing Services, 2010), 10.

clearly present in the Scriptures, but it is significant beyond its mere mention. God cares deeply for cities. We sense the pathos in Yahweh as He weeps for the cities of Moab, Heshbon, Simbah and Elealeh (Isaiah 15 and 16), and as Jesus weeps for Jerusalem (Luke 13). We sense God's commitment to cities as He directs the brightest and best lay leaders, such as Daniel and Esther, to minister there as urban practitioners, or Paul, His most gifted apostle to employ a clear urban strategy during his missionary journeys.

All doubt about God's commitment to the city is removed when Jesus Himself states His intent and purpose to focus His ministry on ministering in the cities. "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). In the Gospel of John, a significant amount of Jesus' ministry time is spent in Jerusalem and the cities of Palestine, where most of His dialogue is with individuals, as contrasted with the mass evangelism or sermons employed in His interactions in rural contexts. Jesus' parables are mostly urban stories. In Johannine material, the seven miracles of Jesus occur in cities.³⁶

Robert Linthicum has argued that the story of the Bible is a story about God's primary intention to bring His kingdom into the city. He writes: "The city is the locus of a great and continuing battle between the God of Israel and/or the church and the god of the world."³⁷ As a general statement God's people must say that God's primary intention is to bring God's kingdom everywhere, not just the city. The church, however, must not minimize the need for a robust biblical theology of the city. The church must embrace the missional importance of strategically engaging the city. The city is where an ever-increasing majority of the world's people lives. Cities are where the world's culture is being shaped and extended. Cities are where technology and innovation are catalyzed. Cities are where Millennials are flocking to live, and where for a time, as they adjust to the complex, competitive, aggressive urban environment, they become most spiritually open to Jesus. The city is where God is bringing the nations and peoples of the world. The city is where all God's people will dwell for all eternity. For much of the twentieth

³⁶ Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 37, "Towards the Transformation of our Cities/Regions," 2004, accessed August 19, 2016, https://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP37_IG8.pdf.

³⁷ Linthicum, 23.

century many evangelicals (particularly white evangelicals) fled the city and, in effect, ceded it to Satan. The church must not make the same mistake in the twenty-first century. It is fair to argue that if the Church reaches the cities of the world, it will touch the whole world. Therefore, it is critical that the church prioritize urban ministry now and in the decades to come until the Lord Jesus returns.

Cities in Genesis: City of Cain, “City” of Noah, City of Babel

Enoch: The City Built by Cain: Genesis 4:17-24

The first mention of city comes in Genesis 4: 16-17 where we are told that Cain left the Lord’s presence, traveled east of Eden into the land of Nod, lived there and built a city, which he named after his son, Enoch. Earlier in Genesis 4 (Gen. 4: 8), out of jealousy and anger, Cain killed his brother Abel. In verses 10-12, God told Cain that because of this murder, he would be under a curse. First, when Cain worked the ground it would no longer yield its crops to him. Second, Cain would be a restless wanderer on the earth. It may be that Cain would be a restless wanderer as a result of no longer being able to produce food from the land. If Cain could not work the land to produce food, he would have to wander in search of food. It may also be that he would be a restless wanderer as a result of having murdered his brother. He would not be able to rest and be at peace because he would always be looking over his shoulder out of fear of retribution.

David Atkinson suggests a more fundamental reason for Cain’s restlessness:

The way of Cain leads to the land of ‘restlessness’ (4: 16). There is no peace for human beings unless they can discover the freedom of living within the providence of God, can see their lives as the focus of his care, and believe that their highest good is found in living under his will. For God’s will expresses both God’s own nature of goodness, and also what is an appropriate pattern of life for

the welfare of his people. God's will is his goodness; God's goodness is expressed in his will.³⁸

In verses 13-15, Cain lamented before the Lord and, in effect, charged God with being harsh and unfair toward him. "You are driving me from the land so that I cannot provide food for myself. And, you are hiding me from your presence so that I am left vulnerable and unprotected." Note that Genesis 4: 11-12 does not say that God would drive Cain from His presence. Cain may have been exaggerating what God said (as Eve did in Genesis 3) or he may have been presuming that God would drive him away because Cain had a small view of God and His character (which may be what was behind the unacceptable offering he brought to God in Genesis 4: 5). Earlier, in Genesis 3: 23-24, God, in response to their sin, had banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, but He had not removed His presence with them or His care over them. The same grace applied to Cain.

In response to Cain's lament, God promised to protect Cain from being killed and put a sign on him as a mark of His protection over him so that no one who found him will kill him. Derek Kidner points out that the same Hebrew word, 'owth, translated as "mark" or "sign" in our English Bibles, also appears in Genesis 9:13 and 17:11, and serves as a sign of covenant. Kidner concludes from this that by promise and by sign God covenants to make Himself Cain's protector.³⁹ So, in essence, God not only promised to protect Cain but also promised not to hide His presence from Cain or break relationship with him.

³⁸ David Atkinson, 111.

³⁹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 76.

But then Cain went out from God's presence, settled in the land of Nod, and bore a son. At some point Cain built a city, which he named after his son, whom he had named Enoch. The Hebrew word for city here is 'ir, which is used 1090 times in the Old Testament. Carl Schultz writes that:

'Ir refers to a permanent settlement without reference to size or claims. ... The primary distinction between a city and a village is that the former 'ir generally had a wall. ... The Greek idea of "city" differs radically from that of Israel. In its developed use polis has as its core meaning a political institution, whereas 'ir, ... Focused on a protected place. ... The importance of cities [in Israel] lay in the resistance they could offer to aggressors because of their fortifications, in the protection they could give to their inhabitants.⁴⁰

So, when Genesis 4 speaks of Cain building a city it may simply mean a walled family compound. But the key point is that the city is walled in order to provide protection. God had promised protection to Cain but Cain decided to secure his own protection by building a walled city.

The word "Nod" means "wanderings"⁴¹ and the name "Enoch" is related to the Hebrew verb meaning "to initiate".⁴² The implication may be that Cain, fearing for his life and not trusting God's promise to protect him, initiated a new plan, a plan different than God's. He built his city as a refuge from those who might seek to kill him, as a rejection of relationship with God, as a substitute for God's protection and rule, and as an attempt to overturn God's prophecy/command that he would be a "restless wanderer." In Nod, the land of wandering, Cain rejected God's pronouncement that he would be a restless wanderer and determined to root himself in one place by building a city, a place

⁴⁰ Carl Schultz, "City," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 2*, eds. R. Laid Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 664-665.

⁴¹ Kidner, 77.

⁴² Kidner, 77.

where he would be protected without being dependent upon God. Cain built his city as an expression of pride, independence, self-assertion, and on-going rebellion against God.

Just as previously with Adam and Eve, from beginning to end, God's response to Cain's stubbornness and pride was a demonstration of the staggering grace of God. In Genesis 3:21 the Lord God clothed Adam and Eve. This was a mark of grace and continued watch-care, provision and protection. When the Lord put His mark on Cain he was doing for Cain what He did for Adam and Eve; He was restraining His judgment and providing His sure protection. But Cain rejected God's care and protection in an on-going rebellion against God's rule. As David Atkinson says:

For, though Cain is protected by God, he still seeks a security outside God. Another aspect to his building a city is seen in the symbol of the city as a man-made security in the land of restlessness. It was, we are told, 'east of Eden, as if to point up Cain's glance back towards the Garden. But instead of returning to the place of divine pleasure, Cain substitutes his own security for that which comes from God.⁴³

Cain killed his brother, Abel. The LORD came to him and asked, "Where is your brother?" When Adam was challenged he at least told the truth, even though it was not the whole truth (Gen. 3: 10). But Cain told an outright lie, "I do not know." He then made an outrageously sarcastic and disrespectful comment, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The fact of the matter is that *he was supposed to be his brother's keeper*, but was instead his brother's murderer. Cain murdered Abel for the lowest of reasons. Abel had not injured Cain in any way. Cain's murderous rage was inspired purely by a spiritual jealousy. Here we begin to see what terrible progress sin had made since the fall. When Adam and Eve sinned, there was a sort of a timid hiding in the garden. But now Cain offered this bold-faced, blatant lie. Sin had pounced; it turned Cain into a murderer and a liar. His denial,

⁴³ David Atkinson, 114.

of course, was absolutely ridiculous. But it was the desperate attempt to silence the voice of God by a lie, and that was the most foolish response of all. But instead of destroying Cain, God offered protection to him. Instead of being grateful for God's protection, Cain, in essence rejected it. He built his city as a way to protect himself. Yet God allowed this city, built out of anger and pride and rebellion, to stand as a place of refuge for Cain.

John Sailhamer interprets Genesis 4: 13-16 differently. He sees verse 14 as an expression by Cain of deep remorse over his sin - "my iniquity is too great to forgive." Sailhamer comes to this interpretation because he believes this makes more sense of God's gracious response to Cain. That is, God offers to extend His protection over Cain because Cain repents.⁴⁴ Given Cain's premeditated murder of Abel, his lying to God and his flippant response to God - "Am I my brother's keeper?" - it seems unlikely to this writer that Cain suddenly falls under deep remorse. God's outrageous mercy, on the other hand, to this writer, seems completely consistent with the Bible's portrayal of God's character. Sailhamer, also, in line with his view that Cain shows remorse, sees the sign or mark of God's protection over Cain as the city that Cain built. In this sense, Sailhamer sees Enoch the city as kind of "city of refuge."⁴⁵ This interpretation also seems unlikely to this researcher. The cities of refuge (Numbers 35) were designed to provide protection in order to ensure a just and fair trial for someone who had killed another. The issue was whether or not the killing was inadvertent or whether it was intended. In the case of Cain's killing of Abel, there was no question; it was out and out murder.

⁴⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 113-114.

⁴⁵ Sailhamer, 114-115.

There is a consistent ethic that runs through all of Scripture concerning our responsibility to one another. As David Atkinson contends, “responsibility before God is responsibility for our brother.”⁴⁶ We are to be our brother’s keeper, to look out for and help the poor, the widow, and the orphan, to feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, to help the sick, and visit the prisoner (Matt. 25: 31-46). When Jesus was asked what was the first and greatest commandment, he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22: 37-40).

Cain abdicated his moral, ethical responsibility to his brother to serve his own ego and injured pride. When the church fled the city, it too abdicated its moral, ethical responsibility to love its neighbor. The church, called to a life of love and service, left the city to serve its own comforts, needs, and desires. The people with the education, training, and resources to make a difference in the city left the city behind. The church with the light of the gospel left the city in the dark. The people of God, indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of God, left the city to the devil. Like Cain who tried to put off God with a flippant response, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” and the teacher of the law who asked, “Who is my neighbor?” the church also has tried to put off God, to justify itself, and to placate its conscience. God’s people, have justified their prejudice against those different from them, justified their desire for personal comfort and safety, and justified their desire for status and self-serving independence. They have tried to silence the voice of God with a lie they told to themselves. But God has neither abandoned the

⁴⁶ David Atkinson, 109.

church nor the city. The church, today, has the opportunity to repent of the abdication of its responsibility to the city and to return to the city as God's representatives.

The narrative in Genesis continues with the progression of the line of Cain. Enoch reaches adulthood and bears sons who themselves bear sons until there is a pause to focus on Lamech, the son of Methushael. In Lamech we see the progression of sin over the course of several generations of Cain's line. The pride, anger, sense of entitlement, and self-assertion displayed by Cain are intensified in Lamech. Derek Kidner remarks:

Lamech's taunt-song reveals the swift progress of sin. Where Cain had succumbed to it (7) Lamech exults in it; where Cain had sought protection (14,15) Lamech looks round for provocation: the savage disproportion of killing a mere lad (Hebrew yeled, 'child') for a mere wound is the whole point of his boast (cf. 24).⁴⁷

But along with the progression of sin we see the progression of culture making in fulfillment of the mandate in Genesis 1: 28 to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue [develop] it." This ability and desire to "make culture" flows out of being made in the image of God.

Andy Crouch borrows language from cultural critic Ken Myers to define culture as "what we make of the world." He continues by saying:

Culture is, first of all, the name for our relentless, restless, human effort to take the world as it's given to us and make something else. ... Something is added in every act of making. This is clearest in the realm of art, where the raw materials of pigment and canvas become more than you ever could have predicted. ... But creation, the marvelous making of more than was there before, also happens when a chef makes an omelet, when a carpenter makes a chair, when a toddler makes a snow angel.

It is what human beings make of the world. It always bears the stamp of our creativity, our God-given desire to make something more than we were given.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Derek Kidner, 78.

⁴⁸ Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 23.

In this brief narrative we see major themes emerging concerning the nature and role of the city. These themes will be played out and developed throughout the rest of Scripture. When people separate themselves from God, pride and self-centeredness and sin abound. When pride and self-centeredness characterizes a city, injustice and oppression and violence erupts. But human beings, even when they rebel against God and reject His rightful rule over them, cannot escape from who and what God made them to be: image bearers who make culture. From the line of Cain came the first farmers and raisers of livestock, the first tent-makers, the first musicians and musical instruments-makers, and the first bronze and iron tool making. Charles Sherlock remarks:

The development of human culture derives from obedience to the divine command to be fruitful and multiply, and to till and keep the earth, and is seen in the growth of human culture in the pre-flood narrative: agriculture, city-founding, tent-dwelling, music and smelting (Gn. 4: 2, 17, 20, 21, 22). The gaining of such skills is nevertheless closely associated with murder, suggesting that with growing variety came rivalry (Gn. 4:8, 23-24). It was the spread of human evil that brought the great flood (Gn. 6: 11-13), but the flood concludes with God's promise to restrain the curse on the earth (Gn. 8:21-22), and pour renewed blessing on the surviving humans and "every living creature that is with you."

There are thus features of every culture that bear some correspondence to the divine intention in creation; ... Other aspects of culture reflect sinful distortions of human living, and particular cultures can become so depraved that they merit divine condemnation.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that the products of human culture making can be used for evil as well as good (for example, the working of bronze and iron can be used to make tool for cultivating the earth or to make weapons that can be used to oppress, kill and destroy) the making, in and of itself, is good.

In the rest of Genesis 4 we are told about the birth of Seth. Eve gives birth to Seth and says, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him. Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name

⁴⁹ Sherlock, 132-133.

of the LORD” (Gen. 4: 25-26). By implication, the people calling on the name of the LORD are Seth and his descendants. What follows in Genesis is a deliberate contrast between the line of Cain and the line of Seth, the ungodly line with the godly. Genesis 3: 15 speaks of a conflict between two streams of humankind. One stream is under the primary influence of the serpent. The other is under the primary influence of the LORD. In Genesis 4 and following we begin to see these two lines of humanity emerge and develop. Both lines of humanity have a Lamech. The Lamech of Cain’s line engages in polygamy, commits murder, and continues a sinful downward spiral that leads to the judgment of the Flood. In contrast, the Lamech of Seth’s line births a son, righteous Noah (Gen. 6: 9), who becomes an instrument of salvation for his people.

Before moving on to Noah, note that there is a curious silence in the contrast made between the two lines of humanity. We are told that Cain built a city where we assume that his descendants also lived. Nothing is said about where Seth and his descendants live. We assume that Seth and his descendants did not build a city, but instead spread out in the wilderness, kept flocks, and tilled the ground. We are told about the culture building accomplishments of Cain’s line but nothing is said about the culture building accomplishments of Seth’s line. It may be that Seth and his descendants contributed little to culture making. If so, this may be because they lacked the creative stimulation that living in a city provides. As John Goldingay contends:

The city is the context in which art and technology begin to develop (the invention of harp and flute, the forging of bronze and iron tools) even though the first recorded use of such discoveries is in the glorifying of human violence (in Lamech’s proud verses about the execution of his wrath on an enemy) as the city becomes a place where vengeance has to be subjected to constraint, where the created order is imperiled and has to be protected. There are of course huge differences between preindustrial cities and the vast cities of the industrial era, but also common features, and these include the fact that both facilitate the

development of art and technology. They are thus the context where specialized activities and crafts evolve, though the underside of this latter is the emergence of a class structure in society. They are also the context where writing develops: if there had been no city, it seems there would have been no history, no theology, no science, no Bible.⁵⁰

Tim Keller adds: “The city, then, has a powerful magnifying effect. Since God invented it as a ‘cultural mine,’ it brings out *whatever is in the human heart*. Since the human heart is made in the image of God and is totally depraved, therefore the city brings out the very, very *best* and *worst* of human capabilities.”⁵¹ We certainly see the worst of humanity emerge in Cain’s city-dwelling line. But we also see some of the best of humanity emerging from Cain and his descendants. Cain and his descendants are city-dwellers who are cultural, artistic and technological innovators; they are culture makers. There is mounting evidence that the density of city dwelling is catalytic in spurring innovation in science, technology, education, business development, medical practice, the arts, and a host of other fields. Many cities, including the city of Worcester, are now developing innovation zones within their cities to spur innovation, find solutions to problems, accelerate job growth, and increase over-all prosperity.

Innovation districts are places where leading-edge anchor institutions and companies cluster and connect with start-ups, business incubators and accelerators. They are also physically compact, transit-accessible and broadband-ready, offering mixed-use housing, office and retail. Their success reflects our increasingly complex world, which demands increased collaboration to understand and address problems with solutions that are more and more found at the boundaries between different fields.⁵²

⁵⁰ John Goldingay, “Is God in the City,” 205-206, accessed on March 24, 2017, <http://infoguides.fuller.edu/friendly.php?s=johngoldingay>, (first published as “The Bible in the City” in *Theology* 92 (1989), 5-15.

⁵¹ Keller, “Understanding the City,” *emphasis in original*.

⁵² Bruce Katz, Brooks Rainwater, Julie Wagner, “Innovation Districts are Catalysts for Urban Growth,” *CitiesSpeak*, June 2, 2014, accessed October 21, 2016, <https://citysspeak.org/2014/06/02/innovation-districts-are-catalysts-for-urban-growth/>.

There is one very important thing we are told about Seth and his descendants. “At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD” (Gen. 4: 26). The context of this statement (Gen. 4: 25-5: 32) is the account of Adam’s family line flowing through Seth. This indicates that Cain was not considered part of Adam’s family line and it suggests that the people who called on the name of the LORD were all and only part of Seth’s line.

How might this relate to God’s intent for the city? It may be that God wanted to preserve the culture making dynamic of the city and so allowed Cain to build his city. But along with the culture making capacity of Cain’s city came a magnifying of sin in the city. As Genesis 6-7 makes clear, this was something God would not allow. The Noah account (Gen. 6-9) also makes very clear that God wanted to preserve a people who called on His name, a people who depended upon Him and obeyed Him. It may be that God kept Seth’s line away from city dwelling, for a time, to protect them from the sin-magnifying effects of city dwelling. Along with this, it may be that God allowed Cain to build a city so that the city’s culture making potential could be unleashed.

The researcher suggests that God intended to preserve the culture making capacity of the city while limiting the sin magnifying dynamic of the city. The way God did this was by creating a people called unto His name, a people who could resist the temptations toward idolatry and sin, and then calling them into the city to engage in God-honoring culture making. To that end, the researcher argues that one way to read the Bible is through this lens. Part of what follows is a beginning exploration of this idea.

The Ark: Noah's Floating City (Genesis 6: 1-8: 22)

In Genesis 6, God determined to flood the earth as an act of judgment against the wickedness of the human race. The evil that was highlighted was sexual perversion (Gen. 6: 1-4) and violence (Gen. 6: 11-13), precisely the kind of evil documented in Cain's line. The sin, however, did not seem to be limited to the line of Cain but seemed to be widespread and inclusive of the whole human race: "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6: 5). Unbridled sin had spread throughout the whole human race with one exception. In Genesis 6:8 we are told "Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." It seems that sin corrupted almost all of Adam's line even though that line had called upon God's name. But, in the midst of the epidemic of human wickedness and evil that swept the earth there was a man, Noah, and his family, who remained righteous, blameless and faithful before God. God told Noah to build an ark and gave him very specific instructions as to why to build it, how to build it and what to bring into it. And "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22).

One way to think of Noah's ark is as a floating city. Like other cities the ark is a walled [and waterproof] enclosure that provides protection to its inhabitants. While Cain built his city as an expression of pride and out of distrust of God's protection, Noah built his "city" at the direct command of God and for God's purpose. Ultimately Cain's city, built for Cain's purpose, would prove unable to offer protection. The flood washed it away. Noah's city, on the other hand, built for God's purpose, offered all the protection that was necessary. There may be a great irony here. It may be that Noah used skills and

tools to build his “ark city” that flowed out of the creativity and innovation that emerged from the city dwellers of Cain’s line. But what is clear is that God used a “city” to offer protection to those who honored Him and that in building this city Noah did in fact honor God. So, this is the first occasion in Scripture where city building honors God.

Noah’s “city building” is a picture of what the people of God are called to do. They are called to build culture as an act of worship and obedience to God and in a way that serves God’s purpose and reflects God’s gracious character. Noah’s city is culture building that serves God’s purpose. One of the ways it serves God’s purpose is that it allows Noah to be “his brother’s keeper.” Noah and his family, in obedience to the voice and will of God, build a city that protects them and creates a future for their posterity. So, early on in Scripture we begin to get a sense that cities are not intrinsically evil. Cities can be expressions of rebellion against God or instruments of God’s glory and human good, depending on who builds them and for what purpose. But we also see that cities magnify the characteristics of their people, particularly their leaders, for both good (technology and innovation) and evil (violence and injustice). We see that righteousness is both a relative term and not guaranteed even among those whose forefathers are of the godly line. Seth may have been “righteous” but his descendants were swept into sin along with the rest of humanity. Noah, though “righteous” also falls prey to sin (drunkenness), and his son, Ham, takes advantage of his father’s sin such that Ham’s descendants (Canaan) are cursed (Gen. 9: 20-27). This pattern continues into the next narrative in Genesis 10-11.

The City of Babel (Genesis 11: 1-9)

The Flood washed the world clean and gave the human race, through Noah and his family, a fresh start. God reiterated to Noah what he had commanded the first human beings, Adam and Eve, to do: “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth (Gen. 9: 1, 7). To enable Noah and his family to fulfill His command, God gave them authority over, and access to, all the rest of creation, just as God had done for Adam and Eve. Along with this command, God established a covenant with Noah. He promised that never again would He send a flood to destroy the earth (Gen. 11: 15). The implication in all of this is that Noah and his family was to continue the work that God had first given Adam and Eve: Fill the earth, steward God’s creation, develop the earth, build God-honoring culture.

Several generations of Noah’s descendants passed and people began to spread out over the earth. But in Genesis 11:1-9 we are told that the people came to a place in Shinar and determined to settle there permanently. This was in direct violation of God’s command to fill the whole earth: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

John Walton argues that the issue here is not pride and disobedience but idolatry and heresy that emerged from the building of a city and ziggurat tower. Walton contends that when God says, “fill the earth” this is not a command that must be obeyed but simply a blessing to be enjoyed. So, the desire not to scatter was not disobedience and thus was not subject to God’s punishment. Walton also argues that filling the earth comes from reproducing, not scattering, so even if the people remained in one place, they would still

be filling the earth. He links the idolatry/heresy with the urbanization project (not urbanization in general) as it unfolded in Mesopotamia where the ziggurat was its chief symbol. According to Walton, as the Mesopotamians urbanized they began to see the way they organized their society with rulers and citizens as applying to the cosmos as a whole. The gods ruled the cosmos and humans were under the rule and protection of these gods. So, the Mesopotamians began to see the gods as made in their own human image and having human needs. Walton sees this degraded view of God as the ultimate issue that spurred God's scattering of the people of Babel.⁵³

Concerning Walton's first and second points, the researcher does not believe that Walton has made his case that "filling the earth" is not a command that must be obeyed, nor that filling does not mean scattering. Walton seems to simply assume that "fill the earth" is simply and solely a blessing and not also a command. While it is technically true that "filling" requires reproduction, it also, at the very least, implies covering "the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11: 9), of spreading to the ends of the earth. Filling the earth means more than increasing the density of one place. It also means extending humanity throughout the whole earth. Concerning Walton's linking the city and tower building of Babel with the Mesopotamian religious system, this view seems to imply that this Mesopotamian religious view was already present and this point has not been proven.

In response to the decision of the people of Babel to build a city with a tower to make a name for themselves, God comes down, sees what they are building and pronounces judgment: "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (Gen. 11: 5, emphasis

⁵³ John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 374-378.

mine). They are choosing to determine for themselves what is good. They are planning a rebellion against God's rule.

They choose for themselves what is good for them rather than trusting in what God determines is good for them. They pursue their plan rather than God's plan. They build a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens because they want to make a name for themselves instead of a name for God. They assert their power rather than humbly and trustingly submitting to God's power.

It may be that they want to build a tower that reaches to the heavens because they distrust God's promise that He will never flood the whole earth again. It may be that they built the tower for the same reason that the Israelites built the golden calf (Exodus 32). The Israelites became impatient and frightened when Moses, the conduit of God's presence with them, left them to go up the mountain to meet with God. Maybe the people of Babel built a tower because they felt anxious and insecure and wanted a way for God or a god to visit them. Or, it may be that they built a tower reaching to the heavens to serve as a highly visible rallying point drawing people into their city and thus enhancing their prestige, power and security. Perhaps they wanted the security that is perceived to come from building a strong city and staying together rather than the security that comes from trusting in God and obeying Him. But the key point is that they refused to obey God's command to fill "the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:9).

Regardless of how one views the motivations of the people of Babel, their actions reveal a distorted view of God's character and a small view of His wisdom, power and sovereignty. They distrusted God's character and purpose and believed that they could band together and prevail in asserting their will against God. Like Adam and Eve, the

people of Babel wanted to become like God and exercise what is only God's prerogative: the right to determine for themselves what is good. Like Cain and his descendants, they distanced themselves from God, chose to disobey God's command, strove to secure their own security and, in an exercise of self-worship, worked to establish and elevate their own name.

David W. Smith writes:

As we shall see, the consequences of the human attempt to rule the world without reference to its Creator becomes a central and constant theme of the Bible and is at the heart of its critique of the cities of the ancient world.

From the perspective of the early chapters of the Bible then, the fundamental problem with the cities of the ancient world relates to the mythical beliefs of those who built and shaped them. The root of the urban evils denounced by Israel's prophets are not to be found in the urban form itself (as Ellul appears to think), but rather in the megalomania that results in delusions of grandeur and the denial of death. The existential question posed by God to alienated human beings in the garden—'Where are you?' (Gen. 3:9)—needs, therefore, to be asked with even more urgency amid the forest of skyscrapers in the city where the danger increases that the reality of the human condition may be concealed and forgotten.⁵⁴

God thwarted their plan and squashed their rebellion. He confused their language in order to inhibit their ability to communicate with one another and work together. Unable to work together, they could not complete their project. Unable to communicate with one another and unable to complete their project, they had little reason to stay together. God prevented them from staying together to complete their project so that they would scatter and complete His project. What happened when the languages were confused and the people were scattered? How did this advance God's project? These questions take us back to Genesis 10.

⁵⁴ David W. Smith, *Seeking a City with Foundations: Theology for an Urban World*, (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 126-127.

The Birth of “The Nations” and the Family of Abram (Gen. 10; 11: 10-32)

Chapter 10 continues the narrative of Genesis 11: 1-9. Genesis 11:1 says, “the whole world had one language and a common speech.” Genesis 10 indicates that multiple languages had developed. The logical conclusion is that Genesis 11: 1-9 precedes the developments of Genesis 10. Note, too, that Genesis 11:1 begins with the word “now” and seems to pick up the narrative from Genesis 9. Also, Genesis 11:10ff uses the toledot formula (this is the account of ... family line) of chapter 10 and continues the account of Shem’s line begun in Genesis 10: 21-31.

Genesis 10 tells where the people on the plain of Shinar went when they were scattered by God, who their descendants were, and something of what they did. As David Smith points out, Genesis 10 “describes how humankind fulfilled the divine mandate to ‘fill the earth and subdue it.’”⁵⁵ Among the things revealed in this chapter is that the scattering led to the development of multiple languages and to the formation of multiple nations and cultures in their own territories. Genesis 10: 5, 20, and 32 provide some variation of “these are the sons of, ... By their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.”

The Babel narrative raises a number of questions: Is there more to God’s confusing of the Babelian language than God’s desire to disrupt human rebellion? Is it possible that God’s confusing of the language of the people of Babel and their subsequent scattering was both a judgment and a blessing? Was God’s intent from the very beginning for the human race to develop into a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural people? Was it necessary for the people to scatter for that kind of diversity to develop?

⁵⁵ David W. Smith, 127.

First, this accounts for the fact that within the God-created gene pool of the human race was the ability to start a process that would lead to an ethnically diverse humanity. Within the God-created mind of human beings was the creativity and curiosity to develop multiple expressions of culture. One may conclude that God created humankind with this innate capacity because He intended for humankind to develop it.

Second, we know that God intended gender diversity: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1: 27). We also know that the male and the female are equally made in the image of God. We can say that, in their partnership with one another, they better reflect the image of God than just one or the other gender alone. From this we may extrapolate to say that ethnic and cultural diversity does the same. Such diversity better reflects God’s triune nature, majesty, beauty, creativity, power, wisdom and purpose than a mono-cultural humanity would.

Third, many have seen Pentecost as the reversal of Babel. At Pentecost, “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs” all heard “the wonders of God [their] own tongues!” (Acts 2:9-11). God’s Holy Spirit enabled people from all these nations to understand Peter’s preaching, even more to hear Peter’s preaching in their own language. God did not eradicate their individual languages and make one new language that they could all understand. God did the humanly impossible. He spoke to the peoples in their own languages through the preaching of one man who preached in only one language. Out of this God created one people of God made up of

many nations, tribes, peoples and languages. If the confusing of languages and the ethnic and cultural diversifying of the human race was meant by God to be a curse, then why does this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural diversity continue into eternity? In Revelation 7 we see the one people of God, in their full diversity, gathered together around the throne of God in worship and adoration. It seems reasonable to believe that this - the gathering of peoples from every nation, tribe, people, and language gathered together around God's throne in passionate, adoring, worship - is what God intended when He first created the Adam and Eve. Diversity in community reflects the nature and purpose of our triune God. It may very well be that God scattered the one rebel people at Babel because He wanted them to become the diverse worshiping community at Pentecost and into eternity.

The church today is called to reflect, wherever possible, the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, inter-cultural beauty of the church in Revelation 7. The city is where the ethnic and cultural diversity of the world's people is most widely represented. The city is where the presence of this many cultures are in closest proximity to one another. The city is where the church can most easily come into contact with the widest diversity of the world's peoples. The city is where ethnically and cultural diverse churches are most possible and most necessary. A diverse, multicultural church living in community displays God's glory in ways a mono-cultural church cannot. Racism, bigotry, prejudice, and fear of the other, seem to reign in our world. A united church made up of diverse peoples and cultures that love one another and honor one another's cultures and differences, becomes an extraordinary demonstration of the goodness and power of God to change the human heart and reconcile the human race.

The city, because of its diversity, is the place where God's intent for human beings to develop culture can be most fully embraced and advanced. Diverse peoples bringing together their diverse cultures and perspectives, their distinct music, art, foods and fashion, their assorted work skills, management styles and organizational structures, along with their unique passions, temperaments, and energy, almost exponentially magnify the human potential to make new things, solve hard problems, create great beauty, and expand human flourishing.

In the New Jerusalem, the diverse people of God will gather together as one family in His presence. They will be together and work together as an act of worship. They will bring delight to God through their fruitful work and familial love for one another. This will be the church's daily experience and greatest joy. This is what shalom is and looks like. This is what human beings were created to experience and foster. The holy city, the New Jerusalem is where God's shalom will be fully expressed. In the meantime, the church in the city has the opportunity to be a partial expression of the shalom God intends for His people now and throughout all eternity.

Abram: Blessed to be a Blessing

The Genesis account shifts from the people of Babel to the account of Shem's line of descendants, and this account culminates with a focus on Abram. Abram seems to be paralleled with Noah. When human wickedness spreads throughout the human race, God judges the earth and the people on it by flooding the earth. But not all the human race is destroyed. Before God sends the flood, He instructs Noah to build his "ark city" so that when the flood comes, he and his family will be protected. God tells Noah to build the ark, to bring his family on board, and to also take with him pairs of every kind of animal

and bird so that they will be the remnant seed of the post-flood human race with all that they will need to fill the earth and steward God's creation. Noah is God's instrument of grace in the midst of His judgment.

When the human race is scattered because of their foolish pride and rebellion against God, they begin to differentiate, begin to develop their own languages, customs, traditions, and distinct cultures. Just as God preserved a remnant of the human race through His calling of Noah to build an ark, God called Abram to be the progenitor of a distinct, remnant people through whom God will ultimately save the nations. Abram will become the father of God's chosen people Israel, and from his descendants will come the Savior of the world, Jesus (Matt. 1:1-17).

God tells Abram to leave behind everything that is important to him - his country, his people, and his fathers' household - to go to a land that God will show him. God promises Abram that He will make Abram into a great nation, will make Abram into a great name, will bless him and enable him to be a blessing to all peoples on earth (Gen. 12:2-3).

God promises to Abram much of what the people of Babel tried to secure on their own. The people of Babel want to "make a name for themselves" (Gen 11: 4). God promises to make Abram's name great. The people of Babel want to secure their own security by staying put and refusing to go where God wants them to go. God says "Go, and I will ensure that you will not only be safe and secure but that you will become a great nation."

Abram/Abraham grew up in the city of Ur and later was taken by his father, Terah to the city of Harran, where his father settled. It was in Harran that God spoke to Abram

and commanded him to go. On the basis of his trust in God's promise, Abram goes. From that point on, Abram/Abraham never settled in a city again. So, in what way does Abram contribute to our theology and missiology of the city? Hebrews 11:8-10 says Abram went even when he "did not know where he was going" because "he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." At the very least, this passage from Hebrews indicates that though cities may be full of evil (Sodom and Gomorrah, Nineveh, Babylon, Rome) the idea of city is not evil. As Scripture makes clear in Revelation 21-22, that city with foundations is the New Jerusalem, which will be the eternal dwelling place of all God's people.

Genesis 18:16-33, the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, provides another opportunity to glean insight about God's view of cities and about the mission of God's people to the city. Genesis 18:1 says: "The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day." That appearance of the Lord comes to Abraham in the form of three visitors. Abraham sees these visitors standing near, rushes to greet them and offers them lavish hospitality, as was the custom of his day.

During the course of his interaction with them, Abraham realizes that these three visitors are not mere men but instead are a manifestation of God. After enjoying Abraham's hospitality the visitors get up to leave and Abraham walks with them. As they are walking the Lord has an internal dialogue with himself and says: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD

by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised to him” (Gen. 18:17-19). This internal dialogue reveals why the LORD decided to tell Abraham what He was going to do. It was because the LORD chose Abraham to keep His way and to teach his descendants the LORD’s way. Abraham and his descendants would be blessed by keeping God’s way. The nations would be blessed as they saw and embraced the way of God being lived out by Abraham and his descendants. But, in order for Abraham to keep the LORD’s way and to direct his children in God’s way, he needed to know what that way was.

Genesis 18: 20ff show us how God gave Abraham an expanded understanding of what the way of the LORD is. Christopher Wright points out:

Starting in Genesis 18:20, we hear the “outcry” (*ze ‘aqah*) that comes up to God from Sodom—a word that immediately tells us there was cruelty and oppression going on there.

The term *ze ‘aqah*, or *se ‘aqah*, is a technical word for the cry of pain, or the cry for help, from those who are being oppressed or violated. It is the word used for Israelites crying out under their slavery in Egypt (Ex. 2:23). Psalmists use it when appealing to God to hear their cry against unjust treatment (e.g., Ps. 34:17). Most graphically of all, it is the scream for help by a woman being raped (Deut. 22:24, 27). As early as Genesis 13:13 we were told that “the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.” Here that sin is identified as oppression, for that is what the word “outcry” immediately indicates. Some people in or near Sodom were suffering to such an extent that they were crying out against its oppression and cruelty.⁵⁶

The LORD hears the cries of pain from those suffering and oppressed and He judges the oppressor. The LORD wants Abraham to hear these cries as well and to act in accordance with God’s justice. Part of what it means to walk in the way of the LORD is to be attentive to the cries of pain and suffering and injustice in the world.

⁵⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 84.

In the city of Worcester there are too many signs of pain and suffering and oppression to count and the cries for help are almost deafening - children being abused, women being trafficked, the poor, the refugee, immigrant being cheated and oppressed. The temptation for the people of God is to ignore them, to walk right by them as the priest and the Levite did to the man lying beaten and half dead by the side of the road in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In effect, we step over them as the rich man did to the poor man, Lazarus, in another of Jesus' parables (Luke 16:19-31). But the call here is not only to hear the cries of the oppressed but also to fully acknowledge the depth of the oppression and to confront the oppressor.

Abraham somehow knows that the LORD is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. But Abraham seems to be unsure about the justice of God's judgment, probably because this is where Abraham's nephew Lot lives. God's justice is not just an abstract concept here. It affects Abraham's family and so affects Abraham's perception and judgment. Can Sodom really be so full of corruption that the whole city deserves destruction? In response, Abraham begins to intercede on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. He intercedes on the basis of God's character. "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" He continues, "Far be it from you to do such a thing - to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18: 24-25)? Abraham seems to be saying, "LORD, what are you doing? LORD, you are righteous! LORD, You only do right! This is wrong!" It takes the events of Gen. 19 to convince Abraham that the LORD's judgment against Sodom is just.

In Worcester, as in many cities, there have been protests by “Black Lives Matter” activists against racial profiling and police brutality. Many white residents of Worcester, including many who are evangelicals, think the “Black Lives Matter” campaign simply political theater. They do not think that the “Black Lives Matter” campaign is a just and righteous response against the oppression of people of color in the city. They do not believe racism is widespread and that the police treat people of color differently than whites. They definitely do not believe that God stands with the Black Lives Matter protesters. The stubbornness of this disbelief endures despite what seems to be a mountain of evidence that racism and bias against communities of color exists and leads to injustice. What will it take for God to convince the white church community that white privilege is real, that racism is prevalent, and that in not confronting the racism in their midst, they (we) are complicit in the injustice that occurs?

Verse 22 is translated as “The men turned away and went toward Sodom, *but Abraham remained standing before the Lord*” (emphasis mine). Robert Linthicum points out that this is a scribal emendation of the original Masoretic text, which originally read, “The LORD remained standing before Abraham.”⁵⁷ Linthicum then argues that if the original text is correct, what this means is that “God was the supplicant before Abraham. It was *God* who was advocating Sodom’s deliverance before *Abraham*!”⁵⁸ The point Linthicum wants to make is that God was eager for Abraham to intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah, that God was almost begging Abraham to intercede for these cities because He wanted to show mercy to them despite their great sinfulness. Linthicum writes:

⁵⁷ Linthicum, 106-107.

⁵⁸ Linthicum, 107.

If Abraham had asked for it, would God have spared the city for one family—the family of Lot? Would he have spared it for Lot alone? If the wording of Genesis 18:22 has indeed been reversed [the LORD standing before Abraham as opposed to Abraham standing before the LORD], then the answer clearly is yes! God so loved Abraham and so loved Sodom and Gomorrah, he would have given to Abraham the city for anything the old man [Abraham] had asked. God *wanted* the city saved. God’s sense of justice, however, demanded justice.

Linthicum overstates his case when he contrasts and sets at odds what God’s wants - His desire for mercy - with God’s justice. What God wants is justice and He alone has the right to determine what is just. But God’s willingness to hear Abraham’s six-times extended intercession for Sodom (Gen. 18:23-33) indicates “the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Num. 14:18).

Linthicum’s application from this interplay between the LORD and Abraham in Genesis 18 is that God stands before His church today and, in effect, pleads with us that we intercede for the cities of our world and to advocate for them before both God and the power structures of our world. “Do we have sufficient nerve to ask God for our city - the nerve to *be* in the city, to *proclaim*, and to *work for justice*, for what God calls the church to be? Are we willing to be the embodiment of the kingdom of God in our city?”⁵⁹

Whether Linthicum is correct in his interpretation of God’s interaction with Abraham in Genesis 18 is unclear. There are times when judgment against oppressors, even to the point of destruction, is necessary in order to deliver those being oppressed. But Linthicum is surely right in saying that God loves mercy and wants His people to intercede for our cities, to proclaim good news, and to work for justice.

⁵⁹ Linthicum, 107-108.

In the Joseph cycle (Gen. 37-50) we see God's calling of Joseph. God protects Joseph from the plots of his brothers. He delivers Joseph from unjust imprisonment. God orchestrates the events of his life such that Joseph eventually becomes the second in command in Egypt. From that position he not only saves his people from famine, but he also saves Egypt. God's blessing of Joseph enables Joseph to be a blessing to two distinct peoples - Israel and Egypt. Daniel and Nehemiah serve similar roles in Babylon. Both are exiled to Babylon, and earn favor with their respective kings by serving these kings well. They serve their earthly kings well because they stay faithful to their God. Their faithfulness both to God and to the kings of Babylon enable them to be a blessing to their own people and to the people of Babylon.

From the very beginning God's chosen people were meant to be a light to the Gentiles. Israel was meant to display God's image and carry on God's purpose in the world so that the world would be reconciled to God. God's promises to Abraham (a great name, a great nation, blessing) and God's call (blessed to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth) extended to all of Israel and now to the church. Like Abraham we are a pilgrim people "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11: 10). Like Joseph and Daniel and Nehemiah we are God's people in exile among the nations, called to serve our God and our neighbor.

Christopher Wright, reflecting on God's judgment of Sodom and Abraham's call to walk in the way of the LORD, issues a warning that the church must heed:

Our text tells us that God judged Sodom. Yes, and we can see the marks of Sodom all around us still. But God called Abraham and his people to be different, to live by different standards, to reflect the God who is radically different from all the flawed gods of the nations. Our problem is that so often the church is no different from the world, and in some respects even worse. A divided, split and fighting church has nothing to say or to give to a divided, broken and violent

world. An immoral church has nothing to say to an immoral world. A church riddled with corruption, caste discrimination and other forms of social, ethnic, or gender oppression has nothing to say to the world where such things are rampant. A church with leaders seemingly obsessed with wealth and power has nothing to say to a world of greedy tyrants. A church that is bad news in such ways has no good news to share. Or at least, it has, but its words are drowned out by its life.⁶⁰

The church in Worcester has not always walked in the way of the LORD and it has compromised its message of good news. It has turned a blind eye to the oppression of the poor and marginalized and allowed injustice. It has fought over non-essentials and violated the unity of the church because of ego and pride. And, it has sought, in its local church expression, to enhance its “market-share” rather than the “kingdom-share.” Rather than co-operating with one another to seek the shalom of the city, churches, at times, have competed with one another for influence and prestige. Instead of walking in the way of the LORD, the church in Worcester has walked in the way of the world.

Shalom, the City of Babylon, and the Church

When God called Abraham, He told him that he would be blessed *to be a blessing*. Several times in Scripture, the people of God are called to bring blessing, even to bring blessing to pagan cities that were enemies. Jonah is called to preach repentance in Nineveh and eventually and begrudgingly does so. When Nineveh then repents, Jonah is angry and bitterly complains to God about His graciousness to this wicked city. The Lord God asks Jonah the question, “Should I not be concerned for the city?”

Jesus shows that same concern for the city of Jerusalem. Despite Jerusalem’s idolatry and rebellion, and with full knowledge that in a few days the city would rise up against him and demand his crucifixion, Jesus weeps over the lost state of Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ Wright, 95.

Though Jerusalem, for a time, became the enemy of God, Jesus wept over her and then went to the cross on her behalf.

God cares about the people and God cares about the city. The city, in the fullness of its flowering, is the apex of God's creation (Rev. 21-22). While cities are often places of idolatry and depravity (Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylon, Rome), they are not depicted as intrinsically evil, as abandoned by God, or as outside the sphere of His sovereignty and mercy.

What does this mean for the church in the city? Like Abraham, the church is a pilgrim people "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11: 10). Like Joseph and Daniel and Nehemiah, the church is God's people in exile among the nations, called to serve our God and our neighbor.

The exhortation in Jeremiah 29: 4-7 to the Israelites in exile in Babylon might be seen as a mission statement for the church. On the cosmic scale, Babylon represents human pride, greed, idolatry, injustice and oppression extended to its logical extremes. There was no city that deserved condemnation more and there was every reason for the people of Israel to despise Babylon and to long for God's judgment upon it. Psalm 137: 8-9 records the intensity of hate exiled Israel had for Babylon: "Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against rocks." Ultimately, God does judge Babylon for her wickedness, violence, slaughter and oppression of His cherished people, Israel. But perhaps to give an opportunity to Babylon to experience God's goodness and to repent, He tells the Israelites who are exiled in

Babylon to seek the peace and prosperity of the city that is the object of their deepest hate and revulsion.

Like the Israelites in exile in Babylon, the people of God awaiting the holy city that is to come, we are to bless the cities we are now in. We are to:

Build houses and settle down; plant gardens [build businesses] and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters, ... Increase in number there; and do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city [Hebrew, shalom]. ... Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper (Jer. 29:6-7).

Genesis to Revelation: God, Creation, the Church, the City, and the Culture

Jeremiah 29:4-14 might be seen as a restatement, in a post-fall world, of the cultural mandate of Genesis I and 2. Both passages speak of marriage and of increasing in number, of cultivating and developing, and enjoying the fruit of the earth, of eating and having enough, of the LORD being present and available. Both passages paint a picture of shalom: peace, prosperity, and plenty in the context of meaningful work and reconciled relationships with God, one another, and even their enemies. So, we circle back to Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as being formless and empty. John Sailhamer argues that the meaning of formless (Hebrew, tohu) and empty or void (Hebrew, bohu) in Genesis 1: 2 is that the land is formless/ empty in the sense that human beings do not yet live in it.⁶¹ Sailhamer writes:

The immediate context suggests that the land was described as “formless and empty” because “darkness” was upon the land and because the land was covered with water. The general context of Gen. 1 also suggests that Moses, the author, means “formless and empty” to describe the condition of the land before God made it “good”. It refers, ultimately, to the land in its “not yet” state, not yet inhabited by humankind.⁶²

⁶¹ Sailhamer, (footnote 11), 85.

The land was not yet good because it was not yet humanly inhabitable. What God does in the rest of Genesis 1 is to make it fit for humankind. When He makes the land habitable for humans, He fills it; it is no longer formless and empty. So, in Genesis we see that God created the Garden with meticulous care in order to be a place where the first human beings could flourish, where they would have unhindered access to God and intimate relationship with Him, where all their needs could be met, and where all their creativity could be unleashed in a way that reflects God's character and purpose. In Revelation we see that God, in His sovereign wisdom and love, creates the city, the New Jerusalem, for the same purpose He created the Garden. It is in this city that human beings will have access and intimacy with God, have all their needs met, and have all their creativity unleashed to fulfill God's purpose. It is in this city that humans will have the opportunity to live out their God-given potential and calling to the fullest.

What does all this mean for humankind? According to Genesis 1: 26-28, humankind is made in God's image and is commanded to fill the earth, and subdue it, to "*rule over*" (Hebrew, *rada*) the rest of creation. Humankind is created to *rule over the earth as God's regents*. God's rule is wise, protective, compassionate and just. That is how humankind is to exercise dominion. Our rule over the earth and its creatures is to be compassionate and not exploitative. Victor Hamilton notes that the form of this verb used in Genesis 1: 26 (qal stem) is used 22 times.⁶² In Leviticus 25 it is used to describe a master being over a hired servant and in verses 43, 46, and 53) the master is explicitly told not to rule over his servants with ruthlessly or harshly. In Psalm 72 the king is said to

⁶² Sailhamer, 85.

⁶³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 137.

have dominion from sea to sea (v. 8). But he is to exercise his dominion by serving as “the champion and protector of the poor and disadvantaged. What is expected of the king is that he exercise *responsible dominion*, responsible care over that which he rules.”⁶⁴

Throughout Genesis 2 the idea of humankind’s “likeness” to God is consistently developed. Just as God, in Genesis 1, took the raw matter of His Creation, and cultivated it by bringing order and beauty to it, so humankind is to reflect God’s image by continuing God’s work. So, the key idea in Genesis 1 is that humankind, made in God’s image, is called by God to act as His regent in the earth, exercising dominion and stewardship in a way that reflects God’s character and purpose. Using the raw materials of God’s creation we, the people of God, are to continue God’s creative activity on earth as an expression of worship to Him.

The clear implication is that we must see all of our lives, including our work lives, as expressions of worship and obedience to God. We must do our work “with all our heart, as working for the Lord, not for mortals.” (Col. 3: 23). In our work we are serving as priests before God, honoring His character and purpose, bringing Him thanksgiving and praise. This means that our work has significance outside of ourselves, that it is not to be done for simply self-serving ends, and it is not to be done by unjust or ungodly means because it reflects on God’s character and purpose. Our work is meant to be a reflection of God’s work, with the desire that it serve God’s ends and bring God glory.

How does this relate to the church’s role in the city? As has been said, the Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city. What Scripture seems to be saying is that the New Jerusalem is what God intended the Garden to become as humans fulfilled God’s command to be “fruitful and multiply” and to “work the ground and take care of it.” The

⁶⁴ Hamilton, 138.

end result of humankind's stewardship of creation was to be a holy city, the New Jerusalem. Humankind is called by God to steward His creation by acting as His regents and fulfilling His purpose on the earth. In relation to the city this means that we are to honor God's intent that we "cultivate" the city and make it habitable and hospitable for humans to inhabit. In our "rule over" the city we are to reflect God's image and character. God-honoring culture making is founded on the principle and practice of shalom. We are to rule humbly and sacrificially with justice, righteousness, compassion and mercy. We are to create a just society where all human beings can flourish.

What Does Shalom in the City Look Like?

In Isaiah 58: 6-12, the Prophet Isaiah, speaking for God, decries the false worship and piety of Israel and highlights what true worship and true obedience look like. True worship loosens the chains of injustice and sets the oppressed free. It feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, repairs and rebuilds the broken lives of people and the broken structures of the community. True worship reflects God's character, shines God's light, honors God's purposes and seeks God's kingdom shalom.

In Isaiah 58 and passages like it (for example, Isa. 61: 1-9, 65:17-25; Jer. 29: 7; Mic. 6: 6-8; Zech. 7: 4-14, 8: 4-5; Matt. 25: 31-46) we see what God's kingdom shalom looks like. Children run safely and joyfully in the streets, old people reach a ripe old age and live out their lives with dignity, and family structures are intact. People have meaningful work and everyone has enough because the least, the last, and the lost are all cared for. Both individuals and whole cities are reconciled to God and the goodness of God is evident to all.

This is what God wants for His world. This is what God's people are called to pursue in this world. The people of Israel are judged for not caring for the least among them. God removes His hand of blessing and protection because they are self-absorbed and complicit in allowing injustice and oppression of the poor and the destitute to take place in their midst. The Church may also be judged if she does not seek the welfare of the city, and does not care for the widow, the orphan and the stranger in our midst. If we want renewal in the Church, we must pursue justice and righteousness, and we must advocate for and care for those who are vulnerable, defenseless, and destitute. The church does not have to look far to find those most vulnerable. They roam the inner city streets of our world.

In Genesis 1 we see God forming the land and preparing it to be filled by humankind. He brings order out of chaos, separates light from darkness, the waters above from the waters below, day from night, woman from man. All of this "separation" activity is designed to bring about that which is beneficial for humankind. The creation accounts in both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 highlight the details that make the land good for humans to inhabit. God takes a formless void and both fills it and orders it. He places human beings on the earth to serve as his image-bearers and regents; we carry on His work by multiplying and by subduing the earth. Subduing the earth does not mean that we pillage it; it means that we cultivate it and bring out its fullest potential and beauty so that it is a place that is "good" for all humans to inhabit.

Many Christians flee the city because they see the city as polluted and God-forsaken. They flee the city because the city is uncomfortable, complex, and often chaotic. Rarely do people move from cities to suburbs out of a missional desire to glorify

God and to advance His kingdom. Almost always they move to the suburbs because they believe that the suburbs are safer, more comfortable, and provide better opportunities to educate and position their children for future financial success. This is a rejection of the church's responsibility to cultivate and improve our environment, including our urban environment. As God's image bearing regents the church is to serve as stewards of the earth, which includes the city. Rather than leaving the earth/city alone the church is to make it better than she found it. The church does not complete her responsibility to steward creation by staying out of the way. The church completes it by participating in God's ongoing creativity.

The church is called to be God's image bearers and God's regents on the earth. This is her great privilege and great responsibility. The transformation of the city is part of God's eternal plan. God cares about cities; He cares about the city of Worcester. The church is called to bring order and beauty to the city, to seek justice and to serve the poor, needy, hungry and oppressed in the city. It is this pictured of shalom—of peace and wholeness and health, of justice and freedom and overflowing joy—that is initiated by God in Genesis and that is brought to glorious culmination in Revelation. The church has the privilege, in the way she serves and cultivates the city, to reveal something of God's absolute goodness and ultimate intent.

From the beginning humanity was given an unparalleled gift of being made in the image of God. In part, this means we share His capacity for creativity, for conceiving a future, and most importantly for making moral choices. When God made the animals He brought them to the man to see what the man would name them. Whatever he named them, that was their name. This is an illustration of how God has left creation open for

our management and development. From the beginning God called us, not to leave creation alone, but to rule over it and develop it.

David Atkinson says this:

God has put mankind in His garden, to look after it as His estate manager. If our human creativity is to reflect something of God, it will not be concerned simply with what is new, economically productive or artistically expressive. It will go beyond these to seek to reflect God's concern for a world and a society of which He can say, 'This is good'.

Our human creativity should seek to mirror God's, within the freedom of the obedience of faith, to confront the formless and disordered places of our world, and of our lives, and make them places of beauty and goodness. The concerns of town planners for an environment in which the good life can be lived; the work of doctors and therapists in seeking to facilitate that health which is the strength for good living; the personal growth in character which increasingly reflects the beauty and goodness of Christ: these and many others are all aspects of true creativity.⁶⁵

The people of God are called to be His image bearers and regents on the earth. This is our great privilege and our great responsibility.

Transforming the City: The Need for the Local and the City-Wide Church

The transformation of the city is part of God's eternal plan. True worship is not just what the people of God do in their weekend worship services but also what they do in the streets and neighborhoods of their cities throughout the week. If they do not seek justice and serve the poor and needy and hungry and oppressed in their city then their worship is false. But if they give ourselves to the service of the poor and broken, and expend themselves on behalf of justice in His name, then God promises to guide them always, to provide for them and strengthen them, and to enable them to accomplish His purposes. The church will experience God's presence and renewal as the church pursues God's mission.

⁶⁵ David Atkinson, 62.

But for true and lasting church renewal and city transformation to take place, the local churches in the city must come together as the One Church in the city. It is an expression of spiritual hubris and an exercise of personal kingdom building for a local church in Worcester to engage in mission to the city by itself and to intentionally disdain missional partnership with other churches in the city. More than that it is rejection of Christ's prayer in John 17: 23 that the church become one in the same way that the Father and the Son are one so that the world will know that the Father sent the Son and loves the world just as He loves the Son. The people of Worcester will not know that the Father sent Jesus into the world because He loves the people of the world unless the church comes together as one in demonstrating God's love.

Conclusion

The Journey Community Church moved into the Bell Hill neighborhood with a vision and commitment to contribute to the shalom of its neighborhood. Biblically robust theology and missiology fuels God-honoring ministry and life-enhancing community. It fuels the pursuit of God's shalom.

Journey Church is in the beginning stages of developing such an urban theology, a theology adequate to meet the challenges and opportunities of its inner city environment. Some of the development of this urban theology is coming from trying to read the Scriptures with an urban lens and with an eye toward a Worcester-focused application. Some of it is coming from finding mentors and role models in the writings of people like Ray Bakke, Bob Lupton, John Perkins, Tim Keller, Harvey Conn, Soong Chan-Rah, Manuel Ortiz, Mac Pier, and Noel Castellanos. But a key factor in Journey Church's theological development has come from beginning to enter the Bell Hill neighborhood

and engage with its people. This neighborhood engagement has begun to reveal how much of the culture, language, theology and practice of The Journey Community Church are rooted in its white, suburban, middle class background. Interaction with, and sometimes confrontations by, leaders in the communities of color in Worcester has led to a measure of awareness of Journey's largely unconscious and unexamined assumptions about culture, life, Scripture, values, and ministry practice, and toward a "fusion of horizons".

We all live in a historically situated culture and are part of a particular tradition. That culture and that tradition shape each of us. They shape what we think and believe, how we view and how we react to the world. "They are part of the horizon in which we live and through which our world-view gets shaped."⁶⁶ They are part of the largely unconscious vantage point from which we try to understand both the world and ourselves.

As Journey Church engages with its neighborhood and community and begins to uncover its unconscious bias and unexamined assumptions about how life is to be lived, this is driving the Journey Church body back to the Scriptures with fresh questions and fresh eyes. It is giving them a bigger picture of God and a greater appreciation of His patience with them and His grace poured out on them. It is allowing the Journey Church body, individually and corporately to grow in humility and openness toward the people in its Bell Hill neighborhood. And it is expanding Journey Church's capacity to worship God through loving Him and loving their neighbor. Biblically faithful theology is being proved in the living. Trying to bring shalom to the neighborhood is allowing God's shalom to flood back into the church.

⁶⁶ Bjorn Ramberg and Kristin Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed., Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2013), 16, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/hermeneutics/>.

CHAPTER THREE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE RELATED TO ESCHATOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE CITY

Introduction

The literature related to urban ministry is abundant and wide-ranging, running the gamut from abstract theological and philosophical reflection to concrete ministry strategy and praxis. This review focuses on questions related to two broad and overlapping areas as they relate to the role of the church in the world and in the city: God's purpose for His creation, and God's purpose for the city. This focus was partly determined because of questions and pushback that the researcher received from members of Journey Church concerning his views on eschatology and on engagement with the public square in the service of social justice. In addition, this review explores questions arising from Journey Church's attempts to face and address three key challenges in reaching and serving the Bell Hill neighborhood. These three challenges are: meeting needs holistically without causing harm (avoiding toxic charity), embracing the ethnic, cultural, racial and socio-economic diversity of the Bell Hill neighborhood and developing multi-cultural community (acknowledging and addressing issues of cultural bias, and prejudice), and remaining alert and steadfast in combating evil and spiritual opposition on both the personal and systemic level (waging spiritual warfare). Two intertwined biblical concepts, shalom and culture making, tie together the response to these areas of focus.

God's purpose for the city and for creation as a whole is shalom. God's original creation was good; it experienced shalom: right relationship to its Creator, and right

relationship to itself - peace, wholeness, harmony, synergy of purpose and function in all its parts. That shalom was broken in the fall of humankind and all creation now groans as it eagerly awaits God's new creation, where shalom will be once again be full and complete (Rom. 8:18-22). This new creation, like the first creation, is entirely God's work. But the people of God are not simply to wait for God's new heavens and new earth to appear. They are to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and be agents of shalom in the world, bearing God's reconciling grace into every sphere of life, and, in his name and by his power, destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). In so doing, the people of God bear witness to what, by God's power and grace alone, is to come.

God's original purpose for humankind was to continue the work of creation that He had begun; humankind was to be culture makers, cultivating the earth and bringing out the creation's fullest potential. The fall complicates and often twists the purpose and nature of human culture making, but it does not annul God's pre-fall mandate to build culture. The re-issuing of the call to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9: 1-3 makes this clear. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert state:

The "cultural mandate" of Genesis 1:28-30 teaches that God created us to be stewards, people who understand, protect, subdue, and manage the world that God has created in order to preserve it and to produce bounty. Note that while God made the world "perfect," He left it "incomplete." This means that while the world was created to be without defect, God called humans to interact with creation, to make possibilities into realities, and to be able to sustain ourselves via the fruits of our stewardship."¹

As His regents, God's people are to exercise responsible, ethical stewardship of the earth, and engage in God-enabled and God-honoring culture making that provides creation with a measure of freedom to flourish. The seeking of shalom and the engaging

¹ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty, without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 55.

in God-honoring culture making by God's people produces a synergistic effect. The presence of shalom allows God-honoring culture making to proceed in a less-hindered way. God-honoring culture making increases the possibility of shalom. God's intent for His people is that they live in shalom and engage in culture making, even now in this fallen world, and for all eternity in the new heavens and new earth, the New Jerusalem.

The Purpose of God for His Creation

What is the fate of the earth in God's plan? Will the earth be cast away and destroyed in the Eschaton, or will it be redeemed and restored by God? How does one's understanding of eschatology influence one's approach and use of non-human creation? Does all of creation matter to God or is it only humankind that matters to Him? Does creation exist only for humankind to use in any way seen fit by humankind or are God's people called to steward and nurture the earth as God's regents? Is the church called to creation care and culture building?

In the local church-based evangelicalism experienced by the researcher, the end fate of the earth was seen as being complete destruction. In this view the world was simply temporal and lacking in eternal significance. The only thing that mattered for eternity to God was a redeemed humanity. For this reason, the role of the church was to proclaim a gospel almost exclusively focused on the personal salvation of individuals. The result was that this thinking allowed "many Christians [to] justify throwing away neighborhoods like Styrofoam cups when they cease to function for our benefit" and to "deny that the salvation or destruction of communities is a spiritual issue."²

To support the idea that the world is only temporary and destined for complete destruction, 2 Peter 3: 4-7 is often cited. In this passage, Peter compares God's judgment

² Bakke, 35.

on sinful humanity during the time of Noah with God's judgment on the day of Christ's return as King and Judge. In verses 6-7 and 10-13, Peter writes:

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

This passage has been read to mean that the world we now live in will be judged and completely destroyed. Nothing but human beings will be left, some of whom will experience eternal life in heaven and others who will experience eternal damnation in hell. Therefore, this world has no eternal value, and creation-care, culture making, social justice and community development are a distraction from the church's spiritual work of evangelism. Christopher Wright challenges this interpretation of 2 Peter 3:6-13 by pointing out that just as the world in Noah's time was not destroyed, neither will the world be destroyed on the Last Day. He writes:

The language of fire and destruction does not mean that the whole of creation will be *obliterated*. Rather, it is parallel to the same terms used to describe the way the sinful world was "destroyed" by water in the flood (2 Peter 3:6-7). What was destroyed in the flood was not the whole planet, but the world of sin and rebellion. Likewise, what will be destroyed in the final judgment is not the universe, but the sin and rebellion of humanity and the devastation they have caused. It will be a conflagration that purges and purifies, so that the new creation will be a place devoid of sin but filled with righteousness, because God himself will dwell there among his redeemed people (Rev. 21:1-4).³

Richard Mouw argues similarly:

³ Wright, 61.

In the end time, God will “make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). In order to renew and transform his good creation, he must purge it of all rebellion and idolatry: “as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). But God will not destroy the things they have put to their own rebellious uses. The new Jerusalem will be bedecked with jewels and metals gathered from the nations of the earth; and “the glory and the honor of the nations” will be brought into the transformed City (Rev. 21:26).⁴

All the world - humankind, both the natural and the built environment, and culture in all its dimensions - will be pruned of sin and idolatry by God, but not destroyed. It will be redeemed and restored and turned to God in worship. How the people of God treat the earth and the kind of culture they build has both temporal and eternal significance.

N. T. Wright has been at the forefront of re-shaping the American evangelical understanding of eschatology and its implications for the life and mission of the church in the present time. His book, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* addresses two questions: “First, what is the ultimate Christian hope? Second, what hope is there for change, rescue, transformation, new possibilities within the world in the present?”⁵ To answer his first question, N. T. Wright argues that the ultimate Christian hope is that believers will bodily rise from the dead and live in a God-created, God-inhabited, and God-ruled new earth, the New Jerusalem.⁶ Against the view of some that the people of God will be taken from the earth and brought to heaven

⁴ Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem, Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 34.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 5.

⁶ N. T. Wright, 29.

N. T. Wright contends that “it is not we who go to heaven, it is heaven that comes to earth; indeed, it is the church itself, the heavenly Jerusalem, that comes down to earth.”⁷

The church then, “is to live as resurrection people in between Easter and the final day, with our Christian life, corporate and individual, in both worship and mission, as a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second.”⁸ The call of the church goes beyond simply seeking the salvation of individuals; it extends to the work of culture making and shalom seeking.

The point, ... Is that a proper grasp of the (surprising) *future* hope held out to us in Jesus Christ leads directly and, to many people, equally surprisingly, to a vision of the *present* hope that is the basis of all Christian mission. To hope for a better future in this world—for the poor, the sick, the lonely and depressed, for the slaves, the refugees, the hungry and homeless, for the abused, the paranoid, the downtrodden and despairing, and in fact for the whole wide, wonderful, and wounded world—is not something else, something extra, something tacked on to the gospel as an afterthought. And to work for that intermediate hope, the surprising hope that comes forward from God’s ultimate future into God’s urgent present, is not a *distraction from* the task of mission and evangelism in the present. It is a central, essential, vital, and life-giving part of it. Mostly, Jesus himself got a hearing from his contemporaries because of what he was *doing*. They saw him saving people from sickness and death, and they heard him talking about a salvation, the message for which they had longed, that would go beyond the immediate into the ultimate future. But the two were not unrelated, the present one a mere visual aid of the future one or a trick to gain people’s attention. The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future. And what he was promising for that future, and doing in that present, was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God’s ultimate purpose—and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project.⁹

⁷ N. T. Wright, 104.

⁸ N.T. Wright, 30.

⁹ N. T. Wright, 191-192.

A certain hope of the future should free the church to live with humility, compassion, justice, and courage in the present. A vision of a renewed earth in the future should shape the contours of the church's mission in the here and now.

J. Richard Middleton, in *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* aligns with N. T. Wright's view that the future of the people of God resides in a new earth. The purpose of his book "is to clarify how New Testament Eschatology, rather than being a speculative add-on to the Bible, actually coheres with, and is the logical outworking of, the consistently holistic theology of the entirety of Scripture."¹⁰ Middleton grounds his understanding of eschatology and of the call of the church in God's original intent for creation. The creation was created perfect but not complete. Humankind was created in God's image and called to develop the earth in a God-honoring, God-reflecting way.

God's intent from the beginning is thus for a cooperative world of shalom, generosity, and blessing, evident most fundamentally in his own mode of exercising power at creation. ... In the end, nothing less than God's own exercise of creative activity ought to function as the ethical paradigm or model for our development of culture, with attendant care of the earth and just and loving interhuman action. By our wise exercise of cultural power we truly function as *imago Dei*, mediating the creator's presence in the full range of earthly activities.¹¹

Here Middleton connects the two concepts of shalom and culture making. God-honoring culture making is how the people of God bring shalom into the world. The overarching point that Middleton makes is that God's original intent for the creation, including humankind, still stands despite the fall of humankind. Humankind is still called

¹⁰ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 15.

¹¹ Middleton, 52.

to function as God's image bearers who express worship to God by developing culture in accordance with His character.

In relation to eschatology and its implications, Christopher J. H. Wright, in *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* aligns with the views of Richard Mouw, N. T. Wright and J. Richard Middleton. Christopher Wright reminds his readers that: "The Bible begins and ends with creation,"¹² is referred to constantly throughout the Old Testament, and is connected to Christ in the New Testament.¹³ Care of the creation is a major theme in Scripture and is an intrinsic part of the church's mission. This mission is grounded in God's creation of human beings in His image (Gen. 1: 26-28) and in God's call to humankind to exercise dominion within creation in a way that reflects God's character and kingship.¹⁴

Creation care is also grounded in the gospel. Reflecting on Colossians 1: 15-20, Christopher Wright says:

Paul's vision of the gospel is as wide as creation itself, and that is because his understanding of the cross includes the whole of creation in the reconciling work of Christ. Now our mission is founded on the gospel and needs to reflect the length, breadth and depth of the gospel. If, then, the cross of Christ is good news for the whole creation, our mission must include being and bringing good news to the whole creation.

So our care for creation is motivated not solely by the fact that it was created by God and we were commanded to look after it, but also by the fact that it has been redeemed by Christ, and we are to erect signposts towards its ultimate destiny of complete restoration in Christ. God's redemptive mission includes creation. Our mission involves participating in that redemptive work as agents of good news to creation, as well as to people.¹⁵

¹² Christopher Wright, 48.

¹³ Christopher Wright, 49.

¹⁴ Christopher Wright, 50-51.

¹⁵ Christopher Wright, 60-61.

So, Christopher Wright sees creation care as an essential role for the church. In his explication of what creation care looks like, it is clear that he sees it in terms of seeking the shalom of the whole creation. For Christopher Wright, the mission of God's people is to seek the shalom of the whole creation, and to engage in holistic and just culture making.

Ray Bakke directs his readers to William Temple's book, *Christianity and the Social Order* where Temple reflects on the image in Genesis 2: 7 of God making the first man out of the dust of the earth. Bakke writes:

William Temple helped me see the theological significance of this photograph, as he calls it. It's so totally contrary to the pictures of other gods in the ancient world, which, like the Greek mythology, tended to put layers of protection between their spiritual deities and the physical matter of earth, lest the gods become contaminated.

Temple further observes that the Bible concludes with the photograph of our God cleaning up the cosmos after the final holocaust, and that this same Bible pictures a God who occupies real physical bodies, Christ's and ours. His conclusion: Christianity is the most materialistic religion on the entire earth. It's the only religion that successfully integrates matter and spirit with integrity

If Temple is correct, we Christians are the only people who can truly do the salvation of souls and the rebuilding of city sewer systems in the same sentence.¹⁶

Regardless of what other people do, the people of God are to follow the example of their God. They are to clean up the trash-filled streets and parks and playgrounds. They are to fight for safe streets and good schools, for clean water and decent housing. In the words of Isaiah, the church is to be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (Isa. 58: 12).

Mark Dever rejects the idea that this is an essential task for the church as an institution. He makes a distinction between the role and activities of the local church in its corporate and institutional form and that of individual believers. The purpose of the

¹⁶ Bakke, 33-34.

church as an institution is to lead the congregation in the worship of God, to teach and disciple the believers, and to engage in the evangelization of the world.¹⁷ These three functions are essential to the church's purpose; anything and everything else is not essential.

What is the church's ministry to the world? It may be important first to consider what it is not. The Christian congregation is not required to take institutional responsibility for the physical needs in the unbelieving community. The Scriptures do make Christians responsible to care for the needs of the members of their own churches, though even here the New Testament makes further qualifications. Paul's instruction to Timothy concerning the care of widows seems to indicate the church was to care for Christian widows (1 Tim 5:3-16). Yet such care was to be given only when there was a lack of family support. Paul instructed family members to care for their own needy first, if at all possible (v. 16). By the same token, we might conclude that support that can be acquired from outside the church (for instance, from the state) should be preferred over using church funds, thus freeing church funds to be used elsewhere.

In summary, congregations must carefully prioritize the responsibilities unique to the church. It is proper for Christians to be concerned with education, politics, and mercy ministry, but the church itself is not the structure established by God for addressing such concerns. Such matters are the proper concern of Christians in schools, governments, and other structures of society. In fact, churches must be careful not to let such concerns distract them from their main and unique responsibility, that of embodying and proclaiming the gospel.¹⁸

Dever seems to be saying that it is appropriate for Christians to bring their Christian values into their roles as good citizens of society. But they do so as private citizens. Dever allows that churches may engage in acts of compassion and social justice if they so choose. But he does not believe that local churches, as institutions, are required to do so, and he warns the church to be cautious in doing so.

Poverty, war, famine, death, and other tragic effects of the fall will not end except by the bodily, visible return of Christ (see Mark 14:7; John 12:8; Rev 6:1-11). The heavenly city will come down; it won't be built up, constructed from the

¹⁷ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville, TN: B and H Academic, 2012), 69.

¹⁸ Dever, 83-84.

ground up, as it were (Heb. 11:10; Rev 21:2). Its coming is as one-sided as creation, the exodus, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the regeneration of the individual heart. It is a great salvation act of God. If human culture can ever be said to be redeemed, it will be God doing it, not us.

The gospel's main thrust is not to renew the fallen structures of this world but rather to create a new community of those purchased by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 5:6-12) and washed with his Word (Eph. 5:26-27). Only through the fulfillment of God's promise to forgive sin are all of God's other promises fulfilled. The joy of being reconciled to God and the prospect of being in his presence is superior to all the goods of this world. No gospel that describes Scripture's sweeping narrative as culminating in the coming of the kingdom but neglects to explain how individuals can be included in that kingdom is any true gospel.¹⁹

This writer finds himself in the strange position of agreeing wholeheartedly with almost everything that Dever says but disagreeing vehemently with the conclusions Dever draws. He agrees with Dever that humankind's greatest need is to be reconciled to God in Christ. He also agrees that being reconciled to God and dwelling in His presence is the greatest treasure any person might gain. He agrees that humankind cannot reverse the effects of the fall and that the holy city, the new Jerusalem is all of God and God alone. He agrees with Dever that evangelism and discipleship must be primary tasks both of the church as an institution, and of all Christians as individuals. He also agrees that the church must gather together in corporate worship and in mutual edification. The writer disagrees with Dever, however, in relegating a concern for the poor and a desire for social justice to secondary and non-essential functions of the church. Too often, what is required is what is done. If the church believes that is not required by God to concern itself with social justice, very often it will not do so.

Dever seems to see evangelism and social action as enemies. He seems concerned that if a local church engages in holistic ministry it will be distracted from its evangelistic

¹⁹ Dever, 85.

call. The liberal-fundamentalist conflicts in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century give some historic precedence for this concern. Yet, there is much larger historical precedence for the wedding together of evangelism and social action by the church. Rodney Stark writes about the practice of mercy by the early church in a pagan culture where “mercy was regarded as a character defect and pity as a pathological emotion: because mercy involves providing *unearned* help or relief it is contrary to justice.”²⁰ Stark continues:

This was the moral climate in which Christianity taught that mercy is one of the primary virtues—that a merciful God requires humans to be merciful. Moreover, the corollary that *because* God loves humanity, Christians may not please God unless they *love one another* was even more incompatible with pagan convictions. But the truly revolutionary principle was that Christian love and charity must extend beyond the boundaries of family and even those of faith, to all in need. As Cyprian, the martyred third-century bishop of Carthage explained, “there is nothing remarkable in cherishing merely our own people with the due attentions of love. ... Thus the good was done to all men, not merely to the household of faith.”²¹

The early church’s concern and sacrificial care for the suffering, for the sick and the poor, for the abandoned children, and for all those challenged the prevailing moral and ethical values of their culture. Within three centuries the Christian faith was the largest in the Roman Empire because the proclamation of good news in Christ was vindicated by the actions of the church in seeking the good of their neighbors.

Norris Magnuson chronicled the massive involvement of the church in social work from roughly 1865-1920. In the period after the Civil War huge numbers of immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe flooded in to U. S. cities. At the same

²⁰ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 112.

²¹ Stark, 112-113.

time, many former slaves moved from the south into northern cities looking for work.

They were all looking for a better life but found life in these cities to be brutally hard and oppressive. Magnuson writes:

During that troubled era an increasing number of revivalistic slum workers united to penetrate the blighted areas of American cities with their gospel of “salvation.” Their hallmark was thorough supernaturalism and intense religious commitment. Beginning as a small body of earnest Christians from various Protestant denominations, these evangelists attracted hundreds of thousands of recruits and converts within a few decades. Their continuing experience in the slums soon led them into varied and extensive social welfare programs. Thus combining evangelism and welfare they formed one of the largest and most influential contingents of field workers in American cities during those decades.²²

Throughout church history, from the first century until the present, there are examples of the church, as an institution, caring for the poor and advocating for the weak. As Magnuson points out, social work was not an enemy but an ally of evangelism. Sinners became converts because they saw and experienced the love of God in Christ through the actions of Christ’s followers.

John Nugent broadly agrees with the eschatology of N.T. Wright and others who argue that the “kingdom of heaven is not a place in heaven. It is a reality in which God’s will is done ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6: 10).²³ The world will not be destroyed by God but instead will be renewed by Him. Humankind will not live for eternity in heaven but on the renewed earth that God will bring forth out of heaven. For N.T. Wright and others, God’s end goal becomes the blueprint for what the church’s mission in the world is to be. Since God will bring forth a new, renewed, and completely just world, then the church should embrace these values in the here and now. The church

²² Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 2.

²³ John C. Nugent, *The Endangered Gospel: How Fixing the World is Killing the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), Kindle location 184-188.

should serve as an agent of justice and renewal in this world. But Nugent questions whether it is the church's role to fix the world:

In the past, we've wanted to save people from this broken world. Nowadays, we want to fix it. We want to end war, purify water, feed the poor, and eradicate all forms of discrimination. We don't just want to talk about it; we want to do something and make a difference. This Christian desire to "do something" goes way back. Second-century Christians did something by rescuing abandoned babies from Roman gutters. Medieval men and women took vows of poverty and chastity to better serve the poor. Fearless Christians harbored Jews who were fleeing from Hitler's soldiers. Since the early twentieth century, liberal Christians have been working hard to make this world a better place. Meanwhile, evangelical believers debated whether the church should pursue social justice or just stick to saving souls. That debate is mostly over: God cares about both, and so should we. I agree that Christians should do something. God has indeed called his people to do something. But I wonder, has God really called us to fix the world? Is this what Jesus meant by calling us salt and light? Are we even capable of fixing this world? Is it something that God has empowered us to do?²⁴

Nugent shares some of Dever's concerns about whether a desire to make the world a better place through commitments to social justice and ministry to the poor may compromise the church's distinctive identity and mission as the body of Christ. He argues that "When Christians begin substituting activism for discipleship, it's not the world that becomes endangered, but the gospel."²⁵ He further argues:

Striving to make this world a better place oversteps the bounds of [the church's] mission, eclipses part of the gospel, and leads us to neglect our true calling. It is in this sense that the gospel is "endangered."²⁶

Nugent contends that the church's true calling is not to fix the world but to embrace God's kingdom reign as a gift and to display this kingdom reign as the church. The church is to be God's set-apart people, who, by the power of the Holy Spirit become the better place that displays God's goodness to the world. The church in its worship of

²⁴ Nugent, kindle location 80-89.

²⁵ Nugent, kindle location 136.

²⁶ Nugent, kindle location 400-402.

God, in its visible, sacrificial love of one another, and in its proclamation of the gospel and its demonstration of kingdom life is to show the world what God intends. The church should focus not on making the world a better place but on being the better place that Jesus meant the church to be. This does not mean that the church isolates itself from the wider culture. Nugent notes:

One of the tasks of this book has been to demonstrate how it could be that God's people are not responsible for making this world a better place, but for being the better place that Christ has already made and that the wider world won't be until Christ returns. It should be clear by now that this doesn't mean that Christians should stick to saving souls and leave social activism to everyone else. The gospel is inherently social. It brings forth a church that lives out God's vision for humanity and showcases God's justice before the watching world. God has not, however, called the church to demand justice from this world. We are not God's instrument for making the world a better place. God has created us to be the living picture, the pilot project, the first fruits of his kingdom and his justice. This was entirely God's doing. We receive our new identity as a gift that we did nothing to deserve. God has entrusted his kingdom to us, but this is not a mandate to force it upon those who reject the kingdom. It is a divine initiative, accomplishment, and gift all the way down. It is a gift for us and it must be a gift for any who receive it through us. Our job is to embrace that gift, display it, and proclaim its availability to others. The idea of "just embracing God's gift" sounds like quietism—the misguided notion that churches should live in a holy bubble, keep their hands clean, and never truly enter the fray of this world's brokenness. This is simply not the case. God has sent us into a broken world to make visible his kingdom and to proclaim its implications for all of creation.²⁷

For Nugent, the way that the church makes visible God's kingdom is through its common life together and through its clear demonstration that living as God's kingdom people is its primary ambition. Nugent believes that as the church radically loves one another within the body of Christ and demonstrates its supreme loyalty to God and His kingdom many will recognize the truth and goodness of the gospel.²⁸

²⁷ Nugent, kindle location 3009-3022.

²⁸ Nugent, kindle location 3077-3088.

Nugent lays out a compelling vision of the church as the better place created by God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. For Nugent, the church is the first fruits of God's kingdom, which is already here, though not yet revealed in its fullness. In essence, he calls the church to live out what it already is by the grace of God. His concern is that the church, out of compassion or out of a desire for cultural relevance, is in danger of substituting its primary calling to embrace, display and proclaim God's kingdom, with a misplaced calling to "fix the world."²⁹

This writer is intrigued by his thesis that the church is called not to make the world the world a better place but to be the better place that draws in the world. He resonates with Nugent's call to the church to radically live out the values of the kingdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. But he finds Nugent's views too narrow at certain points. He believes that Nugent creates false dichotomies. Social activism does not have to replace evangelism and discipleship but can and must be a vital component of both.

Nugent argues, "God has not, however, called the church to demand justice from this world."³⁰ The researcher is not clear as to how Nugent would apply this in a case where a church member is experiencing social injustice. For example, Linthicum tells the story of a young woman in his church who came to him to say that she was being forced into prostitution. Linthicum pleaded with her to go to the police. He was stunned when she said that it was the Chicago police who were forcing her into prostitution. In a situation such as this, would Nugent rally his church to protect a church member by challenging the unjust systemic injustice that threatened her? And, how would Nugent

²⁹ Nugent, kindle location 369-373.

³⁰ Nugent, kindle location 3014.

have responded to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*? Dr. King expressed his disappointment that so many clergy had failed to enter the fray and seek the cause of social justice on behalf of the oppressed.

I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother." In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

There was a time when the church was very powerful--in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent--and often even vocal--sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.³¹

One of the issues that the church in Worcester has faced is that city leaders did not expect the church to take an active role in addressing community problems. As a result, they did not even invite the church to enter into the conversation regarding community

³¹ Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter From a Birmingham Jail," accessed January 11, 2016, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

concerns. They saw the church as committed largely to proselytizing others rather than to serving them. The picture they had of the church is that it is standoffish, uninvolved and irrelevant to larger community interests. Even worse, some city leaders saw the church as a parasite. They saw the church taking full advantage of her non-profit, tax-exempt status while offering little of worth to the community at large. This perception of the church has been slowly changing over the last several years as a result of some citywide initiatives sponsored by the church like Convoy of Hope and because some churches have gotten heavily involved in city-sponsored events like Working for Worcester, the Community Dialogues on Race, and the effort to provide emergency shelter space to the city's homeless. While the negative perception of the church is slowly changing, there is a long way to go.

Scripture speaks of the commandment to love God, to love our neighbor and to love one another. Nugent seems to see the command to love one another and to love our neighbor as one and the same. He argues that the Scriptures call the church to focus on loving one another in the church. He references the command to love our enemies, but does not think this means loving our enemies outside the faith but rather loving brothers and sisters who have offended or hurt us. That seems too narrow to this writer. Jesus did not only love and serve Jews. Gentiles were loved and served by him as well. It was in loving and serving them while they were still unbelievers that they came to faith. For example, Jesus takes initiative with a demon-possessed man, heals him and then sends him back to his home in the Gentile region of the Decapolis to "tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5: 19). Love, by its very nature, overflows. Nugent is right in saying that nowhere in Scripture are the people

of God called to “fix the world.” But loving people and seeking their good by working for social justice in both personal and institutional forms is not necessarily the same as trying to fix the world.

Jesus’ ministry to Samaritans (John 4) and his parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) suggest to this writer that Jesus had a broad view of who is included in Jesus’s command to love one’s neighbor. To buttress his argument that the church is called primarily to demonstrate love for one another in the church, Nugent argues that the Samaritans were included in the family of Israel. He asserts that they were seen as being a sub-set of Israel but does not make a case for it. It’s fair to say they were not Gentiles in that they had some allegiance to the God of the Pentateuch and could be, in that sense, considered a Jewish cult. But with this logic, one could argue that Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are part of the church. They hold to many core beliefs that Christians hold, and honor much of the Bible. But evangelicals do not include them in the church because where they err, they err in significant and foundational ways. This writer argues that Israel saw the Samaritans in this way - not true believers, not Israelites, and thus not within the people of God.

Nugent has a particular slant on what it means that Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. The blessing to the nations comes indirectly. That is, it comes as the nations see the common life of Israel, want it for themselves, and so enter the community of God’s people. The church blesses the nations by inviting them into the blessed community of God. This is certainly one way, and the best way, in which the church blesses the world. Scripture provides examples of the nations being blessed by the expression of God’s common grace. Joseph certainly modeled faith in Yahweh before Pharaoh but he also

saved Egypt (and his family) from famine through his administrative gifts while giving God all the glory. Daniel provided wise counsel to Nebuchadnezzar.

It is true that when Christians sacrificially love one another in the body of Christ, those outside the church who observe it are drawn to Christ in some way. But it is also true that when the church offers radical forgiveness and sacrificial love to those outside the church, a door for the gospel is opened. To give an example, on June 17, 2015 white supremacist Dylann Roof entered Emanuel Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina and murdered nine church members as they were gathered together for a Bible study. The decision by members of Emanuel Baptist to forgive Dylann Roof stunned the watching world. It compelled the world to consider the radical nature of Christian forgiveness flowing from the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Nugent allows for this when he says that the church, as the church (not as individual Christians and not as the “para-church”), bears witness to the gospel through such service. Here again, the writer is confused by how Nugent distinguishes between what is “fixing the world” and what is living out the gospel.

Nugent contrasts the church with the para-church. The church, for Nugent, is the institutional local church, not the people of God in general. His ecclesiology, like Mark Dever’s, is an ecclesiology of the local church, not of the people of God as a whole. The writer is a bit perplexed by the strong distinction Nugent makes between church and para-church. To this writer, the local church and para-church ministries are all part of the one church and are allies in mission. If we push this thinking a bit, we would have to say that the Apostle Paul was a para-church worker - a missionary, itinerant evangelist, church planter, and theologian-at-large. He served the church and had relationships with many

local churches but was not a local church leader or even a church member for at least a portion of his ministry.

Nugent mentions but does not interact with Jeremiah 29: 4-7 where the exiled community of Jews in Babylon are called by God to plant themselves in Babylon, to seek the shalom of that evil city and to pray for its peace. This passage seems to call for an active and direct engagement with the city of Babylon.

Seeking justice and upholding the cause of the poor and marginalized is a command of God in both the Old and the New Testament. Both Israel and the Gentile nations were judged for their injustice against the poor and the powerless. Jesus declared that what we do on behalf of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, we do unto him (Matt. 25: 31-46). Jesus also declared that the first and greatest commandment was to love God. He then immediately added that the second commandment (perhaps a corollary and an application of the first commandment) was to love one's neighbor as oneself. To love one's neighbor as one's self is to want for one's neighbor what is wanted for one's self and family -- salvation, adequate food, housing, healthcare, and meaningful, living-wage work, safe neighborhoods and good quality schools. Proclaiming the gospel in word and demonstrating the gospel in deeds of social justice and ministries of compassion go hand in hand. Both are God honoring and God-empowered. Both are necessary if the witness of the church is to be plausible and compelling.

Christopher Wright declares "Mission has to do with the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world [and] that means using the whole Bible."³² Wright uses

³² Christopher Wright, 266.

the whole Bible³³ to unpack the broad range of the gospel message and its implication for the church's mission to the whole world. Rooting mission in the metanarrative of Scripture - Creation, Fall, Redemption in History, and New Creation³⁴ - he shows how the Bible's grand story "shapes and energizes the mission of God's people."³⁵

C. H. Wright argues that the church's mission "flows from the prior mission of God."³⁶ Mission is "all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose."³⁷ The gospel is not just about how the individual can be forgiven his or her sins and escape hell but "has to do with the cosmic reign of God in Christ that will ultimately eradicate evil from God's universe (and solve our individual sin problem too, of course)."³⁸

From God's creation of human beings as His image-bearers who are called to be stewards of creation, Wright moves on to the call of Abraham - blessed to be a blessing - as a paradigm for mission. Wright answers two related questions: How was Abraham blessed? And, how was Abraham to be a blessing to the nations of the earth? Abraham was blessed not only with descendants, a great name, and ongoing protection (whoever curses you I will curse), but even more with a revelation of God's character and purpose: The LORD God revealed Himself to Abraham in a way that very few have experienced. Abraham was to be a blessing by walking in the way of the Lord. That is, he was to

³³ Wright discusses passages from 52 of the Bible's 66 books and covers every major section of Scripture.

³⁴ Christopher Wright, 39-46.

³⁵ Christopher Wright, 44.

³⁶ Christopher Wright, 24.

³⁷ Christopher Wright, 25.

³⁸ Christopher Wright, 31.

imitate and reflect God's character by doing righteousness and justice.³⁹ Nugent argues that the people of God bless the nations by calling them into the community of the blessed. Christopher Wright, in contrast, argues that the people of God bless the nations by loving them like they love one another and by being agents of God's justice and righteousness in the world.

Wright illustrates this in his discussion of the LORD's interaction with Abraham in Genesis 18: 16-33. Here Wright reflects on God's character and highlights the reason for God's judgment. God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah came because of the outcry against these cities was "so great and their sin so grievous" (Gen. 18: 20). "Sodom was a place filled with oppression, cruelty, violence, perverted sexuality, idolatry, pride and greedy consumption, and it was a place empty of compassion or care for the needy. A model, indeed, of the fallen world in which we live."⁴⁰ The LORD heard the outcry against Sodom, came to investigate it, saw that the cries against Sodom were justified, and so determined to bring judgment against the city.

Notable in this incident is that the LORD revealed to Abraham what He was about to do and invited him to take part in it. The LORD's reasoning was: "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen. 18: 17-19). In essence, the LORD revealed to Abraham what He was about to do, and called him to take part in it, so that Abraham would learn what it means to keep the way of the LORD. It was in

³⁹ Christopher Wright, 83.

⁴⁰ Christopher Wright, 85.

keeping the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just that Abraham would be blessed and be a blessing to all the nations of the world.

Wright contends that what was true of Abraham is true of Abraham's descendants. The people of God are blessed so that they will be a blessing to the nations and peoples of the world. The people of God can only be a blessing to others when they walk in the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. Part of what it means to do righteousness and justice is to hear and respond to the cries of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. The people of God must be advocates for the oppressed, confront the oppressors, and challenge and seek to change the systems and structures of injustice and oppression. They must live like Abraham in a world that is very much like Sodom.

Wright extends the idea of walking in the way of the LORD in his discussion of the Exodus from Egypt and its implications for the people of God. "The texts portray at least four dimensions of the bondage that Israel suffered in Egypt - political, economic, social and spiritual - and goes on to show how God redeemed them in every one of these dimensions."⁴¹ Wright goes on to say:

If then, redemption is biblically defined in the first instance by the exodus, and if God's redeeming purpose is at the heart of God's mission, what does this tell us about mission as we are called to participate in it? The inevitable outcome surely is that *exodus-shaped redemption demands exodus-shaped mission*. And that means that our commitment to mission must demonstrate the broad totality of concern for human need that God demonstrated in what he did for Israel. And it should also mean that our overall motivation and objective in mission be consistent with the motivation and purpose of God as declared in the exodus narrative."⁴²

⁴¹ Christopher Wright, 99.

⁴² Christopher Wright, 102.

Taking this to heart, this researcher has been involved in mobilizing churches in Worcester, with Journey Church as a key participant, to confront the sin issues and sin structures and to address the totality of human need in the city. Among the initiatives that have begun are the monthly Clergy/Police Dialogues, Worcester Convoy of Hope, the Worcester Alliance for Refugee Ministry and the opening of church space as emergency homeless shelters.

Christopher Wright sets the command to seek the welfare (the shalom) of the city (Jer. 29: 7) in the broader context of the mission of God's people to engage the public square - "the whole world of human cooperative effort in productive projects and creative activity: work, trade, professions, law, industry, agriculture, engineering, education, medicine, media, politics and government-even leisure, sport, art and entertainment."⁴³ He asks the question: "What, then, does the Bible say about God and the public square, the world of all human work in all its diversity?"⁴⁴ He argues first that work is God's idea and not simply "the result of "the curse:

Of course, all work is now affected in myriad detrimental ways by our fallenness. But work itself is of the essence of our human nature. We were created to be workers, like God, the worker. This has been called the "cultural mandate". All that we are and do in the public sphere of work, whether at the level of individual jobs, or of the family, or of whole communities, right up to whole cultures and civilizations over historical time, is connected to our createdness and is therefore of interest to our Creator. The public square and marketplace are, of course, polluted and distorted by our sinfulness. But then that is true of all spheres of human existence. Our fallenness is not a reason to excuse ourselves from the public arena, any more than the fact that sickness and death are ultimately the results of sin is a reason for Christians not to become doctors or conduct funerals.⁴⁵

⁴³ Christopher Wright, 222.

⁴⁴ Christopher Wright, 223.

⁴⁵ Christopher Wright, 224.

Beyond creating work, Wright points out that God audits our work, governs it, and redeems it.⁴⁶ Tying all this together in terms of the implications for the mission of God's people in the public square, he says:

We have to respond at two levels. On the one hand, we are called to *constructive engagement* in the world-because it is God's world, created, loved, valued and redeemed by him. But on the other hand, we are called to *courageous confrontation* with the world-because it is a world rebellion against God, the playground of other gods, standing under God's condemnation and ultimate judgment.

The challenge of the mission of God's people is to live with the constant tension of *doing both with equal biblical conviction*. It is essentially the challenge of being "in the world but not of it".⁴⁷

The people of God are called to be God's image-bearers who care for the creation. They are called to walk in the way of the LORD as Abraham did. They are called to extend God's deliverance and redemption to every realm of life - political, economic, social, and spiritual - just as God did for the people of Israel in the Exodus. This means the people of God are called by God to pursue justice by engaging the public square. All of this applies to seeking the welfare (shalom) of the city. More, it may be argued that it is in the city that God's people may most fully engage in God's mission. It is in the city that the creation (both the natural environment and the built environment) is most neglected and abused. It is in the complexity, competition, and anonymity of the city that sin, idolatry, and pride reign most powerfully and where ethics, integrity, and trust in God are most challenged. It is in the city that human misery, oppression, and bondage cries out the loudest. The city is where the public square is most developed and influential and thus most in need of missional engagement by God's people.

⁴⁶ Christopher Wright, 224-229.

⁴⁷ Christopher Wright, 229.

Christopher Wright's broad discussion of the mission of God's people provides substantial insight that can be applied to urban mission. Holistic ministry that includes evangelistic proclamation, social action, compassion ministries, and a concern for the environment seems to this researcher the best way to evidence a visible and compelling embodying of the gospel. The church in New England is, on the whole weak; New England is the least churching region of the United States. In Worcester, until recently, the church was ignored because it was seen as disengaged from the needs of people in the city and from the issues that defined the city.

The church must be concerned about the salvation of souls. The church must also be concerned with sewer systems and playgrounds, safe streets and adequate, affordable housing. In response to this, Journey Church has partnered with Belmont St. School in a variety of ways. It has funded a school wide reading program and provided volunteer readers and tutors. It has also purchased new playground supplies and equipment and has volunteered to paint the school cafeteria. The researcher is now a core member of the Bell Hill Task Force. The three issues the task force is working on are: ensuring traffic and pedestrian safety in the neighborhood, restoring the Betty Price playground, which is the only public playground in the neighborhood, and holding landlords accountable to keep their properties livable and up to code. All of these issues contribute to the shalom of the neighborhood. All of these necessitate engaging the public square.

The church must join with others in the neighborhood to address these issues. The people of God can and must be both a prophetic voice for creation care in the neighborhood and an active agent in preserving, cultivating, and beautifying both the natural and the built environment. In doing so, the church will, over time, build trust and

gain an audience for the message of the gospel that includes the salvation of souls and the flourishing of the community.

If it is true that our vision of the future shapes our living in the present, then our understanding of eschatology takes on massive importance. Much of the church in New England has been steeped in a dualistic theology that sees a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, a dichotomy between the spiritual work and mission of the church and the profane work of the marketplace and civic sphere. If the only thing that God cares about is church-focused activity, then there is no reason to engage in culture making or to seek God's shalom for our world. There is little vision for creating beautiful buildings and music and art, or just political order and equitable financial systems and new technologies shared for the common good.

In the researcher's experience, many Christians read Scripture from an individualistic orientation, which is endemic in American culture. Mark Baker states:

Rather than seeing their individual salvation as part of a larger theme, like the kingdom of God, people attempt to understand the kingdom of God as a subcategory of individual salvation. They might only equate the kingdom of God with heaven or as something within the individual Christian. What cannot be brought into line with the central theme of future individual salvation is left as optional or secondary in the Christian life. As long as this lens is in place, much of the biblical holistic gospel will either be spiritualized, rejected or considered an appendix to the gospel.⁴⁸

English translations of the Bible add to this by obscuring the fact that most of the "you" statements in Scripture are plural rather than singular. An individualistic gospel means that the focus and application is on personal salvation and on the nuclear family. Many Christians miss the corporate calling that permeates the Bible, the calling to live as members of God's one corporate body, and as fellow citizens of God's one kingdom.

⁴⁸ Mark D. Baker, *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 57.

This individualistic orientation also makes it difficult for Christians to recognize their place and role in the larger community.

An eschatology that sees the world as temporary, with complete destruction as its ultimate end, removes any responsibility to nurture this world, to protect it, cultivate it, and bring out its full potential. It negates any sense that culture making is a mandate from God with eternal validity. For all these reasons Christopher Wright, N. T. Wright and J. Richard Middleton's works are not just esoteric musings. They take seriously two stubborn facts that must be considered: First, God chose to create a universe that was both material and spiritual, a universe where God and humankind could interact and commune with one another. Humankind is both material and spiritual. Second, God the Son took on human flesh, lived in this material/spiritual world, bodily rose from the dead, and maintains that body through all eternity. The people of God will also bodily rise from the dead and experience the fullness of God's presence in that bodily form for all eternity.

God created a universe that was good. It was perfectly aligned with God's character and purpose. This is the biblical idea of shalom. All of creation experienced shalom. All of creation was perfectly aligned with God and His purpose. All of creation lived in harmony with itself. The sin of the first man and woman shattered the shalom that had characterized the universe but it did not alter God's purpose. God initiated a process of redemption and restoration that began in the Garden of Eden after the fall and will culminate in the return of Christ on the last day. God will restore shalom to all of His people.

God created a universe that was perfect but not complete. He called Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and rule over it, to tend the earth and

manage it. He called them to fruitful work. This is the cultural mandate. He gave Adam and Eve this mandate before the fall. The fall distorted all of creation, brought the element of painful toil into work, and immeasurably complicated the fulfillment of God's call to make culture. But it did not eliminate God's call. God, using the same language He used with Adam and Eve, before the fall, called Noah and his descendants to continue the work of developing the creation after the fall. In a broad sense, the call to shalom and to culture making display God's character and God's purpose for humankind made in His image. How the church understands God's purpose for the original creation and how it understands God's end for this earth determine how the church understands its role in this earth in the here and now. Christopher Wright, N. T. Wright and J. Richard Middleton demonstrate the unity in God's intent between creation and new creation. And their explication of God's ongoing call to His people to engage in shalom seeking and culture provide a vision to guide the church's mission on the world.

The Purpose of God for the City

What is God's purpose for the city? What future does God intend for the city? Is the city incidental or central to God's plans for His world? Is the city intrinsically and irrevocably evil? Is the city inherently good? Does God care about cities simply because that is where a lot of people reside? Or, does He also care about cities as cities, as places of value to Him?

God's Purpose and the Future of the City

The Bible begins with creation and ends with a new creation. The people of God start in the Garden and end up in the new creation, which is the holy city, the new Jerusalem. Mouw states:

When God originally created, he formed a rural place for human beings to occupy. But in bringing in his new creation, he will not recreate the original Garden. In the end time, the product of God's transforming work will be a renewed City.

There is an important sense in which the Holy City is the Garden-plus-the-“filling.” During the course of history sinful human beings have created a misdirected “filling.” The things they have added to the Garden are, contrary to the Creator's intentions, perverse and idolatrous. But God still insists that the “filling” belongs to him. And he will reclaim it at the end time, in doing so transforming it into the kind of “filling” that he originally intended for his creation. This is why the “wealth” and the “glory” and the “honor” of the nations must be gathered in when the Day of the Lord arrives. God's ownership over the “filling” must be vindicated at the end of history.⁴⁹

Some see the language of “the holy city, the new Jerusalem” (Revelation 21: 2) simply as a metaphor for the people of God as the bride of Christ and not as an actual, material city. Mouw disagrees:

The Christian life is directed toward a City, a place in which God's redemptive purposes for his creation will be realized. If we think of the future life as a disembodied existence in an ethereal realm—which is not, I have suggested, our ultimate goal—then it is difficult to think of our present cultural affairs as in any sense a positive preparation for heavenly existence. But if we think of the future life in terms of inhabiting a Heavenly City, we have grounds for looking for some patterns of continuity between our present lives as people immersed in cultural contexts and the life to come. The Bible, I think, encourages us to think in these terms.⁵⁰

Those who see the New Jerusalem as simply a metaphor for God's people ignore the connections made between the Garden of Eden and the new Jerusalem. Scripture clearly links the two. Ironically, many evangelicals who believe the new Jerusalem is only a metaphor also tend to believe that the Garden of Eden was a literal garden, an actual, material garden prepared by God to receive the first man and woman. The researcher's view is that the new Jerusalem refers both to the people of God as the bride of Christ and to a literal, material city where the people of God will live.

⁴⁹ Mouw, 37.

⁵⁰ Mouw, 190.

All of creation is now suffering under the curse of the fall. Every aspect of human culture is tainted by sin. Yet the goodness of creation and the possibility of God-honoring culture making endures. Both realities, the curse of the fall and the enduring goodness of creation and human culture making, can be found in the city. Until the new Jerusalem descends from heaven, Robert Linthicum argues that all cities display a mixture of both good and evil. To develop his thesis, Linthicum traces the development of Jerusalem and Babylon as archetypes. He writes:

Babylon is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of a city fully given over to Satan.

Babylon is painted in Scripture as a bureaucratic, self-serving, and dehumanizing social system with economics geared to benefit its privileged and exploit its poor, with politics of oppression and with a religion that ignores covenant with God and deifies power and wealth (Isa. 14:5-21; Jer. 50:2-17, 51:6-10; Dan. 3:1-7; Rev. 17:1-6; 18:2-19, 24). Much of what is dark and evil in Babylon is replicated in cities (even Jerusalem) throughout the biblical story.

Jerusalem, by contrast, is seen in its idealized form as the city of God . . . an idealized Jerusalem is celebrated as city as it was meant to be—a city belonging to God. As a social system, it is called to witness to God’s shalom (Ps. 122:6-9; 147:2). As an economic entity, it is meant to practice equitable stewardship, and in its politics, a communal and just existence (Exod. 25- 40; 1 Sam. 8: 4, 20 . . . Finally, Jerusalem is portrayed as the spiritual center of the world, a model city living in trust and faith under the lordship of God (Isa. 8:18; Mic. 4:1; Deut. 17:14-20).⁵¹

What the biblical archetypes of Babylon and Jerusalem reveal is that cities have tremendous culture making capacity. Both Babylon and Jerusalem display this capacity. The differences between these two cities in their archetypical depictions lie in whose values undergird the culture making, what use is made of the culture making, who benefits from it, and who receives the honor from it.

Babylon is the city of Satan. Knowingly or not, his values drive the direction and use of the culture making. This culture making is dominated by pride, arrogance,

⁵¹ Linthicum, 24-25.

manipulation, exclusion, oppression and violence. Its residents are tools to be used for the benefit of its rulers. Its accomplishments are an expression of self-worship and are driven by a desire for praise and adulation.

Jerusalem is the city of God. The city exists for the glory of God. It is driven by God's values, that is, by the vision of shalom for all. In the archetypical Jerusalem, peace, justice, prosperity extends to all and praise, honor and glory flow from all to God.

Scripture's depiction of Babylon and Jerusalem as archetypes shows us the worst and the best of what cities can be. They give the people of God an uncluttered lens through which to identify the good and evil elements of any city. No city completely fits either the archetype of Babylon or the archetype of Jerusalem. Every city, including Jerusalem, has elements of both "Jerusalem" and "Babylon" in it.⁵² Linthicum argues that the etymology of the word "Jerusalem" suggests that the city is both city of Yahweh and city of Baal.⁵³ Whether or not he is correct in his understanding of Jerusalem's etymology, he is correct in his assertion that every city is a battleground between God and the devil.

This is a critical assertion for two reasons. It tells us that the cities of this world are not neutral ground and the presence of the church in the city matters. God chooses to work through His people. Sodom was destroyed because God could not find even ten righteous people in it. Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 5: 13-16 that they are to be the salt and light of the world. They are to restrain evil and promote good. They are to shine light by doing good deeds that reflect Christ's character (outlined in the Beatitudes, Matt.

⁵² Linthicum, 25.

⁵³ Linthicum, 25-26.

5: 3-12). This shining of light through the doing of good brings glory to God. The biblical archetypes of these two cities show us what the stakes are. The people of God have the power to determine, at least to some degree, the spiritual character of the city. In essence, when the church abandons or neglects the city, the devil runs free in the city and the city suffers.

Linthicum's assertion that the city is a battleground between God and the devil is important, too, because, on the one hand, it protects the people of God from engaging the city with naïve optimism. On the other hand, it encourages the church not to fall into despair when it encounters the face of evil in the city. The fact that the battle for the city has already been won by God provides great hope and great encouragement. The fact that the victory of God will not be fully displayed until the return of Christ reminds the people of God to stay alert and engaged in the battle. As the researcher has engaged his inner city neighborhood he has needed to remind himself of these twin realities on a daily basis.

What Are Cities and Why Do They Matter?

Despite all the discussion about cities there is not yet a widespread consensus on what is meant by “the city” or what urban ministry should entail. Does the definition of “city” have to do with crossing a certain threshold of population size? If so, there is no broadly agreed upon understanding of what that population size is.⁵⁴ To add to the confusion, sometimes writers, even in the same work, use the word “city” to mean the city proper. At other times they use it to mean the metropolitan area, which includes the city and the surrounding area. For example, people often reference the city of Boston

⁵⁴ Conn and Ortiz, 161.

(population of about 670,000 people) but mean the greater Boston area (population of about 4, 735, 000 people). The statistics pointing to the pace of global urbanization tend to speak of city growth in this way. They refer not just to growth in cities proper but also to growth in metropolitan regions. Discussion about metropolitan regions have even been stretched to include multi-state areas such as the “BosWash” urban region, meaning the stretch from Boston, Massachusetts to Washington D. C. The problem with this imprecision regarding the definition of city is that it sometimes blurs important distinctions: distinctions between cities and suburbs, and distinctions between cities within a larger metropolitan region. These distinctions matter when it comes to developing a ministry strategy.

Stephen Um and Justin Buzzard argue that what all cities “share in common is a large number of people freely choosing to dwell closely together with one another.”⁵⁵ They use the criteria of diversity, density and heterogeneity to define the essence of what cities are, and to make the case for why cities matter:

Cities are diverse, dense places where different types of people interact with one another. Cities are populated with people of various cultures, different worldviews, and different vocations. Cities force individuals to refine their cultural assumptions, religious beliefs, and sense of calling as they rub up against the sharp edges of the assumptions, beliefs, and expertise of other city dwellers. A twentysomething from a small, white, upper-middle-class, churchgoing Midwestern suburb who has a desire to teach high school students meets a tremendous opportunity for growth when he moves into center-city Boston. He will become a new type of teacher when he holds his first day of class and finds students of every conceivable race, culture, social standing, and worldview. Encounters take place in cities that do not take place elsewhere.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Um and Buzzard, 27.

⁵⁶ Um and Buzzard, 16.

Um and Buzzard cite Joel Kotkin to argue that people are attracted to cities because “cities are centers of power, culture, and spirituality.”⁵⁷ So, for Um and Buzzard, cities are where large numbers of people choose to live, where worldviews are challenged and shaped, and where opportunities for growth are maximized. In essence, cities are where people find safety, community and diverse expressions of spirituality.⁵⁸

Um and Buzzard focus on larger, “world class” cities in describing the characteristics, functions, and culture-shaping potential of cities. While Worcester does not have the cultural cachet, influence, and economic power that cities like Boston, New York, London, Berlin and Shanghai have, some of the same characteristics and dynamics are present, though obviously in a much more modest scale. Worcester is the cultural center and economic engine of Worcester County, which has a population of over eight hundred ten thousand people. It is the home of 36, 000 college students, and it is a growing science and biotech hub. It is also the home of a growing arts and music community. Over one hundred languages and dialects are spoken in the Worcester public school system and in the same classroom are students representing multiple countries, tribes, languages, religions, and worldviews.

Most evangelical leaders now agree that the city is of strategic importance to the mission of the church. The remaining debate is about what makes cities important priorities for the church. Some see cities as important simply because cities are where the majority of the world’s people are. People matter to God. Cities are where the most people are. So, cities matter because that is where people need to be reached with the

⁵⁷ Um and Buzzard, 27-28.

⁵⁸ Um and Buzzard, 28.

gospel. To reach the most people, the church must enter the cities of our world. Others see cities as places of theological and cultural significance beyond being aggregators of people. Cities are important in and of themselves because of their contribution to culture making. Cities are what God intended when He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth and to develop it. Cities unleash the creative culture making potential of humankind. Cities are where humankind best develops the earth.

Um and Buzzard contend that it is the characteristics of cities “as magnets (their ability to attract), amplifiers (their ability to turn up the volume), and engines (their ability to drive our world) that largely explain why they matter so greatly to our culture.”⁵⁹ Cities attract all kinds of diverse people. They attract those who aspire for success, those who have been marginalized and come to the city looking for a community, and those who are exploring their identity, beliefs, and values.⁶⁰ Worcester is big enough, diverse enough, vibrant enough, and affordable enough that it is beginning to attract people from Boston and other major cities.

Cities are also “amplifiers for the skills, talents, and ideas of their citizens. They do this by understanding and taking advantage of the interplay between two uniquely urban phenomena: clustered density and connective diversity.”⁶¹ Clustered density has to do with the simple fact that cities bring people into close proximity to one another.⁶² Connective diversity has to do with creating an environment where diverse people, ideas, and ways of doing things are connected to one another. When diverse people and ideas

⁵⁹ Um and Buzzard, 38.

⁶⁰ Um and Buzzard, 38-44.

⁶¹ Um and Buzzard, 44.

⁶² Um and Buzzard, 44-45.

are in close proximity to one another and interact with one another, then new ideas, technologies, and industries sprout up. The city of Worcester brings people into close proximity with one another and in the city are people from very diverse ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. But the city has only in the last ten years begun to take advantage of its diversity by creating environments where diverse people can interact. The church in Worcester has been even slower than the city as a whole in taking advantage of close proximity to create connective diversity in its ministry. There are, however, some signs that the church is becoming open to building bridges and developing relationships that span the diversity that is present in Worcester. Pastors' gatherings that reflect the diversity of the church in Worcester have been taking place and several joint initiatives to reach and bless the city have occurred.

Um and Buzzard point out that ultimately cities fall short in meeting the needs and wants of those they attract and this opens the door to point people to Jesus and the gospel of the kingdom. They also point out that the amplifying capacity of cities can produce both good and evil. They bring out both the best and the worst of people.

As engines for the production of culture, our cities have the ability either to lead us to human flourishing or to human famishing. In the end, the question is one of worship. When the citizens of a city are animated by a loving response to the grace of God, the city will flourish and rejoice. When urban dwellers run on self-interest, self-indulgence, and self-definition, the city will eventually turn in on itself and wither. If in the end the well-being of a city is tied to what it worships, might this provide a significant entry point for the gospel in an increasingly urban world?⁶³

The role of the church in the city is to serve as agents of God's kingdom and witnesses to Christ's redeeming grace. "It is ultimately the upside-down, power-sharing,

⁶³ Um and Buzzard, 53.

worship-reordering, redemptive work of Christ that urban dwellers lack and need.”⁶⁴ Um and Buzzard contend that a key aspect of bringing the gospel to the city is discovering the DNA, the worldview, of the city. To discover the DNA of the city, Um and Buzzard provide five questions: What is your city’s history? What are your city’s values? What are your city’s dreams? What are your city’s fears? What is your city’s ethos?⁶⁵ Once these questions have been answered, then the task for the church is to “piece together your city’s narrative. The baseline story is the overarching belief system that drives how a city functions. Knowing, engaging, and challenging this story line is the next step in contextualization and the key to doing ministry in the city.”⁶⁶ The researcher has found this process extremely helpful in his attempts to exegete both the Bell Hill neighborhood and Worcester as a whole.

Spiritual Warfare in the City

Robert C. Linthicum, in *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* begins by explaining the motivation behind his research and writing:

I entered urban ministry in 1955 by working with Afro-American youth and children in a Chicago slum. I have been at it ever since. As the years passed, I became increasingly aware that my theology was inadequate for my inner-city pastorates and community organizing.

Incident after incident reminded me that I suffered from a theology gap. A theology that would be adequate for a rural world or Western culture was not adequate for the city. Manifestations of raw corporate evil, almost beyond the power even of its perpetrators to control, made nonsense of a doctrine of sin perceived as individual acts of wrongdoing. My confrontation with economic and political exploiters of the poor who were also faithful communicants in their churches made a mockery of the church as the body of Christ. My experiences

⁶⁴ Um and Buzzard, 54.

⁶⁵ Um and Buzzard, 98-104.

⁶⁶ Um and Buzzard, 108.

increased my frustration with a theology learned in college and seminary's halls of ivy.⁶⁷

It is clear that Linthicum's experience of evil in a Chicago slum has shaped the perspective of his theological reflection and writing. His major thesis is that in Scripture "the city is the locus of a great and continuing battle between the God of Israel and/or the church and the god of the world."⁶⁸ There is a battle going on for the soul of the city. That battle has a foregone conclusion. God will win. Satan will be dethroned and utterly defeated. Every vestige of sin will be washed away. Christ will return as king, the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven, and God will dwell in this holy city in the midst of His people for all eternity. Until then the people of God are called to live as God's people in this fallen world and they are to wage spiritual warfare against the devil. They are to demonstrate that God is good, that He has not abandoned His creation, that the kingdom of God is at hand, and that the eternal purpose of God will triumph.

Linthicum argues that it is important to acknowledge the presence of evil in the city and to understand its nature. He provides a number of illustrations both from Scripture⁶⁹ and from his personal experience⁷⁰ to argue that sin and evil is both personal and corporate. To understand the nature of evil in the city, Linthicum contends that it is necessary to examine the primary systems that make a city function. These systems are economic, political, and religious (religious in the sense that they provide meaning in

⁶⁷ Linthicum, 20.

⁶⁸ Linthicum, 23.

⁶⁹ Note especially Linthicum's exposition of Deuteronomy 6 (47-51) and of Ezekiel 22 (60-62).

⁷⁰ Linthicum gives an example of how a fourteen-year-old African American girl, "Eva," was forced into prostitution by a corrupt Chicago police force (45-47).

life). In discussing the systems of a city Linthicum makes clear that these systems are not intrinsically evil. They can be used either for holy or for unholy purposes:

The systems have the potential to work for justice and economic equality for the people and wise stewardship of a city's resources if their functioning is based on both corporate and individual relationship with God. But systems can be demonic as well, enhancing the economic privilege of a few while exploiting the poor and powerless, using the political order to further such exploitation while maintaining a city's order, and turning faith commitment into formalized religion that legitimizes 'the powers that be' while benefiting from the powers' largess.⁷¹

Um and Buzzard speak about the amplifying effects of urban culture. Linthicum traces how those amplifying effects work themselves out in cities. He believes:

Every city has a "spirit" about it—an almost palpable essence distinct from every other city. It is a combination of that city's history, surroundings, and systems, the people who have moved through it, and the events that have occurred in it.

If we cannot name, understand, and cope with our city's spirit, we cannot hope to understand either the complexity of our city's spiritual warfare or the scope of ministry to which the church is called.⁷²

Linthicum examines the Apostle Paul's treatment of "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers" and argues that these are more than "solely spiritual forces that have their abode and authority in the 'heavenlies.'"⁷³ He sees these principalities and powers as having been created good by God but having been captured by Satan. They are now working through the structures and systems of the city, or nation to bring about Satan's evil ends.⁷⁴ Linthicum also believes that every city has a "brooding angel" that is

⁷¹ Linthicum, 62-63.

⁷² Linthicum, 65-66.

⁷³ Linthicum, 68.

⁷⁴ Linthicum, 68.

the inner spirituality of a city and that has “immense power, either for good or ill.”⁷⁵ He writes:

Every city has an interior spirituality. When the city’s inner spirituality is under the authority of God (as was the messenger angel in the Daniel story), that spirituality is “angelic.” When the city is under the authority of Satan (as was the angel of Persia), then it is demonic in its power and influence. All cities are caught in a spiritual warfare; the forces of God and the forces of Satan battle for that city’s soul.⁷⁶

The church, Linthicum argues, must be aware of these spiritual realities, and be able to identify Satan’s tools and strategies to wage spiritual warfare effectively in the city.

In Chapter 4, Linthicum gets to the heart of his book - God’s intent for the city and the call of the church in the city:

The kingdom of God is the primary paradigm for understanding God’s call to the church in the city.

God’s primary intention for the city is to bring God’s kingdom in to that city - to permeate its political, economic, and religious structures, to transform the lives of its inhabitants, to exorcise evil and unrepentant principalities and powers, and to place over that city, not a brooding angel but a Christ who would gather the city to himself. It is God’s intention to transform every city into the city of God by making of that city the embodiment of God’s rule.

God would seek to do this in every city by creating in that city a new community: the church. That community would be the very embodiment of God’s kingdom in the city. In its life together, the church would practice that new social order. Through its witness, the church would call the city that new social to participate in God’s kingdom. By its solidarity with the economically, politically, and spiritually poor of the city, and by its confrontation with the powers that would seek to control and oppress rather than recognize their own poverty, the church would work for God’s kingdom.⁷⁷

Linthicum aligns with John Nugent in arguing that the role of the church is not to save the city.⁷⁸ Christ is the one, the only one, who saves. But unlike Nugent, Linthicum

⁷⁵ Linthicum, 75.

⁷⁶ Linthicum, 75.

⁷⁷ Linthicum, 105.

⁷⁸ Linthicum, 129.

believes that the church should directly engage the power structures when they act unjustly. Through his death on the cross, he has broken the power of sin, death, and the law. He has disarmed the satanic forces working through the systems and structures of the city.⁷⁹ Linthicum lays out the implications of Christ's willing death on the cross:

Jesus came to the city to die for the city, its systems, and its people. And Christ asks us to participate in what he has done. We are to take up our cross and follow him into the city—there to be willing to minister, to suffer and, if need be, to lose our lives. His death was not an esoteric exercise occurring at the limits of human understanding. It was a death coming out love and intense commitment to the city, its systems, and its people. So it is that the Christ demands of those who would follow him into the city that they have his same level of commitment to the city's afflicted and comfortable and the exploiters and exploited of its systems, its principalities, and powers. He even wants us to look seriously at the pernicious corruption in us all.

For our Lord was not crucified in a gothic cathedral on a golden cross placed upon a marble altar between two silver candlesticks. He was crucified on a rugged cross between two thieves, on the city's garbage heap, at the kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. That is where Christ died. And that is what Christ died about. That is where Christ calls his church to be. And that is what Christ calls his church to be about!⁸⁰

Using as a template the story of Jesus' healing of the blind man in John 9, Linthicum argues that the church's role is to help people to see through Satan's lies. It is to help them see that Christ has destroyed the evil works of the devil, and has broken the bondages caused by sin. It is to help people see their city from a new hope-filled perspective and to call them to action in the service of that hope.

In a word, the vocation of the church in the city is to be the dreamer and the advocate for a city given over to God. The church is to be the people of the vision—those who can see through Satan's lies to a city as God would have it. The church is to be the people of action—those who call the city's structures and systems to accountability, who defend those oppressed and exploited by those

⁷⁹ Linthicum, 126.

⁸⁰ Linthicum, 127.

systems, and who minister to those who are deceived but who benefit from that city's principalities.

For the poor and oppressed of the city, for the city's rich and middle class, for the systems and structures which are lusted over by Satan, Christ—and Christ's church—is the only hope. Do not leave them there in their sins until they are almost dead. Touch their eyes with Christ's love so that the once-blind can now see. Let them see a vision of their city where God will make his home, where they shall be his people and he will be their God, and all tears shall be wiped away. Call them to join in Christ's triumphal procession which claims victory over their city's principalities and powers. Let Christ raise them from their deadly tomb and let the church unbind them and let them go free. Hold out for them the assurance that when they spread out before the throne of grace that which is overwhelming and which they cannot face, God will hear their prayer and will rescue them from almost certain conquest. And remind that they need have no fear, for protecting them from the Evil One are the angelic hosts and their chariots of fire.⁸¹

Linthicum calls the church to seek the shalom of the city, its peace and prosperity.

From his study of Jeremiah 29: 4-14, he presents four specific tasks the church must fulfill: Pray for the city, be God's presence in the city, work for the good of the city, and proclaim good news to the city.

He cites Psalm 122 as a model for urban prayer and unpacks four major areas for prayer. We are to pray with diligence and perseverance for the city's economic health, safety, political order, and the shalom of its people.⁸² The Kingdom Network of Worcester (KNOW) has begun using Linthicum's four areas of prayer as a template for prayer in its Worcester area prayer gatherings. Christians from a number of churches in Worcester have begun meeting for weekly prayer. On the first Tuesday of the month we pray broadly for the shalom of the people and the vitality of the church. On the second Tuesday we pray for the economy of Worcester - for an unleashing of entrepreneurial creativity, for new job creation that enables everyone who wants to work to find a job, for

⁸¹ Linthicum, 144.

⁸² Linthicum, 149-155.

just business and labor practices, and for living wages. On the third Thursday of the month we meet in the Worcester mayor's office to pray for the political leaders of the city and the political order of the city. And, on the fourth Sunday of the city we prayer walk through the neighborhoods in the city that are experiencing gang shootings or other kinds of violence and trauma.

In regard to the importance of being God's presence in the city, Linthicum points to Jeremiah 5:1: "Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city." He argues that the presence of godly people in a city protect the city from succumbing to Satan's influence.⁸³ To support his claim, Linthicum turns to Matthew 5: 13-16 where Jesus calls his disciples to be salt (adding flavor to the city and preserving it from decay) and light (exposing the lies of the devil as he works through the city's systems and structures). In this way people experience God's goodness and give glory to Him.⁸⁴ An example of this dynamic in Worcester was the Worcester Convoys of Hope in June 2015 and June 2016. People in underserved neighborhoods in the city received a multitude of free services including medical, dental, vision and hearing screenings, AIDS testing, and job search counseling. They also were given the opportunity to receive prayer, to get a Bible in their language, and to hear about Jesus. Each year about a thousand people asked to receive prayer and about forty prayed to receive Christ and were connected to a local church. Several residents of these

⁸³ Linthicum, 157.

⁸⁴ Linthicum, 159.

neighborhoods told the researcher said that their neighborhood was quieter and more peaceful for several weeks after the Convoys of Hope.

To illustrate what he means by working for the good of the city, Linthicum turns to Isaiah 65: 18-25 where he finds six key examples of the good: joy and delight in the city, accessible health care and longevity, adequate and affordable housing, economic growth and economic justice, vibrant relationship with God, and shalom with the neighbor.⁸⁵ To highlight the importance of advocacy for the poor and empowerment of the poor, Linthicum takes his readers to Jeremiah 22.

Tying all this together, Linthicum suggests:

A crucial way for the church to look at the city is to recognize that the church is not foreign to the city. It has been placed by God in the city to be its primary steward. The city is a massive investment made both by God and by humanity. Humanity provides for the stewardship of that city's political, economic, social, and material investment through the systems and structures of that city. As we have seen from Scripture, however, the city is also a considerable spiritual investment; in fact, it is to be understood primarily as a spiritual entity. How is the spirituality of the city protected and nurtured and allowed to grow? It will either be done through the church or through the demonic forces of that city. Consequently, the church has as a major responsibility the stewardship of the spirituality (and therefore the materiality) of its city.

Along with prayer for the city, godly presence in the city, and work done for the good of the city, Linthicum calls for the church to be zealous in proclaiming the gospel. It is through the proclamation that people come to recognize the presence and work of God in the city. It is proclamation of the gospel that helps people know the hope of salvation and draws them to faith in Christ.⁸⁶ It is through the practice of these four tasks that the church stewards the spirituality of the city.

⁸⁵ Linthicum, 164-172.

⁸⁶ Linthicum, 186-187.

Linthicum is unrelenting in arguing that the church has a God-given responsibility to seek the good of the city and he marshals scriptural passage after passage to make his point. While one might disagree with his exegesis of select passages, one cannot dismiss the cumulative weight of the biblical evidence he presents.

Spiritual warfare in the city is wearying. The problems seem unending. The needs are overwhelming. The victories seem few and far between. The personal experience of being victimized by theft, vandalism, and violence, the constant concern for the safety and flourishing of one's children, and the exposure to a myriad of small daily annoyances are an ongoing reality for those who live and serve in the city. Doubt about the wisdom and value of staying in the city rises up often. Magnifying all of this is the powerfully malevolent and insidious opposition of the devil "who seeks whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5: 8). For these reasons, Linthicum insists, in the last section of his book, that the people of God must avail themselves of every spiritual resource available. They must devote themselves to personal spiritual formation, participate in community, maintain a God-focused vision of the city, and seek to be faithful rather than "successful" in the work of the gospel.⁸⁷

The church is called to seek the welfare of the city. The people of God are called to persevere in the spiritual battle over the city. They are called to stay in the city and keep fighting. Why stay? Why keep fighting? It is because Jesus loves the city and has shed his blood for the city. It is because Jesus is present and active in the city and has called his church to join him in the city. It is because one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord of the city. Ultimately, it is because, even now,

⁸⁷ Linthicum, 236.

the city is a place where the people of God experience His presence, walk in His way, reveal His glory, and bask in His delight.

A Theology as Big as the City tells the story of how God brought Ray Bakke into the city, the questions he encountered and the challenges he faced. These questions and challenges, coming out of the urban context in which God placed him, drove Bakke back to the Scriptures on a quest to develop a theology adequate to meet the urban challenges he faced. One of his key claims is that a theology of the city is needed because most Christians “read the Bible through rural lenses.”⁸⁸ Part of what he means by a theology “as big as the city” is a theology that sees God as “interested and involved with both the structures and the individuals that compose society.”⁸⁹ Bakke was looking for a theology of the city that made sense of his experience in the city and that enabled him to engage the city as a whole in all its complexity and diversity. To develop his theology of the city, Bakke’s approach to the Bible was “to bring theological reflection to the text in the light of [his] own unique traditions and social context.”⁹⁰ His book is an attempt to demonstrate what reading Scripture through *urban* lenses might look like, what new questions of Scripture it might raise, and what new scriptural insights and ministry applications it might reveal.

Bakke’s urban lens for scriptural engagement broadens the understanding of the church’s role in the city. It puts the church of today more in alignment with the church’s role throughout much of its history. For example, Bakke argues that: “The church must

⁸⁸ Bakke, 14.

⁸⁹ Bakke, 14.

⁹⁰ Bakke, 29.

learn how to go up to the urban powerful and down to the urban powerless with equal integrity.”⁹¹ One could argue that this statement encapsulates the message and purpose of the prophets and of Jesus himself. The researcher had not done either one with any real consistency, but in particular he have neglected the urban powerful – the people with connections, influence, authority and resources to effect change. Convicted by Bakke’s exhortation he began pushing himself to reach out to political and other leaders in my city. One of his first steps was to start attending school committee and city council meetings and to introduce himself to the mayor and the City Manager.

Bakke talked about intentionally and systematically visiting and exploring all the neighborhoods of Chicago in order to better know and understand his ministry context. He did this because he “realized that [he] didn’t love Chicago, because [he] didn’t yet know it.”⁹² The researcher started to do that in Worcester by beginning to walk or drive and pray through Worcester neighborhoods.

Bakke points to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the early twentieth century as the time when evangelicalism became a privatized faith that disengaged with the city.⁹³ In essence, he argues that from the early twentieth century to the end of the century, evangelicals turned from their own history of social and urban engagement and truncated the gospel to a concern for personal salvation. Norris Magnuson shows that during this period the evangelical church was heavily engaged in both personal evangelism and holistic ministry. The church proclaimed and demonstrated the gospel to

⁹¹ Bakke, 14.

⁹² Bakke, 22-23.

⁹³ Bakke, 14.

the whole city, to its people and its structures. As Ray Bakke exhorts, the evangelical church spoke to both the urban powerful and the urban powerless with equal integrity.

We must have justice—more justice,” the New York Tribune quoted Ballington Booth, commander of the American Salvation Army forces, as saying. “To right the social wrong by charity,” he had said, “is like bailing the ocean with a thimble. . . . We must readjust our social machinery so that the producers of wealth become also owners of wealth.” The editor of the *War Cry*, in a spirit mindful of the Booths, complained that laws giving “unbounded power to the wicked and the strong to do evil and the weak are not liberty.” He later asserted that the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth” was chief among many American social evils.⁹⁴

This researcher had considered himself a careful, attentive, and socially aware reader of Scripture. Bakke’s book showed him that he was wrong. He had read Scripture through a still too individualistic and white, middle class lens. He had not adequately explored the cultural importance, and the historical development, political structure, and socio-economic context of the places named in the Bible. He had missed all kinds of nuances and implications in Scripture that directly spoke to ministry in his urban context. Much of the church in New England reads Scripture with that same lens. In Worcester, all of the historic evangelical churches, have died, are in decline, or have moved to the suburbs. Their theology, values, strategies, and ministry models were shaped in white, middle class, rural/suburban, and individualistic contexts. Their theology and ministry methodology was not adequately contextualized to navigate the challenges of Worcester’s rapidly changing demographics and changing community needs. They did not have a theology that spoke to the social issues and needs the people in the inner city were facing. They did not have a theology that produced a missiology that propelled their members into the streets and homes and often-messy lives of their church neighbors in the inner city. They, in Bakke’s words, did not have a theology as big as the city.

⁹⁴ Magnuson, 165-166.

Charity or Development

In the conduct of urban ministry, how can the church meet the needs of the poor and marginalized in a way that is truly helpful? How can the church avoid a toxic charity that weakens initiative among the poor and leads to unhealthy dependencies? What is the difference between giving charity and promoting community development?

Robert Lupton has written extensively about the problem of toxic charity and about how to fix it in *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help and How to Reverse It*, and in *Charity Detox: What Charity Would Look Like if We Cared About Results*. Lupton writes movingly about the effects of poverty on the poor:

To be poor is to be marginalized, isolated from mainstream society, excluded from the privileges and advantages available to the rest of the culture. When people become isolated from and devalued by society, their dignity diminishes; their self-worth erodes. Isolation in inner cities or in rural communities more often than not means substandard education, a severe lack of viable job opportunities, and an almost total absence of upwardly mobile neighbors. Poor communities everywhere are universally plagued by exploitive businesses and a relentless, deadly undertow of criminal influences. When hard work yields only continued poverty, a person understandably abandons his or her ambition; a work ethic loses meaning. And when the pressures of survival take precedence over the motivation to achieve, hope begins to flicker. Resignation is inevitable, and a poverty of spirit begins to take root.⁹⁵

But Lupton strongly contends that charity in the form of handouts hurts rather than helps the poor. “When you do for others what they have the capacity to do for themselves, you are likely doing them a disservice.”⁹⁶ “Subsidizing inactivity is a bad practice. . . . Purposeful work is what establishes one’s place in society. In addition to

⁹⁵ Robert D. Lupton, *Charity Detox: What Charity Would Look Like If We Cared About Results*. New York: HarperOne, 2015, 17.

⁹⁶ Lupton, 26.

providing legitimate income, work is what gives one purpose, enables one to develop a skill, earns one a positive reputation.”⁹⁷

His charity axiom is:

Feed a person once, it elicits appreciation.
 Feed him twice, it creates anticipation.
 Feed him three times, it creates expectations
 Feed him four times, it becomes an entitlement.
 Feed him five times, it produces dependency.⁹⁸

To avoid this kind of toxic charity Lupton calls the church to recognize that every single human being has a God-given capacity to help both themselves and others.⁹⁹ Therefore, to avoid unhealthy dependencies and to preserve the dignity of the poor, effective compassion ministries must ask more from those being served, not less.¹⁰⁰

Lupton contends that you cannot serve someone out of poverty.¹⁰¹ He argues that only a decent job, one that pays a living wage and respects the dignity of the worker, will enable the poor to escape from poverty. He goes further to argue, “the primary creators of decent jobs are businesspeople who believe deeply in the free-enterprise system.”¹⁰²

A key insight related to community development and flourishing is that a good job alleviates poverty for an individual. But it does not end poverty in a depressed neighborhood: “The person with the good job eventually moves out of the neighborhood

⁹⁷ Lupton, 32.

⁹⁸ Lupton, 113-114.

⁹⁹ Lupton, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Lupton, 4.

¹⁰¹ Lupton, 3.

¹⁰² Lupton, 27.

because he or she has no reason to stay. So, it is good for the achieving individual or family but not necessarily good for the neighborhood.”¹⁰³

He notes further that “for a neighborhood to flourish, it must retain indigenous leaders (remainers), attract fresh leaders {relocaters), and draw achievers (returners) back to the community. Community transformation is about the quality of neighbors, not the quality of programs.”¹⁰⁴ The natural tendency of all people who have the capacity to rise from poverty is to escape the place of poverty. But the irony is that the people with the capacity to leave the distressed neighborhood are the very people who must choose to stay in order for the neighborhood as a whole to rise. A neighborhood will not flourish unless a critical mass of people with resources, skills, and leadership ability choose to stay and invest in the flourishing of the neighborhood.

Lupton says that the way to bring about change and flourishing to a distressed neighborhood is through reneighboring (people with skills and resources moving into the neighborhood and being good neighbors),¹⁰⁵ reconciliation (reaching across barriers of race, class and culture, and redistribution)¹⁰⁶, and redistribution (everyone using their gifts, talents and abilities to serve one another in mutual respect).¹⁰⁷ Journey Church is attempting to do these things in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The church is trying to be a good neighbor, seeking to bring about reconciliation, and endeavoring to mobilize people

¹⁰³ Lupton, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Lupton, 135-136.

¹⁰⁵ Lupton, 132.

¹⁰⁶ Lupton, 142.

¹⁰⁷ Lupton, 143.

to use their gifts and abilities in service to the Bell Hill neighborhood and to the city as a whole.

Ministry in a Multi-Ethnic, Multi-cultural Neighborhood

Gaining greater cross-cultural understanding and competency is crucial to effective ministry in the Journey Church neighborhood. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, in *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity*, addresses issues of diversity and social justice in the context of the Bible's message about the oneness of the human family, God's celebration of the diversity of peoples within the oneness of humanity, and God's mission to reconcile all peoples together as one in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸ Throughout his book, but particularly in his first chapter, "One Human Family, Many Cultural Expressions", DeYoung highlights God's concern for all the peoples of the world. Here, DeYoung bemoans the fact that the church in the U.S. keeps missing or gliding over the oneness of humanity and God's love for all the peoples of the world.

In chapter 2 of *Coming Together in the 21st Century*, Frank M. Yamada and Leticia A. Guardiola-Saenz talk about the formation of culture and identity and how they inform the way each of us reads and interprets the Bible. They argue:

As we read the Bible, let us keep in mind that culture shapes our faith and how we read. Since meaning is bound to context, there is no single general understanding of the Bible that will be valid for everyone; understanding is always particularized, modified by our context. . . . Devaluing or seeking to destroy cultural diversity hinders and limits our understanding of the world and of the Word. Valuing diversity and the richness that it brings makes us stronger as a people and allows us to discover and respect the otherness in ourselves as well.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ DeYoung, 41.

The researcher strongly agrees with Yamada and Guardiola-Saenz' broad point that valuing one another's cultural diversity adds richness and vitality to the church. He also agrees that one's culture and experiences shape the way one reads Scripture. He disagrees with their statement that "meaning is bound to context" and "there is no single general understanding of the Bible that will be valid for everyone."

The researcher believes that the Bible is the inspired word of God and argues that meaning is bound to the biblical author's intent and is embedded in the biblical text. Scripture, therefore, does not derive its meaning from the reader. However, no person or culture reads Scripture with a fully objective posture. Every person has biases and blind spots that are often unconscious and that affect his or her reading and interpreting of Scripture. Acts 10 records the Apostle Peter's encounter with the Roman Centurion, Cornelius. As the encounter unfolds, Peter comes to an unexpected revelation: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10: 34-35). Through a vision about God inviting him to eat animals he considered unclean and through a face-to-face encounter with a man he considered unclean, Peter comes to understand that his religious biases had prevented him from seeing what God was doing to reconcile all peoples to Himself. When people with different understandings of Scripture engage one another in honest and respectful dialogue, their respective biases get exposed and a more accurate reading of the text becomes possible.

The Bible has riches of truth and wisdom embedded in it that are not immediately obvious. Understanding the cultural and linguistic background of a passage of Scripture reveal hidden nuances in the text. They bring the reader closer to deriving its full

meaning and implications. The meaning is in the text not in the reader. But no one person or culture sees everything that Scripture has to teach. When different cultures, in dialogue with one another, bring their unique backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and questions to the text of Scripture they unearth more of the riches of Scripture and strengthen the church's understanding of God's word. The church is stronger and wiser when the church embraces one another's cultural distinctions and receives one another's cultural contributions.

Soong-Chan Rah speaks to some of the same themes - the unity in diversity of the human family, the need to repent of racism and classism and other forms of prejudice, and the call to pursue social and economic justice - as DeYoung. But his main goal is to make the case that the Church, if it is to be effective in ministry to our rapidly changing and increasingly diverse world, must become culturally intelligent. In his words, "the church needs to develop cultural intelligence in order to fully realize the many-colored tapestry that God is weaving together."¹¹⁰ To develop cultural intelligence, Rah argues that churches must be able to adequately define culture, know their own cultural and racial history, and develop a biblical/theological understanding of culture and the role of the church in relationship to its surrounding culture. Churches must "construct a working cultural paradigm" that enables them to develop "a multicultural worldview that incorporates different points of reference that leads to culturally intelligent actions."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 12.

¹¹¹ Soong-Chan Rah, 12-13.

Social psychologist Christena Cleveland points out: “There are many instances in which beautifully interdependent cross-cultural interaction goals fail because well-intentioned group members do not recognize status differences that maintain divides.”¹¹² She argues that, for positive cross-cultural interactions to work there must be equal status between the individuals or groups. This means that historic wrongs must be recognized, admitted, and made right, that high-status people must acknowledge their privilege, and that they must look for ways to give up their privilege by leaving their own comfort zones and going onto other people’s turf and submitting to their terms and leadership.¹¹³ Cleveland writes about the reasons people tend to use to categorize one another. She says that we are tempted to categorize because it helps us conserve limited mental energy. It is easier to categorize people than it is to try to get to know them as individuals, so we categorize and then avoid personal interactions. The net effect, Cleveland points out, is that our categorizing creates walls between different groups that get thicker and higher over time if not challenged.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

The city is where creation’s eternal future will unfold. It is where the shalom of God will reign in fullness and where humanity’s culture making potential will be fully unleashed. Sin will be purged from all creation, the curse of the fall will be lifted, and everything in all creation will joyfully surrender to the kingdom rule of God. Everything that God intended humankind to be and to do will emerge unhindered and be revealed

¹¹² Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Discovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 164.

¹¹³ Cleveland, 164-165.

¹¹⁴ Cleveland, 49.

without distortion in the holy city. In the New Jerusalem God's people will fully express their worship. It is in the New Jerusalem that God's glory will be most brilliantly displayed.

In the here-and-now, the church, as John Nugent argues, must strive to be God's better place. It must love God with all its heart and mind and soul and strength and must consistently seek first the kingdom above all other things. The church must also love one another joyfully and sacrificially and must proclaim the gospel humbly, boldly, persistently, and passionately. The church must also live out its eschatological hope by taking the lead in building God-honoring culture and seeking the shalom of the city as N.T. Wright and Robert Linthicum and others argue. To quote N. T. Wright again:

The point. ... is that a proper grasp of the (surprising) *future* hope held out to us in Jesus Christ leads directly and, to many people, equally surprisingly, to a vision of the *present* hope that is the basis of all Christian mission. To hope for a better future in this world—for the poor, the sick, the lonely and depressed, for the slaves, the refugees, the hungry and homeless, for the abused, the paranoid, the downtrodden and despairing, and in fact for the whole wide, wonderful, and wounded world—is not something else, something extra, something tacked on to the gospel as an afterthought. And to work for that intermediate hope, the surprising hope that comes forward from God's ultimate future into God's urgent present, is not a *distraction from* the task of mission and evangelism in the present. It is a central, essential, vital, and life-giving part of it.¹¹⁵

The church must love its neighbor as itself and want for that neighbor what it wants for itself - hope, security, opportunity and wholeness - reconciliation with God, with one's self, with all others, and with the creation. In the city that means proclaiming the gospel, welcoming the newcomer, the stranger, the refugee and the alien. It means recognizing and repenting of any prejudice, bias, ethnocentrism and racism. It means sharing resources, honoring people's dignity, working together as equals, seeking social justice and working toward reconciliation. It means abiding in Christ, resting in his grace,

¹¹⁵ N. T. Wright, 191-192.

feasting on his word, meeting together and encouraging one another as the body of Christ. It also means waging spiritual warfare against the principalities and powers, speaking truth to power, loving our enemies and doing good to those who hate us.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Nature of the Research

The ultimate goal of this project was to develop a model for urban ministry that Journey Community Church would use to serve, bless, and reach the Bell Hill neighborhood in the name of Jesus. To be viable, this urban ministry model needed to provide a way for Journey Church to get to know its neighborhood and to begin developing trust with its neighbors. The hope was that this model would, over time, contribute to the flourishing of the Bell Hill neighborhood and draw people to Jesus. In line with Jeremiah 29:7, Journey Church was looking for an urban ministry model that would enable it to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city [and particularly the Bell Hill neighborhood] to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” There was and is a strong sense among the leaders of Journey Church that God opened the door and enabled the church to move into its current neighborhood. Along with this there is both a desire and a sense of responsibility to reach and seek the shalom of this neighborhood. So, this research project was not simply interested in gathering data and gaining knowledge. It was focused on developing relationships, pointing people to Jesus, and fostering holistic neighborhood flourishing.

This project included both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The initial goal was to acquire accurate data that would enable the researcher to understand, in relational and aspirational ways, the people in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The ultimate

goal was to develop a ministry model that would enable Journey Church to serve and reach the Bell Hill neighborhood. A quantitative research approach was used to develop a demographic profile of both the Bell Hill neighborhood and of the city as a whole. Conn and Ortiz state:

[Demography] is the study of population, trends and movements. ... It is best defined as the study of size, territorial distribution and composition of the population, the study of the change in those factors, and particularly the study of the components of such change. ... For Christians, demography is not an end in itself but a means to an end. ... Demographics helps us discover (1) the *shalom* of God in community or the lack of it, (2) systemic as well as individual needs, and (3) the reasons a church is facing growth or decline.¹

Conn and Ortiz also point out that demographic analysis helps churches discern needs in advance and plan for the future.² This insight provided a lens through which to analyze the history of CrossRoads Community Church and to understand some of the reasons for its decline.

The demographic research enabled the researcher to gain a big-picture understanding of the make-up of the Bell Hill neighborhood and gave clues as to some of the potential needs and issues in the neighborhood. It revealed who resided in the Bell Hill neighborhood, their country of origin, household income, and level of education. But it could not reveal what the residents of the Bell Hill neighborhood felt about their lives or what they thought about the neighborhood and what change they wanted to see in their neighborhood.

A key goal of this project was to gain an insider's perspective of the community and to develop on-going relationships with people in the community. Through an action research methodology and a qualitative research approach using ethnography, and auto

¹ Conn and Ortiz, 289.

² Conn and Ortiz, 306.

ethnography, another layer of meaning was added to the understanding provided by the demographic data. The demographic data provided an initial focus and direction to the action research process and guided the selection of possible subjects for ethnographies.

Sarah Randall and Todd Koppenhaver state that:

Over the last two decades there has been a movement in demography toward complementing more traditional quantitative approaches with qualitative methods. The principal motivation of this diversification is to increase our understanding of demographic behaviour and phenomena.³

Randall and Koppenhaver further note:

Anthropologists may be interested in some of the same events as demographers – e.g., birth, marriage, death and migration – but tend to disapprove of the ways in which demographers study such important life events without exploring the social meanings attached to them. Ironically, the classic and fundamental (if somewhat problematic) anthropological method of participant observation is rarely among the repertoire of qualitative techniques adopted by demographic researchers; its absence symbolises the distance between the two disciplines and is unfortunate because sometimes only participant observation, with its necessary long-term immersion in a community, might really allow an understanding of the social complexities surrounding birth, marriage, reproduction, and death, as well as socially deviant demographic behaviour.⁴

Participant observation, which is an aspect of action research, was an essential tool to explore the “social meanings” of the demographic data and to understand “the social complexities” of the Bell Hill neighborhood. The opportunity to interact with people face to face, to observe their interactions in their own environments, to hear them share their perspectives on the Bell Hill neighborhood, to work together on shared tasks and objectives, and to ask questions was invaluable.

³ Sarah Randall and Todd Koppenhaver, “Qualitative Data in Demography: The Sound of Silence and Other Problems,” *Demographic Research: Volume 11, Article 3*, (August 26, 2004): 58, accessed January 3, 2016, www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol11/3/ DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2004.11.3.

⁴ Randall and Koppenhaver, 58-59.

There are a number of significant nuances related to engaging in action research but in essence:

[It] is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being—economic, political, psychological, spiritual—of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part.

So action research is about working toward practical outcomes, and also about creating new forms of understanding, since action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless. Action research is only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus.⁵

The action research provided a way for the researcher to begin developing relationships with people in the Bell Hill neighborhood and thus to begin gaining an insider perspective on the needs and aspirations of Bell Hill residents. This insider perspective, in turn, shaped the development of strategies to engage the neighborhood in culturally appropriate ways.

The researcher took an ethnographic approach in his participant observation and analysis.

Ethnography is the study of social interaction and culture groups, whether these groups are defined as societies, communities, organizations or teams. The term ethnography comes from the Greek words *ethnos* (people) and *graphei* (to write). The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's

⁵ Peter Reardon and Hilary Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, accessed January 2, 2016, http://faculty.mu.edu.sa/public/uploads/1346012794.621handbook_of_action_research.pdf.

world views and actions, as well as the nature of the location they inhabit (Hughes 1992). As Hammersley (1985) stated, “the task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices of the people in these settings. The aim is to ‘get inside’ the way each group of people sees the world” (p 152).⁶

It was the desire to “get inside” the way people in the Bell Hill neighborhood saw the world that led the researcher to this method of research.

In ethnographic research:

1. People’s actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher - such as in experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. In other words, research takes place “in the field.”
2. Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.
3. Data collection is, for the most part, relatively ‘unstructured’, in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis.
4. The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.
5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most.⁷

Conn and Ortiz warn that when doing ethnographic research in an unfamiliar culture the possibility of understanding a situation incorrectly is high. Therefore, it is critical to find “informants” who can help the ethnographer interpret correctly what he or

⁶ Scott Reeves, Jennifer Peller, Joanne Goldman, and Simon Kitto, “Ethnography in Qualitative Educational Research: AMEE Guide No. 80,” *Medical Teacher*, vol. 35, no. 8 (June 2013): e1366, accessed January 2, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/243964702_Ethnography_in_qualitative_educational_research_AMEE_Guide_No_80.

⁷ Reeves, Peller, Goldman and Kitto, e1366.

she observes.⁸ Informants “not only help fieldworkers get information but also assist them in understanding the facts and their meaning, and in developing hypotheses.”⁹ This was certainly the case for this researcher. Informants provided the researcher with access into their respective communities, provided information and understanding, and helped him develop trust in the community.

A key function of the informant is to enable the fieldworker to rightly interpret the language of the group being investigated. “Words familiar to the fieldworker may be used in an entirely different way in the community under investigation.”¹⁰ Informants helped the researcher understand the unspoken signs and communication patterns used by their communities. It was through conversations with informants that the researcher began to understand how people in shame and honor cultures communicated.

The researcher also employed autoethnography in his research. “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.”¹¹

Autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. For instance, a researcher decides who, what, when, where, and how to research, decisions necessarily tied to institutional requirements (e.g., Institutional Review Boards), resources (e.g., funding), and personal circumstance (e.g., a researcher studying cancer because of personal experience with cancer) . . . Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and

⁸ Conn and Ortiz, 278.

⁹ Conn and Ortiz, 278.

¹⁰ Conn and Ortiz, 278-279.

¹¹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, “Auto Ethnography: An Overview,” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 12, no. 1 (November 24, 2010).

the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist.¹²

It became apparent to the researcher that much of his own perspective about poverty, social justice, inequality and the need for the church to engage systemic injustice in the city came from his own experiences. The researcher grew up in a poor, working class, linguistically isolated immigrant family, a background very similar to that of many people in the Bell Hill neighborhood of Worcester. Those experiences affect the way he reads Scripture and sees the world. Autoethnography provided an opportunity to better understand himself and to apply insights concerning the formation of his personal identity and worldview into better understanding and relating to residents of the Bell Hill community.

Data

Primary Data

The primary data came from the researcher's fieldwork with particular groupings of people living in the Journey Church neighborhood and with informants from within those communities. Data also came from interviews with key leaders of Journey Community Church, and from interviews with several former board members of CrossRoads Community Church @ BSBC.¹³ Additional data came from "neighborhood walking" and from participation in the Bell Hill Neighborhood Association, the Bell Hill Task Force, and the Belmont Street School Site Council. Data was also collected from conversations and a "ride-along" with Worcester Police Officers assigned to the Bell Hill neighborhood. A "ride-along" is riding in a police cruiser throughout a shift to experience

¹² Ellis, Adams and Bochner.

¹³ In July 2014, Belmont St. Baptist Church changed its name to CrossRoads Community Church @BSBC.

the neighborhood through the eyes of the police officer). An additional data source came from observations and conversations during the researcher's weekly volunteer reading to several kindergarten students at Belmont Street Community School. Another significant data source came from on-going interactions with several refugee families in the Bell Hill neighborhood. And a third significant data source came from a neighborhood Bible study hosted by a Latino couple in their apartment that the researcher is leading.

Secondary Data

Secondary data included biblical, theological and secular literature dealing with issues relevant to the problem of this project. Demographic data for the Bell Hill neighborhood and Worcester as a whole was derived from the U. S. Census data, and from the Worcester Public Schools Department. Data also came from the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, and Worcester Magazine. Additional data was gathered from the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, the Mosakowski Institute for Public Enterprise at Clark University and the Public Policy Center at UMASS Dartmouth.

Project Overview

The first step was to engage the biblical literature and develop a theology of the city and of urban ministry. An extension of this step was to engage Journey Community Church with this biblical and theological reflection. The engagement took place through multiple conversations, through preaching and teaching, and through the writing of small group curricula. The goal was to develop a common vision for mission and to strengthen the commitment of Journey Church to go out into the Bell Hill community and be good neighbors to that community in the name of Jesus.

The second step was to review the current literature related to the purpose and mission of God in the world, to the role of the church in the world and to its application to urban ministry. This literature review engaged with current debates concerning eschatology and ecclesiology to inform both a theology of the city and to develop an urban ministry model for Journey Community Church. A particular focus was on the interplay of shalom-seeking and culture making in shaping a vision and model for urban ministry. Part of the focus of the literature review came in response to questions and pushback that the researcher received from the Journey congregation concerning his views about eschatology and about the church's engagement with the public square.

The third step was to produce a demographic of the Bell Hill neighborhood and an ethnographic profile of representative students in a kindergarten classroom at the Belmont Street School. The researcher brought autoethnography into his research process as a way to reflect on his ethnographic work.

A fourth step was to review the history of CrossRoads Community Church and to interview several former leaders of that church in order to understand some of the reasons for its decline. The goal was to understand CrossRoads' history so as not to repeat its mistakes.

The fifth step was to identify several neighborhood "gatekeepers" who would enable the researcher to gain an insider perspective of their communities, introduce the researcher to their respective communities, and help the researcher develop on-going relationships with members of their community.

The sixth step was to participate in neighborhood forums and community activities and causes in order to learn about neighborhood issues, concerns, and

perspectives, to develop friendships, credibility and trust in the neighborhood, and to begin making a contribution to the well-being of the community.

The seventh step was to develop a preliminary ministry model that Journey Community Church is using to reach and serve its neighborhood. This ministry model lays out a biblical and theological vision for seeking shalom in the neighborhood, aims at getting Journey members into the neighborhood, and is focused on two communities within the Bell Hill neighborhood: Belmont Street Community School and Nepalese and other refugees who live in the Bell Hill neighborhood. A third community, people in recovery programs, may become a strategic focus in the next year.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents research analysis and findings in the forms of a demographic profile of the Bell Hill neighborhood, a case study of Belmont Street Baptist Church/CrossRoads Community Church, and an ethnography of a kindergarten class at Belmont Street Community School. Conn and Ortiz note, “demographics helps us discover (1) the shalom of God in community or the lack of it, (2) systemic as well as individual needs, and (3) the reasons a church is facing growth or decline.”¹

Demographic research provided a foundation for doing community analysis and developing ministry priorities and strategies to serve and reach the Bell Hill neighborhood. The demography of the Bell Hill neighborhood was primarily developed using U. S. Census Bureau data, Worcester City data, Worcester Public Schools data, data from realtor sites, from personal observation derived through frequent neighborhood “walk-about” and prayer walks in the Bell Hill neighborhood, and from conversations with Bell Hill residents at the Bell Hill Neighborhood Association meetings. The demographic profile portrays both what is the current demographic makeup of the Bell Hill neighborhood and highlights some key demographic trends.

The case study looked at the history and practice of Belmont Street/CrossRoads Church and applies lessons from that history to Journey Church’s ministry in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Loosely using a grounded theory approach, the case study presents

¹ Conn and Ortiz, 289.

possible reasons that Belmont Street/CrossRoads Church failed to adapt to the changing demographics of the Bell Hill neighborhood. The case study suggests that some of the factors that inhibited Belmont Street/CrossRoads Church from reaching the Bell Hill neighborhood may be factors in Journey's ministry current ministry practice as well. The case study concludes with some strategies that Journey might use to better engage and reach the Bell Hill neighborhood.

The researcher chose to do an ethnography of a kindergarten class at Belmont Street Community School for two reasons. First, the demographic makeup of the class is a snapshot of how the Bell Hill neighborhood is continuing to change. It helped the researcher understand the implications of the demographic trends in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Second, the mindset and the practices that enable ethnography to be written also enable cross-cultural outreach ministry to be effective. John W. Creswell describes ethnography as “a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group. ... As a process, ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and interviews the group participants.”¹ Effective ministry requires that the church finds ways to get to know and understand the “values, behaviors, beliefs, and language” of the people it is trying to reach. The process that enables ethnography to be written also enables trusting relationships to be developed and provides the ground for fruitful evangelism to take place.

¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2013), 90.

Demography of the Bell Hill Neighborhood

Bell Hill is made up of the one square mile of land between Shrewsbury Street, a major commercial and industrial center, I-290 and Green Hill Park. Fifty-three percent of the neighborhood has an annual household income of less than \$30,000.00, and seventy-seven percent graduated from high school (includes equivalency).² Nineteen percent of the homes in the Bell Hill neighborhood are owner-occupied.³ There are five Section 8 housing developments in the neighborhood within a half-mile radius of Journey Church. The neighborhood also includes UMASS Memorial Hospital, Adcare Hospital, several medical office buildings, a cluster of five addiction recovery halfway houses, and two low-income elderly housing complexes.

What the neighborhood does not have are fast food restaurants and gas stations. Many Bell Hill residents do not have cars and either walk or rely on the public transportation system, which is very inadequate. It may be that there are no fast food restaurants in the Bell Hill neighborhood because many of the refugees and recent immigrants are not accustomed to fast food and because they cannot afford to eat out much.

The Bell Hill neighborhood also lacks an extensive church presence and is neglected by other religions as well. In the last few years, two Roman Catholic churches and a Russian Orthodox Church shut down, while the Belmont A.M.E. Zion Church and the Ghanaian Baptist Church moved out of the Bell Hill neighborhood. Currently, in

² "Bell Hill," Find the Home, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://places.findthefhome.com/l/160368/Bell-Hill-Worcester-MA>.

³ "Demographics of Bell Hill," Trulia, https://www.trulia.com/real_estate/Bell_Hill-Worcester/23735/community-info/.

addition to Journey Church, there is one Roman Catholic Church and two small Baptist churches. There is also a Chinese Gospel Church that caters exclusively to the Chinese (mostly Chinese university students) in the Worcester area. The Islamic Society of Greater Worcester moved into the space formerly owned by the Russian Orthodox Church. There is no Jewish synagogue in the neighborhood and the researcher has seen no evidence of Buddhist or Hindu temples in the neighborhood. What is particularly striking about the absence of churches is that the Bell Hill neighborhood has the second largest population of all the neighborhoods in Worcester.

The 2010 U.S. Census showed that sixty-one percent of the neighborhood, at that time, was non-white (non-Hispanic). Hispanics made up about twenty-eight percent of the Bell Hill population, African Americans made up twenty-three percent, Asians made up six percent, and Native Americans made up one percent. The category of “unspecified” accounted for the remaining percentage of people.⁴

Demographic trends since the 2010 census indicate that the non-white percentage has increased every year.⁵ In Plumley Village, a federally subsidized apartment complex in the Bell Hill neighborhood, eighty three percent of its four hundred residents are Hispanic and fifty percent are under the age of eighteen.

Student enrollment data from the two public elementary schools confirms that the non-white percentage is growing. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the student enrollment figures at Belmont Street School showed that 47.6 percent of the school was Hispanic, 22 percent was African American, 18 percent was white, 9 percent was Asian, 2.6 percent

⁴ Find the Home, “Bell Hill,” accessed January 6, 2016.

⁵ “American Fact Finder,” United States Census Bureau, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

was multi-race, and 0.3 percent was Native American.⁶ The student enrollment figures at City View School were 51 percent Hispanic, 28 percent white, 12.2 percent African American, 4.8 percent multi-race, and 3.3 percent Asian.⁷

One of the indicators that the Bell Hill neighborhood is continuing to change and diversify is the number of businesses and restaurants targeting diverse ethnic groups and cultures. Faith N Hope Farms and Albino Grocery and Deli are African-owned and cater to Africans. Surya Indian Cuisine and Indian Food and Convenience Store are among several businesses that according to their signs cater to “Indians, Nepalese and Asians.” Belmont Vegetarian caters to Indians, Nepalese and Bhutanese. Miranda Bread, Do Cantinho, and Terra Brasilis Restaurant cater to the rapidly growing Brazilian population in the Bell Hill neighborhood. There are several nail salons that are owned and operated by Vietnamese. A variety of travel agencies, check cashing and pay day loans stores cater to the Ghanaian and other African communities. Indians and Iraqis seem to have captured the mobile phone repair market. Greeks still own the pizza restaurants in the neighborhood but most of the people who now work in them are Hispanic. The Bell Hill neighborhood is still heavily Hispanic (just under fifty percent) but is visibly becoming more and more diverse and less and less white.

Bell Hill is a “gateway neighborhood.” It is one of the neighborhoods in Worcester where recent immigrants and refugees go. They gravitate to Bell Hill because housing costs are cheaper than elsewhere in Worcester (though rising rapidly in Bell Hill and throughout the city because new housing stock is not being built in Worcester) and

⁶ School and District Profiles, Belmont St. Community School, accessed January 7, 2016 <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=03480020&orgtypecode=6&>.

⁷ School and District Profiles.

there are lots of three-decker apartment buildings and other multi-unit apartments available for rent. Landlords are willing to rent to these immigrants and refugees without asking a lot of questions about immigration status or the number of people in the household. These landlords do not ask questions but many of them exploit their renters. The apartments they rent out tend to be badly neglected and not up to code. They get away with this because the people who rent from them do not know their legal rights or because they are afraid they will be evicted.

Another key reason recent immigrants and refugees move into the Bell Hill neighborhood is because they can find people like them, people who are from their country or share similar cultural values and experiences. This is clearly the case for the Nepalese and Bhutanese in the neighborhood. Well over one hundred of them are clustered in five apartment buildings next to or very near one another on Eastern Avenue. There is also a cluster of refugee families from Iraq on Oak Ave. And a fairly large number of refugee families from Somalia all live within two blocks of one another in the Catherine Street area.

The Bell Hill neighborhood hosts a substantial and growing number of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, Vietnam, Cambodia along with an influx of Americans that moved to Worcester from Puerto Rico. There are also a substantial number of refugees in the Bell Hill neighborhood, primarily from Nepal, Bhutan, Somalia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Burundi, Iraq, and Syria. Regarding the influx of refugees into Worcester, the Mosakowski Institute for Public Policy at Clark University notes:

Between 2007 and 2012, Worcester welcomed 2,196 refugees, more than any other municipality in Massachusetts. Refugees who arrived in Worcester during

this period make up 1.2 % of Worcester's current population but represent 26% of all refugees arriving in Massachusetts (8,468) during that time.

The refugees who entered Worcester between 2007 and 2012 came from 24 different countries. The three countries that accounted for the greatest number of refugees were Burma (30 %), Bhutan (26.6 %) and Iraq (16.6 %).

Worcester is home to 37,498 foreign-born individuals. This group constitutes over 20% of the total population of Worcester.

Roughly 54% of the foreign-born population in Worcester estimates that they speak English "less than very well". This rate is about 10% higher than the number of foreign-born individuals statewide reporting a similar lack of proficiency.

Even within the foreign-born population of Worcester, educational attainment varies greatly, and appears to be influenced by the educational patterns of the countries of origin.

The foreign-born population in Worcester has a higher rate of employment and labor force participation than its native counterpart. However, full-time native workers out-earn foreign- born workers by more than 20%.⁸

What the Mosakowski Institute highlights about refugees also applies to the recent immigrants in the Bell Hill neighborhood. A high percentage do not speak English well, have a low level of educational attainment and work in very poor paying jobs.

Dick Taylor argues that the purpose of research is "to discover where people in your neighborhood are being denied their rightful shalom."⁹ The researcher discovered numerous situations in which the flourishing of Bell Hill residents was compromised. A research team from WPI determined that the Bell Hill neighborhood was one of five neighborhoods in Worcester that experienced environmental injustice. They found forty-five hazardous waste sites in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

⁸ Anita Fábos, Maya Pilgrim, Muinate Said-Ali, Joseph Krahe, Joseph and Zack Ostiller, "Understanding Refugees in Worcester, MA," *Mosakowski Institute for Public Enterprise*, Paper 32 (2015): 3, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://commons.clarku.edu/mosakowskiinstitute/32>.

⁹ Dick Taylor, "A Practical Guide for Beginning Local Ministry," *Sojourners* (June 1979), 23, quoted in Conn and Ortiz, 290.

Along the one-mile strip of Shrewsbury Street there are currently over 30 sites producing land, air, and toxic hazards. These sites are mainly car dealerships/ repair shops and parts processing and manufacturing plants. Several of these plants release hazardous chemicals that are commonly used for the production of synthetic plastics. The full extent of the lasting effects these chemicals have on the environment is not entirely known, but they pose a serious threat to the health of nearby residents and other forms of life.¹⁰

Their conclusion was:

Our findings strongly indicate the presence of environmental injustice in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts. The environmental hazard maps we created clearly show higher concentrations of hazards in lower income and higher minority neighborhoods. These maps also show that our assigned communities of Oak Hill, Bell Hill, Piedmont, Quinsigamond Village, and Main South contain a higher concentration of environmental hazards than the majority of Worcester's communities. Our data also indicates that there are lower concentrations of environmental hazards in higher income and lower minority communities. The highest income communities of Forrest Grove and West Tatnuck are shown on our map to contain the lowest concentration of environmental hazards. Following the definition that environmental injustice is the uneven distribution of environmental hazards as a result of demographic factors, these findings indicate that environmental injustice may exist in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts.¹¹

Students at Belmont Street Community School were chronically absent from school because of asthma attacks. At the request of Dr. Susan Hodgkins, principal of Belmont Street School, a team from UMASS Memorial Hospital initiated a home visit program to discover the factors triggering asthma flare-ups. A key factor was that these students were living in sub-standard housing that exposed them to "mold, dust mites, mice and roach infestations."¹² The researcher has been in the apartments of a number of Bell Hill families and can personally attest to the fact that many of them are in appalling condition.

¹⁰ Bowen, Hodge, Ilacqua, and McDonough, 41-42.

¹¹ Bowen, Hodge, Ilacqua and McDonough, 52.

¹² "UMass Memorial Community Benefits Report 2013," UMass Memorial Health Care, November 4, 2013, accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.slideshare.net/umassmemorial/2013-community-benefits-report-final>, 5.

Beyond the degradation of the air, land, and water, there is the degradation of the built environment - streets, houses, public parks and playgrounds and public buildings such as schools. The Belmont Street School has almost 600 students and a very tiny, asphalt playground, with a few small pieces of unusable playground equipment due to vandalism. The playground is too small for children to run and really play and it is rundown and ugly because there are not enough funds to keep it protected and well kept. The physical environment of the school does not promote the experience of shalom for its students and teachers and staff.

The Bell Hill neighborhood has an active gang presence and there have been shootings in the neighborhood. On August 24, 2016, a young man was shot and killed on the corner of Elliott St and Eastern Avenue. The shooting took place about a half-block away from where the researcher led a Bible study. In several, independent conversations at Belmont Street School (with one of the teachers, with the vice principal, and with one of the parents) concern was raised about the gangs pressuring fifth and sixth graders at Belmont Street School to affiliate with them. Meanwhile, there are very few after-school recreational activities available to the kids in the neighborhood and limited access to green space.

The neighborhood is a food desert, meaning there are not supermarkets, farmer's markets or other places where Bell Hill residents can find affordable fruits and vegetables and other nutritious food. As a result, Bell Hill residents tend to rely on convenience stores, which tend to be stocked with processed, sugar, and fat laden foods that can lead to obesity.

The neighborhood is also a laundry desert. In a conversation with Belmont Street School Principal Susan Hodgkins in June 2016, the researcher asked her what the school needed that Journey Church might be able to supply. The first thing Principal Hodgkins said was “we could use underwear, sweatpants and sneakers.” She went on to explain that students come to school with soiled and dirty clothes and that this inhibits classroom learning. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, many of the students at the school have few changes of clothes. Second, they have limited access to laundry facilities. Very few apartments in the neighborhood have laundry facilities and there are no public laundry facilities in the neighborhood. An additional factor in limiting the ability of families at Belmont St. School to provide clean clothes for their children is that they are hard-pressed to afford laundry detergent. Dr. Hodgkins told the researcher that the lack of clean clothes was a factor in older students (fourth graders on up) choosing not to go to school. They did not go to school because they felt embarrassed by the state (and sometimes style or brand) of their clothes.

A Case Study of CrossRoads Community Church @BSBC

Introduction

No ministry takes place in a vacuum. It is necessary for Journey Church to understand its own history and background in order to effectively reach its new neighborhood. It is also important for Journey to understand the history and background of CrossRoads Community Church@BSBC, the church that previously inhabited the building in which Journey Church now resides. This is important because there are some similarities and some overlap between these two churches. About forty people who are now part of Journey were part of CrossRoads Church previously. Some of these former

CrossRoads people are now moving into leadership roles at Journey Church and they bring their history and perspective with them.

The key similarity between the two churches is that neither church congregation reflected the residents of the Bell Hill neighborhood in culture, language, socio-economic status, educational level or way of doing things. Most of the Journey Church members come from suburban middle and even upper middle class backgrounds. Many of them are college students, including many graduate students, and there are many white-collar professionals in the congregation. The Bell Hill neighborhood, on the other hand, is predominantly poor and working class with very many households below the federal poverty line. Many Bell Hill residents are also not native English language speakers. The challenge that Belmont Street Baptist/CrossRoads Church faced is the same challenge Journey Church now faces. Neither church congregation had the same background or looked, spoke, and lived like the majority of the residents of the Bell Hill neighborhood. Belmont Street/CrossRoads Church never adapted to the changes in its neighborhood. They never learned to contextualize their preaching, teaching, and ministry models to fit their environment. The question for Journey Church is: Will Journey Church develop the competencies and make the changes necessary to reach a neighborhood very different from that of the church?

In an attempt to reach the Bell Hill neighborhood, one of Belmont Street Baptist Church's pastors, George Kohl, hired a bilingual Hispanic pastor, Humberto (Bert) Soto, to be his associate pastor. Pastor Bert actively engaged the Bell Hill neighborhood and was well respected and liked by many in the neighborhood. Even so, not many neighborhood residents joined Belmont Street Church during that time. It is this

researcher's opinion that the reason for this was that while Bert was active in the neighborhood, the Belmont Street Church as a whole was not. Pastor Bert got to know and be known by the neighborhood. The church as a whole did not. Pastor Bert developed personal good will and trust in the neighborhood; this neighborhood good will and trust did not extend to Belmont Street Church.

The researcher has been hired by Journey Church to be its outreach pastor. Like Pastor Bert, this researcher has been very actively engaging the Bell Hill community and is starting to develop trust and good will in the neighborhood. However, the researcher will fail in his ministry if he does not equip and motivate the church as a whole to leave the confines of the church building and go out into the neighborhood. Outreach pastors do not reach a neighborhood. Outwardly reaching churches do. To reach and bless the Bell Hill neighborhood, the Journey Church body must become an incarnational and relational presence in the neighborhood. In the short term this means getting involved in the activities of the neighborhood and showing up where Bell Hill residents congregate and recreate. It means opening up the church building to neighborhood use and joining them whenever possible as they use the building. Ideally, in the longer term, becoming a relational and incarnational presence means encouraging and helping Journey members to move into the neighborhood and becoming part of the neighborhood's fabric.

Journey Church must give up any desire to always be in control and in charge. It must be willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable at times. It must be humble and patient, slow to speak and quick to listen, observe, and learn. It must be open, curious, self-reflective and willing to change. Most definitely, Journey Church must be prayerful, communal, and anchored in Christ.

A Brief History of Belmont Street/CrossRoads Church

The First Swedish Baptist Church of Worcester (as CrossRoads Community Church@ BSBC was originally named) was founded in 1880 to serve the large number of Swedish immigrants who had come to Worcester to work in the city's numerous manufacturing plants. In 1904 The First Swedish Baptist Church purchased a lot in the Bell Hill neighborhood of Worcester, on the corner of Belmont and Fountain Streets

This Swedish Baptist church remained a Swedish church, but began using English in some of its programs and services in Swedish in the late 1920s. In February 1942 the church decided that all church services would be conducted in English and on January 13, 1943 Belmont Street Baptist Church was adopted as the new name for the church.

By the late 1950s the Swedish community of Worcester (as part of a general white flight trend) was dispersing to the suburbs and the neighborhood around the church was changing in its demographic makeup. But the Belmont Street Baptist Church, unlike a number of other white, middle class churches of the time, chose to stay in the neighborhood. However, the church was affected by this white flight. In 1958, Belmont Street Baptist Church's membership was 507 people. By 2005 the church membership had fallen to about 180 people. This number included a Chinese and a Vietnamese church plant, neither of which were integrated into the main body of Belmont Street Baptist Church. This decline in numbers was despite the fact that a number of other white city churches closed down during this period and members from those churches who wanted to remain in a city church came to Belmont Street Baptist Church.

In response to the changing demographics of both its immediate neighborhood and the city of Worcester as a whole, Belmont Street Baptist Church, while proud of its

Swedish heritage, tried to welcome people of other ethnicities and began looking for ways to reach out to the neighborhood and to serve the poor. In the 1970s it started a bus ministry to pick up children and youth from the neighborhood to bring them to church services and activities and it participated in a Head Start program sponsored by the city of Worcester. And beginning in the 1980s Belmont Street Baptist Church began to reach out to the new immigrant groups coming into the city. They helped start a Vietnamese Church plant, shared their facility with a Chinese congregation, and later, during the tenure of Senior Pastor George Kohl (1995-2011), with a Brazilian Church and a Ghanaian Church. While Pastor George had a warm personal relationship with the pastors of each of these non-Anglo churches, there was not substantial interaction between these churches with one another. They shared building space but did not share life together.

Meanwhile, the Belmont Street neighborhood continued to change, and that change accelerated in the late 1980s and continues to the present. From primarily white and middle class, the neighborhood had become mostly poor and working class, and very ethnically, culturally and racially diverse neighborhood with a majority Latino population but also with sizable numbers of Africans from Ghana, the Congo and Somalia, African-Americans, and recently arrived immigrants and refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, Nepal and Bhutan.

Belmont Street Baptist Church was unwilling or unable to keep up with the change, or attract, in large numbers, the new people who were moving into the neighborhood. A number of its long-standing families left Belmont Street Baptist for suburban churches and the church both declined in numbers and became older in its

demographics. In 2011, Pastor George Kohl, in the midst of conflict over the direction and leadership of the church, reluctantly chose to resign as senior pastor of Belmont Street Baptist Church. Pastor Ron Cousineau served a very short-term interim pastorate and then in 2012, Howard Cassidy-Moffatt became the senior pastor of Belmont Street Baptist.

Pastor Howard, with his wife Laura who served as the Director of Christian Education and Spiritual Formation, came to Belmont Street Baptist Church with a great desire to reverse the decline at Belmont Street Baptist Church. They called the church to a renewed vision and commitment to reach out to the neighborhood framed as a charge to “Pray, Relate, and Invite.” They also changed the name of the church to “CrossRoads Community Church @BSBC” to better express the outward vision of the church and they focused on initiatives to try to reach the children and youth in the neighborhood. But the changes they made and the new initiatives they started did not halt the church’s decline. In a sermon on January 11, 2015, Pastor Howard said to his congregation:

The kids and grandkids of the people who knew this as their church home when they were little have moved away and find fellowship and church membership nearer to where they live. Consequently, there has not been (for some time) even biological/generational growth in the church. The “Family Church” dynamic has dissipated. Many of those who remain do not look like the neighborhood - a neighborhood which has changed complexion and which continues to change. More than half of those who currently attend the CrossRoads have addresses outside Worcester.¹³

By February 2015 Pastor Howard Cassidy-Moffatt and the elders of CrossRoads had concluded that their church could not remain open much longer. The changes that Pastor Howard and his wife Laura initiated were too little and too late. Conn and Ortiz

¹³ Howard Cassidy-Moffatt, “State of the Church Sermon,” CrossRoads Community Church @ BSBC, January 11, 2015.

refer to the work of Kenneth W. Inskoop to argue that there are both external and internal or institutional elements that influence the growth or decline of a church. External elements are those related to the context in which the church's ministry takes place. Internal elements are those related to the structure and traditions of the church that effect how it functions.¹⁴

Clearly, the external elements related to Crossroads Church had changed dramatically. Sixty years of white flight from the city and the influx of people from a broad variety of cultures, ethnicities and races (along with the secularization of New England) had deprived the church of its previous constituency: people coming from white, English speaking, educated, middle class, religious backgrounds.

While the external elements had changed significantly, the internal elements of CrossRoads had not changed nearly enough to keep up with the changes in its external environment. In terms of its internal functioning, the church lacked the vision, flexibility, energy, and skills it needed to engage the new people in its neighborhood with their dizzying variety of backgrounds, languages, and needs. It was not willing or not able to learn the "language of the people" (the vocabulary, thought patterns, worldview, cultural values, life situations of the new people in the neighborhood).¹⁵ As a result the CrossRoads congregation could not truly relate to their new neighbors, could not feel comfortable with them, welcome them, and make them feel comfortable, and they could not embrace them as equal members in the church body. While most in the CrossRoads

¹⁴ Conn and Ortiz, 258.

¹⁵ Conn and Ortiz, 259.

congregation cared about the people in their church neighborhood they could not demonstrate to the neighborhood residents that the church truly valued them.

CrossRoads tried to reach the neighborhood largely through church-based programming rather than through neighborhood relationship building and involvement. They were willing to welcome people who came into their building or who participated in their programs. But the CrossRoads people were uncomfortable with the Bell Hill neighborhood and, with a few exceptions, were not willing to go out into the neighborhood and take the steps that would enable them to get to know, understand, and identify with their Bell Hill neighbors. Their ministry approach was to create programs that met in their church with the hope that neighborhood residents would come and then stay. Some neighborhood residents did come to the church but very few stayed because they felt like outsiders when they came. The CrossRoads people did not see the neighborhood as their home. The Bell Hill neighborhood was simply where their church building was located but it was not in any way their home. The neighborhood people, on their part, saw the church as an alien and disengaged presence in their neighborhood and felt little reason to enter the church.

From the 1980s on, a succession of the pastors of Belmont Street Baptist/CrossRoads Community Church recognized that the church was allowing structural and cultural barriers to impede its neighborhood outreach. But they were unable to cast a widely held vision or implement an effective strategy for change.

Pastor George Kohl and Pastor Howard Cassidy-Moffitt certainly wanted to understand, welcome, and reach the newcomers in their community and personally invested themselves to do so. Both pastors lobbied for change and offered plans to initiate

change. But the people in the church were extremely resistant to changing the style of their worship services, the way they appointed leaders, the way they made decisions as a church body, and the way they sought to engage and reach the neighborhood. Often, important changes were put on hold even when there seemed to be broad agreement in favor of change because there was a small vocal constituency opposed to the changes. The CrossRoads people could not see how their internal culture and organizational structures were getting in the way of reaching their neighborhood.

The people who wanted to keep the church as it was stymied the people who were willing to make changes. This researcher interviewed several former CrossRoads members who had been part of the Elder Board in the late 2000s through Pastor Howard's tenure as senior pastor. Each one confirmed that there was great conflict on the Board, which led to an inability to make decisions and agree on a direction to take as a church. The inflexibility and inefficiency in its institutional functioning did not allow CrossRoads Community Church to adapt to its changing ministry context. As a result, the church was stumbling toward extinction and neither wishful thinking or even wishful prayer was going to change that fact.

On June 30, 2015, CrossRoads Community Church ended its tenure as a church and turned over its building to the Journey Community Church. The CrossRoads leadership and church body saw no way they could press on. In order to continue the legacy of the church, they passed on the baton to Journey.

Learning from History

On July 1, 2015, when Journey Church moved into the building that formerly housed Belmont Street Baptist Church CrossRoads Church, there was not a single person

in the Journey congregation who lived in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Journey Church had residents from the neighborhood visit the church over the next 18 months but most had not stayed or did not attend regularly. Part of the reason was that Journey has not yet learned “the language of the people” in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The pastoral concerns, vocabulary, and sermon illustrations that Journey used in its preaching and teaching were alien to many Bell Hill residents and did not speak to the realities of their world.

One of the neighborhood residents who visited Journey Church works in a neighborhood diner that the researcher began frequenting when Journey Church moved into the Bell Hill neighborhood. She visited Journey Church a few times but stopped coming. Part of the reason she stopped coming was because she sometimes works on Sunday mornings. But she also told the researcher that another reason was that she did not understand the sermons. They were too theoretical for her and presumed biblical and historical knowledge she did not have. They did not speak into her life in a way that was readily apparent to her, in a way that she could access and apply.

Just as Belmont Street Church/CrossRoads Church did, Journey has created a number of programs to draw neighborhood residents to the church. Throughout the summer of 2016 Journey hosted a number of activities and programs to capture the attention of the Bell Hill residents. The demographic research showed that the Bell Hill neighborhood had a very high percentage of households with children and youth. It also showed that there were not many free programs and activities for children and youth during the summer. So, Journey put together a slate of programs and activities that catered to the perceived needs of the Bell Hill neighborhood. Free outdoor family-

friendly movies (with subtitles in Spanish because that was the most common language spoken in the neighborhood) were shown in the church parking lot that drew an average attendance of over two hundred people each night. A “Splash Fest” in August 2016 drew over four hundred people over the course of the day. Open gym nights that begin over the summer and continue consistently draw about thirty neighborhood teens. The Journey Church body did a wonderful job greeting and welcoming all the people who came to these events. And people in the neighborhood were excited about what Journey Church was doing. A number of them said that they would return on a Sunday for worship service. Some Bell Hill residents did visit one or two of Journey’s Sunday worship services. But very few neighborhood people stayed and became part of Journey Church.

It might be fair to say that the people in the Bell Hill neighborhood loved the summer programs that Journey Church offered but did not feel comfortable with Journey Church’s services and culture. The researcher’s conversations with some visitors from the neighborhood revealed that the visitors sensed a great cultural divide and did not feel like they fit in. Their backgrounds and life experiences were very different than the backgrounds and life experiences of the people they saw at Journey. They smoked and could not sit through an entire Journey worship service (generally about 85 minutes long). Their grammar was not always perfect and profanities sometimes came out. They struggled with addictions and finances and had a hard a hard time finding and keeping jobs. They had kids but were not married. Some were in situations where they experienced domestic abuse and felt ashamed. They could not believe that people at Journey would be able and willing to relate to them. They could not imagine inviting

people from Journey over for a cup of coffee. And they had an even harder time imagining that someone from Journey would want to invite them.

It might also be fair to say that Journey people love to serve in church programs, events and activities that take place on the Journey grounds, but do not feel comfortable walking out of the church, into the neighborhood, and into people's homes where they cannot establish the parameters and set the agenda. A strong invitation to the congregation was made repeatedly throughout the summer of 2016 to prayer walk the neighborhood for an hour and observe. Only five people in the congregation responded. Busyness may have been a factor, not being clear about what they were being asked to do (despite being given specific, detailed, written instructions) was probably another factor, but fear of the neighborhood was undoubtedly the biggest factor in the Journey congregation's reticence to walk the Bell Hill neighborhood.

There are some hopeful signs that Journey Church is beginning to feel more comfortable in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The number of people who are volunteering at Belmont Street School is growing week by week. This is largely because the people who volunteer have loved their experience at the school and are becoming ambassadors from the school to the Journey congregation. There are also personal relationships that are beginning to develop between some Journey members and refugees in the neighborhood. As Journey Church has opened up its building to the neighborhood and has coupled that with going into the neighborhood on a regular basis a measure of trust has been built and new connections have been made. There are about thirty neighborhood teens that participate regularly in the church's weekly open gym nights. Six or seven have become regular participants in the youth group. As of January 1, 2017, there were only about

fifteen regular attendees, out of almost four hundred Journey Church attendees, who lived in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Four of these fifteen were residents of an addiction recovery halfway house that is in the neighborhood. However, as of February 19, 2017 the number of Bell Hill residents who were becoming regular attendees of Journey (people who had come for several weeks in a row) had risen to over 40 people. These included about 12 people who were in recovery programs and also several new families. While it is too soon to know, the researcher is hopeful that the influx of people from the neighborhood who come and stay will become a continuing trend.

Conclusion

Journey will reach the neighborhood only by getting to know the neighborhood in relational terms. This means that the people of Journey must make the transition that the people of Belmont Street/CrossRoads Church did not. They must embrace the Bell Hill neighborhood as home, not just as a mission field. They must see the Bell Hill residents as potential neighbors and friends to be cherished and enjoyed, not just broken, lost people with needs, who are to be pitied and helped.

A Beginning Ethnography of a Kindergarten Classroom at Belmont St. School

Introduction

To provide context for the ethnography of a Belmont Street Community School kindergarten class, the researcher will present a statistical profile of Belmont Street School as a whole. Along with a statistical profile, the researcher will highlight the impact of high student mobility at Belmont Street School. He will then offer a statistical profile of the entire kindergarten class. At Belmont Street School there are one hundred four kindergarten students divided into four classes, which are demographically similar to

one another. The researcher will focus his ethnography on one of those kindergarten classes, the one led by Diane Smith.

A Statistical Profile of Belmont Street Community School

Belmont Street School is a pre-Kindergarten to sixth grade school with almost 600 students. Demographic statistics for the 2015-2016 school year showed that 47.6 percent of the school was Hispanic, 22 percent was classified as African American (though most of them are immigrants from Ghana and refugees from Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo), 18 percent was white, and 9.5 percent was Asian (mostly Bhutanese and Nepalese). 2.6 percent were multi race, non-Hispanic, and 0.3 percent were Native American. For 63.1 percent of the students, English was not their first language. Eighty nine percent of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged. 94.3 percent of the student body were classified as high needs. The student-teacher ratio was 19.3 to 1. The Worcester district student-teacher ratio was 14.2 to 1, while the state student-teacher ratio was 13.2 to 1. Of the fifty-two teachers at Belmont Street School, forty-nine were White, two were Hispanic, and one was Asian. There were forty-nine female teachers and only three male teachers.¹⁶ When one compares the high need level of the students and the high student-teacher ratio at Belmont Street School with city and state averages, it becomes absolutely clear that this is a grossly underserved and under-resourced school.

The mobility rate of Belmont Street Community School is 30 percent. Mobility rate “also called ‘churn’ or ‘transience,’ can include any time a student changes schools for reasons other than grade promotion, but in general it refers to students changing

¹⁶ “School and District Profiles,” Belmont Street Community School, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=03480020&orgtypecode=6&>.

schools during a school year. It may be voluntary—such as a student changing schools to participate in a new program—or involuntary, such as being expelled or escaping from bullying. Student mobility is often related to residential mobility, such as when a family becomes homeless or moves due to changes in a parent’s job.”¹⁷

The implications of high mobility rates for the long-term well being of children are sobering. Arthur J. Reynolds, Chin-Chih Chen, and Janette E. Herbers found that:

School mobility can contribute to low school performance and related difficulties because it introduces discontinuities in learning environments that alter or weaken instructional, school, and peer ecologies. Subject-matter curricula and expectations in the classroom can differ dramatically across schools, which in addition to the process of adjustment itself, can adversely affect learning. This often carries over to learning in the classroom. . . . Changing schools also requires adjusting to a new school, new teachers, and new peer groups that may hold different attitudes and expectations about school life which lead to a different school climate than what the student is used to. Without institutional supports to smoothen such transitions, performance deficits may emerge.

Detrimental effect on peer relations are a further potential consequence of mobility. Mobile children are more likely than school-stable children to have disruptions in peer relationships that lead not only to weaker peer relationships but lower engagement in the social environments of school and community . . . these lower social ties and school attachments increase the risk of school underachievement. For example, South et al. (2007) found that peer characteristics were stronger mediators of the relation between mobility and school dropout than parent-student relationships or school achievement.

Finally, links between mobility and poorer school performance may be a function of economic disadvantages and stressors within family and neighborhood contexts. Children who move are more likely to be ethnic minorities, reside in low-income and in single-parent households, and have home languages other than English.¹⁸

¹⁷ Sarah D. Sparks, “Issues A-Z: Student Mobility: How It Affects Learning,” *Education Week*, (August 11, 2016), accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/student-mobility/>.

¹⁸ Arthur J. Reynolds, Chin-Chih Chen, and Janette E. Herbers, “School Mobility and Educational Success: A Research Synthesis and Evidence on Prevention,” Paper presented at the Workshop on the Impact of Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods, Washington, DC (June 22, 2009): 4, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Activity%20Files/Children/ChildMobility/Reynolds%20Chen%20and%20Herbers.pdf>.

All of the factors that are predictors of a high student mobility rate are present at Belmont Street School. These factors include chronic homelessness, moves due to job change, uncertain immigration status, and unstable family dynamics. The teachers and staff of Belmont Street School cannot change or control the economic realities and family dynamics experienced by their students. But Reynolds, Chen and Herbers allow that strong institutional support may minimize the effects that high student mobility has on student performance. The problem is that the teachers and staff at Belmont Street School do not have the resources to provide as much of the institutional support as they would like. Such institutional support may include peer buddy programs, mentoring, orientation and transition programs for new students, social skills training, small classes, family support services and greater parental involvement.¹⁹ Given how under-resourced it is, Belmont Street School can undertake very few of these kinds of initiatives. Journey Church has committed to provide some funding and volunteer support in accordance with the priorities established by the principal, teachers and staff of Belmont Street School.

Statistical Profile of Kindergarten Enrollment at Belmont Street School

A look at the kindergarten enrollment for the 2015-2016-school year suggests that the Bell Hill neighborhood is becoming increasingly a community of color. The kindergarten enrollment also suggests that the problems associated with too little funding and too few staff will proliferate. In 2015-2016 there were 104 students enrolled in kindergarten at Belmont Street School. Of those 104 students, 51 were Hispanic, 27 were African American or Black African, 9 were Asian, 13 were white, and 4 were multi-race, non-Hispanic. All 104 were classified as high needs, and 85 were classified as

¹⁹ Reynolds, Chen and Herbers, 17-18.

economically disadvantaged.²⁰ A strong, consistent, relationally based, long-term commitment by Journey Church to serve Belmont Street School has the potential to provide some of the institutional support that might minimize the effects of high student mobility and of other issues related to poverty, lack of English language proficiency and unstable family dynamics.

Ethnography of Diane Smith's Kindergarten Class

November 30, 2016

This is my first day in Diane Smith's kindergarten classroom as a volunteer reader. I had first met her in October 2016. We met to talk about the school and about how Journey Church might partner with the staff and teachers to serve the students and families there. Diane became the gatekeeper and informant who let me into the school and helped me to understand the dynamics of the school and the neighborhood. It was Diane who suggested that Journey recruit people to serve as volunteer readers at the school. It took seven weeks to recruit a team, to get them CORI'ed and approved by the Worcester Public School system and then to get them oriented to Belmont St School. During that time, Diane and I emailed or talked two or three times a week. We talked a bit about one another's backgrounds, about our families, and also about our religious experiences. I told her how I came to Christ and she told me how she fell away from the Roman Catholic Church. I told her about how much teachers had influenced my life and she told me why she decided to become a teacher.

Diane has been a teacher in the Worcester Public School system for fifteen years and a kindergarten teacher at Belmont St School for over ten years. Her long tenure at

²⁰ "School and District Profiles," Belmont Street Community School, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=03480020&orgtypecode=6&>.

Belmont St School is somewhat unusual. The school is not a desired assignment for most teachers in the Worcester Public School system. No one asks to be assigned there, and most of those that do get assigned there try to leave as soon as they can. But Diane cannot imagine being anywhere else. She wants to be at Belmont St School, loves her students and is committed to them. You could say that she sees Belmont St School as her mission field. She is an ardent champion of the school and expects to be there for a long time, maybe until she retires from teaching.

I have committed to volunteer in her class every Wednesday morning from 8:15-9:45. I get there early and no one is in the classroom yet. So I start looking around. The room is big. When I first saw the room a few weeks earlier, I was startled by its size. There is an area with a large rug on one side of the room in front of a big blackboard. To the side of the blackboard on newsprint in big letters is a list of the kindergarten rules:

1. Be Safe
 - Keep your hands, feet, body, objects and all negative comments to yourself.
 - Walk in our school and classroom.
 - Do not leave the classroom or line without permission.
2. Be Responsible
 - Complete your work and clean up when you are finished.
 - Come to school on time every day.
3. Be Respectful
 - Be kind to all students and teachers.
 - Listen when someone else is talking.
 - Solve problems by talking about them.
 - Walk quietly in the halls.
 - Use your manners.

There are lots of plants, a terrarium with a turtle in it, and a big globe in the room. There is a section of a wall devoted to helping the students learn shapes (circle, triangle, square, rectangle, rhombus, trapezoid and hexagon). Another section of a wall shows

different colors. Other wall spaces are covered with several maps, a big “word board”, number grids, and places where the students’ work is on display. And there are stations (small tables, each with four to six chairs) scattered throughout the room for students to work individually or in small groups on phonics, writing, art, math, science, or STEM-related projects. The STEM project for the day is “Build a sturdy bed or chair for Goldilocks.” The room also has a large basket filled with socks, underwear, hats and gloves. She keeps them in her classroom to give to her students whenever she sees they have a need for them.

Diane begins the school day with her students by having all the children sit in orderly rows on the rug. She greets them and then she introduces me to the class and has them greet me. Diane then orients them to the day. The agenda for this day is:

- Arrival - Attendance - Breakfast
- Calendar
- Foundations
- Number of the Day
- Math Groups
- Lunch - Recess
- Storytelling - Storyacting
- English Language Arts
- Gross Motor Skills - Snack
- Centers
- Organize - Clean
- Dismissal

Three of the girls are wearing hijabs. One child is wearing short sleeves even though it is really cold outside. Diane tells him to keep his winter coat on. It strikes me that there is not a single white child in the class. They are a mix of African, Asian and Hispanic. Before settling into their tasks, the students get their breakfast. They can

choose from a variety of cereals, milk, orange juice, bananas and oranges and animal crackers. They eat their breakfast as they start their work.

Diane had previously told me there were twenty-two students in her class. Nineteen of them, she said, were “first language not English” students. Diane assigns three children to me. One is a boy from the Democratic Republic of Congo, another is a girl from Somalia, and the third is a girl from Nepal. All three children come from linguistically isolated households. This means there is no one in their household above the age of fourteen who can speak English, no one at home who can read to them and help them learn to read. The children in Diane Smith’s class remind me of myself. I grew up as the oldest child in an immigrant family where my parents did not speak English and I know first-hand how frustrating it is to not know English well and to not have anyone at home to help me. My job is to read aloud to each child individually, to point out letters and words, to ask them questions that will help them interact with the book we are reading, and to encourage them to draw a picture of something that struck them from the book we read together that day.

Ibrahim is the first child I read to. He is a very energetic and chatty boy whose family background is Congolese. He is not shy at all and begins talking a mile a minute. His spoken verbal skills are quite strong and he seems to begin every sentence with the phrase, “Well actually.” I have no idea where or how he picked that up but every time he says it I start chuckling on the inside. I ask him to pick out a book to read from the book basket at our table and he picks out *Pete the Cat Goes to the Beach*. It becomes apparent that he has had this book read to him often. He has almost memorized it. But he cannot pick out a particular word. He can remember what he hears and he repeats every line I

read to him verbatim. But he struggles to remember or recognize the letters I point out to him. I point to the letter “P” and say, “Ibrahim, this is the letter ‘P.’ Can you find another ‘P’ on this page?” There are three letter “P’s” on the page. He does not recognize them. I find out a little bit later that he cannot write his name. He is clearly smart so I wonder, as I reflect later in the day, why identifying letters and writing is so hard for him.

Hawo is the second child I read to. Her family is from Somalia. She is one of the three girls who wear a hijab. Unlike Ibrahim, Hawo is very shy and reserved. She doesn’t really look me in the face when I speak to her but instead looks down or to the side. She speaks very, very softly so that I really struggle to hear her. As with Ibrahim, I ask her to pick out a book to read too. I quickly find out that I made a mistake in not vetting the books before offering her a choice of which book to read to her. The book she picks out is too long and too advanced for her. I can tell that I am losing her attention. So, after five minutes I put down that book, look through the books in the basket and pull out three shorter books for her to pick from. She picks *When You Give a Dog a Donut*. This goes much better. Hawo seems more engaged and she is able to respond to the questions I ask her. After we finish reading the book together I ask her to draw a picture that describes something in the book. She does not process the book in her drawing. Instead, she draws a picture of her four sisters. I use this to ask her questions about her family. She tells me a little about her siblings but does not say anything about a mother or father. I am afraid to ask her about whether she is living with her parents.

Anisha is the third child I read to. She also picks *When You Give a Dog a Donut*. Of the three, she seems the most in tune with the book we read together. She understands the book, can tell me the plot line, and draws a couple conclusions. But when I ask her to

draw a picture about the book she says that she does not know how to draw. I ask her to just try and do her best but she does not seem to know how to even begin. So, I ask her questions about the book and write down what she says.

As I'm reading to each of my students, I notice that Diane goes back and forth between working with the class as a whole group and breaking them up into small clusters to work on tasks semi-independently. Twenty to thirty minutes seems to be the maximum time spent on any one activity. Diane and Mindy, the classroom aide, check in with each of the cluster groups periodically to help the children stay on task. It reminds me of football practice when I was young. The class is energetic but in no way chaotic. It is organized, purposeful and efficient. Diane has good control of the class and the learning process, uses class time well, and clearly has the respect, attention and affection of her class.

December 7, 2016

Ibrahim picks out another book from the *Pete the Cat* series. As we begin reading he says to me, "Well, actually, cats can't talk and they don't wear clothes." He then fills me in on all kinds of things that cats can't do. As he's talking, I'm really struggling not to laugh out loud. He is so earnest in what he is saying to me. I keep pointing out letters to him. "Ibrahim, this is the letter 'p'. Can you find another 'p' on this page? This is the letter 'e'. Can you find another letter 'e'?" He finds the letter sometimes but not always.

Hawo is a lot more relaxed today. She looks at me and initiates conversation. When we finish the book we were reading together. I ask her to draw a picture about the book. Again, she draws a picture of her family. So I ask her to tell me about her drawing. I point to each figure in her drawing and ask "Who is this?" "This is me. This is my older

sister. This is my other older sister. This is my younger sister.” She draws a figure that was not on her drawing of the previous week. “Who is this”, I ask. She says, “There is a ghost in our house.” She says this very seriously and she looks scared when she says it. I ask her directly, “Are you scared of this ghost?” She nods and looks down. I don’t know what to do or say. I just start praying for Hawo silently.

When Anisha comes to our reading table I notice that she looks tired. I ask her if she is feeling okay. She tells me that she did not sleep the night before - she does not say, “I did not sleep well.” She says, “I did not sleep.” I ask her why she did not sleep but she does not answer my question.

I find myself thinking about Ibrahim, Hawo and Anisha all the time. There is important stuff going on in each of their lives and I do not know what it is. I wonder if they need help of some sort but I don’t know what to do. I’m praying a lot.

December 14, 2016

Things happen pretty much like they did in the previous two weeks. I read a sentence and Ibrahim repeats it verbatim. I ask him to pick out the letter “t” and he cannot do it. When I ask him to write his name, he scribbles five letters that are hard to distinguish.

Hawo and I read a book together. She engages with it and seems to enjoy it. But when I ask her to draw a picture that says something about the book we read, she draws a picture of her family again. She draws herself and three of her sisters. I ask her if she has any brothers. She tells me she has a brother but he is really annoying so she does not include him in her picture. I’m still not sure of how well Hawo knows her letters. But she

is really good at drawing her family. It seems to be the way she processes what is going on in her life and in her family.

Anisha knows her letters. She can pick out any letter I ask her to find. She can also identify some whole words. She's close to being able to read. But she still does not know how to even start a picture and she is very reluctant even to try.

December 21, 2016

I read to Ibrahim and Hawo today. But there is a school program this morning so there was not enough time for me to read to Anisha. Today I found out that Hawo has five sisters and two brothers. She shares a bed with two of her sisters. Today was also the first day she talked about her mom. She told me that today was her birthday, that she is now six years old, and that her mom was getting a birthday cake for her. She is very excited about this. Diane Smith gave her a pair of new sneakers and a paper birthday hat that she had made for Hawo's birthday. Later I found out that Diane gives birthday and Christmas presents to all her students. I asked Hawo if she slept well. She said yes and then told me she was not scared of the ghost anymore. After we finished reading together, Hawo spontaneously gave me a hug - it was completely unexpected! I got a little teary. It means that she is beginning to trust me and to bond with me.

Diane told me later that Ibrahim, Hawo, and Anisha expressed to her that they really love having me read to them. I love reading to them. They have captured my heart. We have bonded together and they are sharing more and more of their lives with me. I wonder if this is because I simply listen to them when they talk. I don't judge them, or try to correct them. I simply listen. When I was growing up I knew my parents loved me but I did not know my parents well. They were not around enough for me to get to know

them. Both my parents worked long hours (two to three jobs) to make ends meet. When they got home they would do whatever chores needed to be done and then go to bed. I do not remember ever having a single personal conversation with my father all through my childhood years. It may be that the childhoods of Ibrahim, Hawo and Anisha mirror mine a bit. Maybe they have bonded with me because for 30 minutes a week I give them personal attention and listen to what they say. I am beginning to pray that they would discover that God loves them and that He has all the time in the world for them. In the meantime, I am committed to being with them each week and I am trying to recruit more people to volunteer at Belmont Street School.

After class I had a brief conversation with Diane. I told her that Journey Church is open to the idea of making a long-term volunteer and financial commitment to Belmont Street School. I asked her, "If Journey Church were able to provide \$2000.00 per year to the school, what would you like to do with it?" The first thing she said was that she would use it for a field trip. She said that students at other schools were able to go on field trips but students at Belmont Street School were not because many students could not afford the ten or twelve dollars that a field trip would cost. That reminds me of my childhood, too. I do not have a single recollection of going on a field trip when I was in elementary school.

January 4, 2017

My daughter Jenna came with me to Mrs. Smith's class today. Jenna graduated from college in May and spent the last four months teaching English to children in Cambodia, Vietnam and Lebanon. She came back home three weeks ago. As usual, I meet with my three students today. Jenna meets with two girls, Ekra and Isabella. Ekra is

Somali and Isabella is Hispanic. As I am reading to my students I glance over at Jenna and see her laughing a lot. Jenna seems to be right in her element.

When we finish reading to our students, Diane takes a few minutes to talk with us. I had mentioned to Diane that Jenna is seriously considering becoming either a classroom teacher or an ESL teacher and would like to work in a school like Belmont Street Community. So, Diane offers to set up a time for Jenna to shadow her and to shadow an ESL teacher as well. She mentions that there is a huge need for ESL teachers throughout the Worcester Public Schools system and that an ESL comes to her class for only thirty minutes each week. Almost every child in the class would benefit from ESL help but the class as a whole receives only thirty minutes a week. That just does not seem right.

In debriefing together later in the morning, Jenna mentions that she knows one of the students in the class. This is a Somali girl named Fardowsa, one of the three students in the class who wear a hijab. Jenna got to know her and her family during a free summer drop-in program that Journey Church offered on Wednesday mornings. At this drop-in program there were games, arts and crafts, and lunch. One of the drop-in program volunteers would pick up Fardowsa along with her mom and three of her siblings every Wednesday and bring them to Journey Church. Jenna tells me that Fardowsa has a younger sister and an older sister and that her mom is twenty-four years old. She had her first child in her mid-teens, which seems to be perfectly normal in her culture. I think about how different this mother's life is from the life of my daughters who are roughly her age.

Jenna also mentions that she asked each of her students who their friends are. She pointed to different students in the class and said, "Is he your friend? Is she your friend?"

In each case both her students said “yes.” In this class students from half a dozen different countries, coming from different cultures, speaking different first languages, have accepted one another’s differences and have learned to become friends. I offer a prayer that they will maintain their willingness to accept one another’s differences and that their friendships with one another across their differences will remain even as these children get older.

Jenna remarks about how calm and quiet the classroom was. She is right. There is a lot of activity but the activity is very focused. The children are diligent in their work but they seem serene, not stressed.

Reflections

I keep thinking about what their teacher, Diane Smith, and what their classroom mean to these children. Their classroom is where they get fed breakfast and lunch and often receive snacks to take home. It is where they get clean clothes and warm winter coats. I have not been in any of the apartments in which students in Diane Smith’s kindergarten class live. But I have been in the apartments of a number of refugee and immigrant families who live in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The apartments these families live in are often very cold and shabby but their classroom is warm and clean and colorful. Their apartments are clean, but small, cramped and sparsely furnished. The only place the children can do their homework is on their living room floor amidst the noise of that occurs when six or seven or even ten or twelve people share the same space. But in their classroom each child has his or her own space. Each child has a desk on which to do his or her work. Each child has friends to talk to. Each child feels safe and secure. The classroom is a safe haven for them.

Diane Smith is their teacher and focuses her time and energy on being a great teacher for them. But in some ways she is also a surrogate mom to the children in her class. She makes sure they eat and do not go hungry. She helps to keep them clothed. She remembers their birthdays and makes sure they get celebrated. She gives them personal attention and follows up with them and their families after school. She is their advocate and their cheerleader. It is clear that Diane loves her students and is committed to doing everything in her power to help these children succeed in life.

Among the most significant people during the researcher's childhood and adolescence life were a handful of public school teachers. They taught him, invested in him, believed in him and encouraged him. They were channels of God's common grace to him and they had a marked impact on his life. This is what Diane Smith is to her students; she is a channel of God's common grace to them and an expression of His love for them. As Journey Church deepens its partnership with Belmont Street School and builds relationships with students and their families, the hope and prayer is that God's common grace will be recognized and become God's personal and saving grace to the entire Belmont Street School community.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This research project emerged from three streams that shape the researcher's life and call to ministry. The first stream is his own family background and experiences as the oldest child in a poor, working class immigrant family growing up in a tough, violent neighborhood similar to the Bell Hill neighborhood in Worcester. Like many residents of the Bell Hill neighborhood, the researcher grew up in a linguistically isolated household and did not learn much English until he started school. Like the children of recent immigrant and refugee families in the Bell Hill neighborhood, the researcher was largely on his own in figuring out how to navigate his way through school and through life. He saw his parents being cheated, taken advantage of and treated with contempt by those with resources and power. He lived in a small world whose boundaries were determined by how far he could walk in a day. He felt the anger, frustration and shame that many of the poor and marginalized experience. This fueled in him a concern for, and identification with, the underdog, a cynicism concerning the motives of the rich, and a desire to seek social justice.

The second stream in the researcher's life came when he became a follower of Jesus in college. It was in Christ and in the community of believers in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship group on campus that the researcher experienced grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Christ and his indwelling Spirit, primarily through the Scriptures and

through the community of faith, reshaped his worldview, redirected his ambitions and goals, and renewed his heart and mind and soul. The researcher began a long and still ongoing process of coming to terms with his past, letting go of his anger, giving up his desire for vindication, and channeling his concern for social justice. He is absolutely convinced of the necessity and efficacy of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. He is convinced, too, of the power of the gospel to transform lives.

The third stream in the researcher's life is his accumulated experiences as an active member of the local church. From the beginning of his life with Christ he has invested himself in the life and mission of the local church. He believes that the church is God's regent on earth and the hope of the world. He has seen the church impact and transform individual lives and families. But he has not yet been a part of a church that seeks to impact and bring transformation and shalom to a whole neighborhood. The driving force behind this project is the researcher's hope that Journey Community Church will become a church that embraces the Bell Hill neighborhood and wholeheartedly seeks its shalom.

Project Design

The researcher's objective in this project was to develop an urban ministry model that Journey Church would use to seek the shalom of the Bell Hill neighborhood. Journey Church moved into the Bell Hill neighborhood on July 1, 2015 and did not have its first worship service there until September 20, 2015. So, Journey Church was a newcomer to the neighborhood. Journey Church was also an outsider to the neighborhood. The people of Journey Church came from vastly different backgrounds, cultures, experiences and life

situations than the residents of Bell Hill. The Journey people looked, talked, dressed, and acted differently than most of their Bell Hill neighbors. They worked in different kinds of jobs, drove different kinds of cars, saw life from a very different perspective. By virtually every measure Journey Church was an outsider in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Coz Crosscombe has written about the danger of outsiders coming into a community to serve. Reflecting on his twenty-year ministry experience in a poor neighborhood of Philadelphia he points out:

One of the major issues that take place when Outsiders come into communities of the poor is that people in the community are viewed as objects of ministry. The Outsiders have come to help people in need, and as such, they have something that the Locals need. This places them, at least in their own minds, in a position of power, causing a separation, especially in forming peer-level relationships. These trends are natural and to be expected. Yet we must be proactive in working against such a natural state. If we allow this natural state to remain unchecked we help foster the paternalism that has been destructive to poor communities here and across the globe.¹

Crosscombe further notes:

Sometimes, the Outsiders see themselves as the only hope for the community, and for the community to be healthy it must take on the culture of the Outsider.

Struggles like this can then lead to Outsiders diminishing the gifts of the local residents. They often see the local residents as mostly helpless people who need the Outsider, whether for spiritual or physical needs. The gifts the Outsider brings, such as institutional education, formal leadership training, finances and other resources, are seen to be superior to the gifts that the local residents bring. This diminishing of the Local gifts in favor of the Outside gifts can then lead to entire ministries being structured as deficit-based.²

A significant weakness of the research was the failure to comprehensively identify the resources, strengths, assets and leadership of the community. This failure was due to limitations of time, not to a dismissal of its importance. It is a critical next (and on-

¹ Coz Crosscombe, "The Outsiders and Their Role in Urban Mission," *The Journal of Urban Mission*, vol. 3 no. 1 (April 3, 2013), accessed July 17, 2016, <http://jofum.com/editorial/articles/the-outsiders-and-their-role-in-urban-mission/>.

² Crosscombe.

going) step for the researcher to partner with other stakeholders in the Bell Hill neighborhood to identify and leverage the strengths and resources already within the neighborhood to effect desired change. Without recognition of the strengths already present in the neighborhood, Journey's ministry in the Bell Hill neighborhood will inevitably be structured as deficit-based. Deficit-based ministry, almost by definition, is paternalistic and, even though unintentional, insulting. It is the strong serving the weak, the rich serving the poor. Bob Lupton has argued that when churches do for others what they can do for themselves they do people a great disservice. Such charity robs people of dignity, inhibits them from developing and using their God-given gifts and abilities, leads to dysfunctional relationships, and ultimately leads to resentment.³

Cameron Harder offers a process by which to discover the strengths of the neighborhood using appreciative inquiry and asset mapping. Appreciative inquiry asks the questions, "What is right in the neighborhood and what is God doing in the neighborhood?"⁴ The goal is to change the perspective of the neighborhood and inspire hope and collaboration for change. Asset mapping "begins with *what is*, not *what isn't*."⁵ It looks for ways to bring the various community assets together so that there is synergy in their use. The most effective asset mapping is done when the community as a whole identifies and connects the gifts present in the community.

[T]he people themselves identify their gifts but also go on to connect and mobilize them in community action. There is broad investment not only in the gifts but also in the process by which they are mobilized, and as a result, there is true ownership of the product or project that emerges.

³ Lupton, 32-33.

⁴ Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches to Building Community Together* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 84.

⁵ Harder, 109.

Asset mapping gains its power by enlisting a congregation or community to play with the mapped resources in such a way that they can see patterns and connect varied resources to create many new forms of effective ministry.⁶

Crosscrombe contends that change coming from the inside is much more effective than change that is driven by people from the outside. An asset-based approach to ministry allows for the community to own the process of change and the desired goal of the change. It enables the community to use its own gifts and abilities and take a lead role in any partnership with those from outside the community who join them in the work. This implies that Journey Church should be cautious in its attempts to reach and influence the neighborhood until it has gotten to know the neighborhood, built trust and become accepted as part of the neighborhood.

One of the great strengths of Journey Church is the ability of its senior pastor, staff, and lay leadership to think strategically, see needs, choose objectives, and then act decisively and efficiently to meet those needs and objectives. This great strength is also a potential weakness when it comes to serving the Bell Hill neighborhood and contributing to the neighborhood's flourishing. It can lead to paternalistic relationships rather than authentic friendships and partnerships. To reach the Bell Hill neighborhood Journey must resist the temptation to set objectives. Journey Church must allow the neighborhood residents to determine their needs and goals and not determine those needs and goals for them. Journey Church must also be patient and allow the community to recognize and employ its own assets instead of jumping in to "get the job done." Journey must refuse to meet needs for people and instead meet neighborhood needs with them.

In light of the dangers that come from entering a community as a privileged outsider, the researcher began with three foundational convictions. First, to develop an

⁶ Harder, 110.

effective ministry model and strategy, the researcher needed to gain an insider's knowledge and perspective of the neighborhood. He needed to find neighborhood gatekeepers and informants who would introduce him to the neighborhood, help him understand the neighborhood, and help him enter into the life of the neighborhood. Second, he needed to participate in neighborhood initiatives that were already taking place and he needed to participate as a learner and servant, not as a leader. Third, he needed to repent of any sense of superiority and look for the strengths and the resources that were already in the neighborhood. He needed to develop mutual and equal relationships rather than paternal relationships with the people in the Bell Hill neighborhood. In mutual and equal relationships both parties enjoy and benefit from the relationship equally and neither party tries to control the relationship. This meant that neither the researcher nor Journey Church as a whole could dictate the type of change to seek for the neighborhood. Instead, he had to listen to the neighbors, allow them to reveal their felt needs and aspirations, and respect the strengths and abilities they could bring to the flourishing of the neighborhood.

To reach his objective the researcher used a form of action research as a primary method of acquiring data. Rory O'Brien notes that:

Action research, ... Aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction. Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of researcher and client, and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process.⁷

⁷ Rory O'Brien, "An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research," in *Theory and Practice of Action Research*, ed. Roberto Richardson, (Joao Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal de Paraiba, 2001), accessed January 4, 2017, file:///Users/lousoiles/Documents/Thesis%20Proposal%20.

The goal of action research is not simply to gather and analyze data but to use that data and analysis to effect positive change. It is research in the service of social action and social justice. At this stage of the researcher's action research, he has not progressed to the co-learning stage yet. He is the one doing almost all the learning.

Project Implementation

The researcher began by trying to identify neighborhood institutions, groups, events, and leaders. He discovered (through using a variety of key terms on Google) that there was a Bell Hill Neighborhood Association. Through the Bell Hill Neighborhood Association's monthly meetings the researcher met a number of the neighborhood's most engaged residents. From them, he learned who was moving into the neighborhood and where they were living, where the drug houses were and what the police were doing to try and shut them down. He learned where trash was being dumped and cars were being abandoned. He also learned about their families and their backgrounds, about how they came to be part of the Bell Hill neighborhood, and about what they thought of the neighborhood.

The researcher also met Ana Rodriguez in his first neighborhood watch meeting. Ana was the convener of the meeting and a well-known and well-respected community activist. She became my first neighborhood gatekeeper and informant. The researcher showed up early to every meeting and stayed late in order to ask her questions and build trust with her. When she saw that he was willing to get involved, she gave him tasks to do such as recruiting people for a neighborhood cleanup, calling people to invite them to a meeting, and hosting meetings at Journey Church. Ana invited the researcher to join the Bell Hill Task Force where the researcher began to get to know some key institutional

leaders who were active in the neighborhood. These included Mary Keefe, Massachusetts State Representative for the Fifteenth District of which Bell Hill is a part, Candy Mero Carlson, Worcester City Councilor representing Bell Hill, and Dr. Susan Hodgkins, principal of Belmont Street Community School. Among the initiatives the Bell Hill Task Force worked on (is working on) were traffic safety, public health issues, and the renovation and maintenance of the two parks and the playground in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Each of these interactions broadened the researcher's understanding of the neighborhood, its issues and its strengths.

From the beginning the researcher, because of his conviction about the importance of early education for future life success, determined to try to establish a relationship with Belmont Street Community School. In October 2015 he met with the principal, Dr. Hodgkins to introduce himself and to ask how Journey Church could help her and the school in their educational mission. She said that many students did not have winter clothes. So, Journey Church provided winter coats, boots, hats, scarves and gloves that fall. Through this, Diane Smith, a long-time Kindergarten teacher at Belmont Street Community School, heard about Journey and emailed the church. The researcher immediately contacted her and arranged to meet. Diane became the gatekeeper and advocate for Journey into the school. She was the person who invited Journey to provide volunteer readers for Belmont Street School. Through her, the researcher is learning about the children in the neighborhood.

In sum, the implementation process of this project was an organic outworking of the researcher showing up at neighborhood meetings and events, being willing to serve in whatever capacity requested and building relationships and trust in the process. This has

been a slow process and the researcher knows that he has barely begun. Not every attempt at relationship building was fruitful and every relationship developed is still young and fragile. Yet the researcher is convinced that this was the best way to enter and get to know the Bell Hill neighborhood. The goal was to use a relational and incarnational project design to become a part of the neighborhood and build trust for trust for the long haul. The researcher believes that this goal is being reached and is committed to continuing the process.

Project Findings and Their Implications for Ministry

Summary of Findings from the Biblical and Theological Reflection

The Bible begins and ends with creation. In Genesis 1 God creates the heavens and the earth. In Revelation 21-22 He creates a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible begins with God placing human beings in a garden and it ends with God dwelling with His people in a city, the holy city, the new Jerusalem. Cities play a prominent place in the Scriptures and in the eternal plan of God. They both reflect something of God's glory and purpose and something of human sin and idolatry. Throughout the Bible, God brings both judgment against cities and redemption for cities. The determining factor in what cities become is the extent to which the people of God invest in cities, seek their shalom and engage in God-honoring culture making. Yet Scripture makes clear that all God's people have an urban future and God is pleased to dwell with His people in the new Jerusalem, His holy city.

In the garden the first man and woman engaged in culture making, enjoyed fellowship with God and loving partnership with one another, and experienced the full measure of shalom. In the new Jerusalem, all of humanity, now redeemed and purged of

the sin that led to the Fall, will also experience the fullness of shalom in every dimension of life. In this in-between time, after the Fall but before the full consummation of Christ's kingdom in the new Jerusalem, the people of God are to continue culture making to God's glory, and are to seek the shalom of the world, including the shalom of the cities in which they dwell.

Summary of Findings from the Literature Review

We live in a troubled, broken, sin-scarred world. But this world that we live in now is not the way the world will always be. There is a new world coming, a world where God will reign and manifest His shalom in its fullness (Rev. 21: 1-5, 22-27; 22: 1-6). The reign of God, bringing with it the conditions that will allow the full flowering of His kingdom shalom in the new Jerusalem, is both a vision of the future and a call to the church in the present. The church needs to believe, embrace and pursue this vision of shalom in the here-and-now. As the followers of Jesus, as the community of God's people filled by His Holy Spirit and carrying His shalom peace, we are to be active agents and a visible sign to our world of this new world coming. The people of God are to seek the shalom peace, reconciliation, and wholeness of the world, and not least in the world's cities.

Ministry Applications from the Biblical Theology and the Literature Review

Ray Bakke lists five challenges to urban ministry but argues, "the primary challenge [to urban ministry] is theological."⁸ What Bakke means by this is that it is the church's lack of a biblically faithful and comprehensive theology of the city, a theology that speaks to the complexity, diversity and influence of the city, that impedes the church's mission in the city. The researcher was skeptical of Bakke's assertion at first but

⁸ Bakke, 14.

has now concluded that Bakke is right. As the researcher has been developing his biblical theology of the city, he has been presenting his conclusions to the Journey leadership and through his preaching to the congregation at large. There has been very spirited discussion, substantial agreement but nowhere near full consensus, and a fair amount of pushback. This makes clear that there is a need for Journey Church to continue developing and refining its theology as it pertains to ministry in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

The literature review went in a direction that the researcher had not initially intended. Conversations with Pastor Tom and with members of the congregation convinced the researcher that he needed to pay attention to matters of eschatology and ecclesiology as they related to understanding the role of the church in the world. Again there is need for further exploration of these issues in order to come to a fuller consensus as a church.

The primary challenge in urban ministry is theological. Theology drives practice. To engage the city and seek its shalom, the church must be convinced that God loves the city and that the city plays a key role in His plans for eternity. The church must believe that God wants to redeem all of the city, its people as individuals, and the city as a whole with its systems and structures, and its values, ambitions, and practices. The church must embrace God's call to the city.

Ministry Applications Informed by the Research findings

Introduction

The challenge is theological and it is also visional. The biblical theology and the literature review helped the researcher to clarify and deepen his theological convictions

about the purpose of God in the world and the role of the church in God's mission in the world. The demographic research and the action research gave the researcher eyes "to see" the Bell Hill neighborhood and its residents from multiple perspectives.

During the 2017 New England Cities Forum, Jeff Bass, director of the Emmanuel Gospel Center of Greater Boston, highlighted the difficulty of seeing cities rightly, comprehensively, and well. Cities have density, diversity, complexity, and are always in a state of change. Thus they are hard to see and know. They are hard to see because sometimes people are simply not looking to understand and are not paying attention. But even when people are trying to see and understand, cities are hard to see because there are so many things that are unexpected, things people are not looking for and so are missed. Bass talked about the difference between first and second order realities.⁹ First-order realities are those things that are objectively observable about people and things. Second-order realities have to do with the meanings we attach to the first-order realities we observe. Sometimes we see things accurately but we do not have sufficient context to understand them and so we attach the wrong meaning to them.

The difficulty in seeing clearly and attaching right meanings to what we see is particularly acute in the current politically and culturally fragmented and polarized environment of the United States. It seems that many people have made up their minds about what "the truth" is and choose to expose themselves to only one version of that "truth." This seems particularly true when the topic has to do with refugees, immigrants and cultural identity as the controversy over President Trump's comments and policies has demonstrated.

⁹ Jeff Bass, "Framing the Day," *New England Cities Forum 2017*.

Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Achebe warns about the danger of limiting ourselves to a single story about others. She tells a story of visiting Guadalajara, Mexico:

A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U. S. The political climate in the U. S. at the time was tense, and there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleecing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.

So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”¹⁰

Throughout this project, the researcher tried to enter into the homes and lives of Bell Hill residents and listen to their stories. Repeatedly he was confronted with his own narrow stereotypes and false assumptions about people, their life situations, their wants and needs, and their capabilities. But through these entries into people’s homes and through exposure to people’s stories, the researcher’s perspective began to broaden, to become more nuanced and full. The uniqueness of individual people began to emerge. People became not just stereotypes, categories and types, not just refugees or immigrants or the poor, not just people helpless and in need, but individuals with dignity and depth and complexity. Some of them have become friends.

¹⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Achebe, “The Danger of a Single Story,” *TEDGlobal 2009*, accessed March 11, 2017, http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

The Demographic Study

The findings from the demographic study of Bell Hill showed areas of the neighborhood where God's shalom was missing. Too many streets in the Bell Hill neighborhood have potholes. Absentee landlords charge high rents but do not keep up their buildings and properties. The desire for excessive profit trumps any concern for people's welfare. Some people dump trash in public places or abandon cars on the streets because they do not want to take the time to properly dispose of them. They create both a safety hazard and an eyesore for their neighbors on Bell Hill and they diminish the sense of neighborhood felt by Bell Hill residents. Journey Community Church has financial resources, leadership gifts, skills, competencies, and influence to help clean up the Bell Hill neighborhood and make it a better place to live. Journey Church is trying to be a good neighbor to those in the Bell Hill neighborhood by investing in the over-all flourishing of the neighborhood.

To meet the needs for safe and wholesome recreational opportunities for children and youth Journey Church hosted free family movies, open gym nights, family fitness events, and other fun activities beginning in July 2016 and continuing to the present. To help enhance learning opportunities for children at Belmont St. School, Journey funded a school-wide reading program for the 2016-2017 academic year. Journey also recruited volunteer readers to read aloud to children who come from linguistically isolated households. In addition, Journey provided hundreds of pairs of underwear, sweatpants and sneakers at the start of the year and warm winter clothing in the late fall. The hope, over time, is to develop a broad slate of after-school programs for children and youth - homework help, sports, arts and crafts, music, and field trips.

To meet the needs of the several hundred refugees and recent immigrants in the Bell Hill neighborhood, Journey is preparing to offer classes and programs for adults, including English Language Learning, basic financial management, and marriage classes. Journey is also working toward offering mentoring and recovery programs for people struggling with various addictions. In all of these things the goal is to let people know that God sees them loves them, offers them forgiveness, and invites them into His church.

The Case Study of Belmont Street Baptist/Crossroads

Belmont Street/CrossRoads never learned the language or heard the heart of the Bell Hill community. They never entered into the lives of their Bell Hill neighbors to see the world from that perspective. To be effective in reaching the Bell Hill neighborhood Journey's ministry model must equip and motivate the Journey people to get into the neighborhood in ways that foster on-going relationships with people who live in the neighborhood. Journey will learn the language and heart of the neighborhood only through developing authentic, mutual, personal relationships with people in the neighborhood. Such relationships will take a lot of time to develop. They will require the patience to listen carefully and the humility to allow others to determine the objectives and to take positions of leadership. To develop relationships of mutual respect and shared power will also take courage. They will require that Journey members listen to criticism and to look at themselves, at their assumptions, biases and prejudices honestly and openly.

One strategy the researcher is using to get Journey members into the community is to recruit them to serve as volunteer readers at Belmont St School. The idea to do this did not come from the researcher. Teachers at Belmont St. School identified upgrading

the reading skills of their students as their key need. In particular, they said that there was a great need for volunteers to work with students who did not have someone at home who could read to them. As of February 2017, 18 Journey members were volunteering, on a weekly basis, to read to kindergarten and first graders who came from linguistically isolated households. To help these young students learn to read would be a great benefit to them and to their families. Learning to read well will enable these students to access other resources and to learn how to learn. In business jargon, it would add value to the community by building skills in the residents.

The hope is that more and more Journey members will become volunteers at the school and that they will not only get to know the students they are serving but also their families as well. In the process of serving, the researcher expects that the volunteers will grow both in love for the Bell Hill residents and in cross-cultural understanding and skills. Over time, this will lead to the development of trust and to open doors to share the gospel.

Another strategy the researcher is using is to host Journey-volunteer intensive monthly events at Journey Church for refugees living in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The idea is to provide opportunities for many Journey members to interact with refugees in the neighborhood with the hope that they begin to see one another as people, not as stereotypes. The safety provided by hosting events on their own turf frees Journey members, to some extent, to be willing to interact with people very different than themselves.

As of the time of this writing (February 2017) five events have been held, all of which included dinner. The first event was a backpack giveaway at the beginning of the

school year. One hundred thirty backpacks packed with grade-appropriate school supplies were given away to refugee children and youth. The second event was a cultural exchange evening. People from several different cultures shared songs, dances, and stories with one another. Among those sharing something from their culture were Nepali, Iraqis, Dominicans, Congolese and Americans. The third gathering was a structured but fun English language-learning event. The fourth event was a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner. But here again, people were invited to share something about their culture. The fifth event was a partnership with the Nepali Church to host a Christmas Celebration for the Nepali refugees in the area. This event was planned and led by the Nepali Church and drew many non-Christian Nepali who live in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

The content of these monthly events came out of conversations with refugees about what they wanted or needed. The one exception was the traditional Thanksgiving Dinner, which was Journey's idea. The event turned out fine and the people who were there enjoyed it. But the turnout was less strong than in our other events. It became clear that the stuff of a traditional American Thanksgiving Dinner - cranberry sauce, green bean casserole, and even mashed potatoes - was not to their liking. They did, however, appreciate being invited and they were glad to talk and share songs and laugh together at each another's cultural miscues.

The Ethnographic Study of Diane Smith's Kindergarten Class

The ethnographic study revealed a class that was calm, serene and purposeful. The children treated one another with respect and affection, and each child felt safe. Everyone knew the rules, knew what they were supposed to do, and everyone engaged in

productive work. This classroom has become a little oasis of shalom for these children. This raises the possibility that a deep and long-term investment by Journey Church in Belmont Street School, and particularly in its kindergarten to third grade classes, may have significant impact in catalyzing flourishing in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Interactions with Bell Hill Residents

The writer's action research brought him into the homes of a number of Bell Hill residents where he experienced extraordinary hospitality. The researcher led a weekly Bible study that met in the apartment of a Hispanic couple that became regular attendees of Journey Church. The first time he visited the couple the researcher discovered it was a multi-generational and open household. There were people living in the apartment that were not blood relatives but had been embraced as family. They were living there because they had no other place to go. Every week, during the course of the Bible study people from the neighborhood would be in and out numerous times. It was clear that people knew each other, looked out for one another, and shared what they had with one another. The researcher discovered that there was significant brokenness present in most of the people he met, but in this community brokenness was not a barrier to relationship. They were willing to accept one another's brokenness and to become family to one another. There was a more radical acceptance and generosity in this micro-community of Bell Hill than in many church communities of which the researcher has been a part. The people in the Bible study were not all Christians but all exhibited a profound hunger to know Jesus and to understand the Bible. The sense of community and the hunger for God are, to the researcher, expressions of God's common-grace shalom. God is at work in that extended "family" and people are coming to faith.

The researcher has also been in the homes of several refugee families. Like the Hispanic family meeting for Bible study, the refugee families value hospitality and express great generosity. The Christians among the refugees pray with extraordinary fervor and are quite bold in their witness to Christ. Their desire to reach the non-Christians in their refugee communities is urgent and convicts the researcher to be more urgent in his prayer and witness. They also are an expression of God's shalom in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

An Urban Ministry Model

Introduction

The ultimate goal of the researcher's project was to develop an urban ministry model that Journey Church would use as it seeks the shalom of the Bell Hill neighborhood. Five objectives, which would be used to define whether or not the urban ministry model was effective and successful, framed the development of the model. These five objectives were to enable Journey Church to: become embedded in the Bell Hill neighborhood, be seen as a good and welcomed neighbor by the residents of Bell Hill, contribute to the flourishing of the neighborhood, point people to Jesus, and strengthen the church.

For these objectives to be met the urban ministry model needed to fit the culture, vision, aspirations, makeup and strengths of Journey Church, and it had to be significant, achievable and measurable. To ensure that it would be utilized, the ministry model had to take into account Journey Church's already extensive programming and therefore needed to leverage the urban outreach potential of Journey's existing structures and programs. Too many programs are the enemy of relationship building and lead to exhaustion. It is

more sustainable to figure out how to leverage existing structures and programs and keep the focus on developing relationships.

Therefore, the urban ministry model needed to focus on just a few strategic priorities but invest in them deeply. When it comes to relational impact, depth of ministry is more effective than breadth of ministry. The researcher developed three strategic priorities in response to the interplay between the culture and strengths of Journey Church and the demographics, culture and felt needs of the Bell Hill neighborhood. These strategic priorities are the children and youth in the Belmont Street neighborhood, with a particular focus on the Belmont Street School community, the refugees and recent immigrants in the neighborhood, and the addiction recovery community in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

The findings from the researcher's biblical and theological reflection, review of the literature, and the research of the Bell Hill neighborhood led the researcher to develop an urban ministry model based on seven interrelated values and principles. These values and principles are:

1. Fruitful ministry comes from abiding in Christ.
2. Ministry Only Becomes Transformational When It Points People to Jesus.
3. Authentic Ministry is Incarnational and Shaped by the Cross.
4. Effective Ministry Focuses on Promoting Positive Change not on Extending Charity.
5. Holistic Cross-Cultural Ministry Values Relationships Over Efficiency.
6. Kingdom-Centered Ministry is Collaborative.
7. Lasting Ministry Requires On-Going Learning and Regular Evaluation.

Attached to each value or principle are several action steps that Journey Church has now begun or is able to implement in the near future. These action steps reflect the researcher's assessment of Journey Church's current development and ministry capacity (as of February 2017).

Values, Principles and Action Steps

Principle One: Fruitful Ministry Comes From Abiding in Christ

Jesus told his disciples, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15: 5). All fruitful ministry flows from a vibrant, dependent relationship with Jesus. Such a relationship with Jesus can only be sustained by regularly practicing personal spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, reflection, prayer and solitude, by reverently participating in corporate worship, by humbly developing inter-dependent, intimate and accountable relationships with one another in the body of Christ, and by actively engaging in concerted prayer and spiritual warfare for the shalom of the Bell Hill neighborhood and the city of Worcester.

Journey Church has significant strength in the areas of faithful and dynamic Scriptural preaching and teaching, God-centered corporate worship, and high participation in life groups (more than sixty percent of regularly attending adults are in life groups) that are well led, Bible-focused, and relationally vibrant. Journey is less strong in the practice of personal spiritual disciplines by its members, and in engaging in concerted personal and corporate prayer and spiritual warfare in behalf of the Bell Hill neighborhood and the city of Worcester.

Action Steps for Principle One

To further strengthen and extend the practice of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, the researcher recommends that Journey Church do further preaching and teaching on the spiritual disciplines. In particular, he suggests that Journey Church use David Fitch's book, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission*¹¹ as the foundation of a preaching and teaching series. Fitch wants the church to be an agent of transformation, of shalom, in the world. His call is for the church to be a faithful presence in the world:

Faithful presence names the reality that God is present in the world and that he uses a people faithful to his presence to make himself concrete and real amid the world's struggles and pain. When the church is this faithful presence, God's kingdom becomes visible, and the world is invited to join with God. Faithful presence is not only essential for our lives as Christians, it's how God has chosen to change the world.¹²

To become this faithful presence in the world, Fitch argues that the church, both individually and as a community, must practice certain spiritual disciplines. He focuses on seven spiritual disciplines that he believes will shape the church "to be a community of his faithful presence."¹³ Those seven disciplines are: The discipline of the Lord's table, the discipline of reconciliation, the discipline of proclaiming the Gospel, the discipline of being with the "least of these," the discipline of being with children, the discipline of the fivefold gifting (apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers), and the discipline of kingdom prayer.

¹¹ David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2016).

¹² Fitch, 10.

¹³ Fitch, 10.

The researcher believes that Fitch's vision of the church and its role in the world would resonate deeply with Journey Church. He also believes that the seven disciplines Fitch explores are particularly relevant to the advancement of Journey Church's ministry objectives in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Therefore he proposes that Journey use Fitch's book as the foundation of a preaching and teaching series in the fall of 2017.

To deepen and extend Journey Church's practice of intercessory prayer the researcher recommends that Journey Church take advantage of its already existing strengths and structures. He offers three specific suggestions. First, he suggests that a pastoral prayer for the neighborhood be added to the church's weekly worship services. Neighborhood initiatives are often introduced to the congregation in the worship services. It would be a simple matter to add a pastoral prayer each week. Second, he suggests that prayer requests, even written prayers, be included in the Weekly Compass, Journey Church's email weekly announcements that are sent out to the whole congregation. Third, he suggests that prayer for the neighborhood become a weekly feature of Journey's life group gatherings. In addition, the researcher recommends that Journey Church would add and heavily promote a new structure to its church life: a monthly or quarterly corporate, all-church, prayer gathering for the Bell Hill neighborhood and the city.

Principle Two: Ministry Only Becomes Transformational When It Points People to Jesus

The deepest and most basic need of every person and community is to know and embrace Jesus. Only Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life." It is only through Jesus that people come to the Father (John 14: 6). Only Jesus is the "true light that gives light to everyone" (John 1: 9). Only Jesus offers and makes possible the experience of abundant life (John 10: 10). Jesus is the one who brings light and banishes the darkness of our

world (John 1: 5). Jesus is the one who “purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1: 7) and only Jesus is the one who has destroyed the work of the devil (1 John 3: 8). Jesus is the one who has broken the power of sin and Satan and death, the one who has poured out the Holy Spirit upon his people, the one who is the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the only one who makes shalom possible.

Action Steps for Principle Two

Journey Church already points people to Jesus in its worship services. In every worship service the preaching and the worship music exalt Jesus. However, Journey Church’s preaching and teaching is not always easily accessible to people with little or no Bible background or to those who have limited education or English literacy. A significant percentage of Bell Hill residents would struggle to understand the sermons and other teaching that take place at Journey Church. The researcher, therefore proposes that Journey Church do three things to make its teaching about Christ accessible to its Bell Hill neighbors.

First, he advises that Journey Church start a Spanish language Bible study. There are a number of people at Journey Church who are both proficient in Spanish and well versed in the Scriptures who can lead such studies so starting a Spanish language Bible study would not be difficult.

Second, he proposes that Journey offer and promote the Christianity Explored course twice a year. This is a DVD-based course, which provides a marvelous exploration of the Christian faith using the Gospel of Mark as its base. In addition to English the Christianity Explored course is offered in about fifty other languages

including Arabic, French, Karen, Nepali, Portuguese and Spanish, which are first languages for very many Bell Hill residents.

Third, the researcher recommends that Journey Church offer ESL classes to the neighborhood using the Discovery Bible Studies curriculum. This curriculum is designed to help people learn English while exposing them to the Bible.

Principle Three: Authentic Ministry is Incarnational and Shaped by the Cross

Authentic ministry is incarnational and cross-shaped. It follows the example of Jesus who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1: 14), and who laid down his life for us. So, authentic ministry means leaving the church building, going out into the neighborhood, being with the people in the neighborhood, and sacrificially loving and serving them.

About 18 Journey Church members began volunteering at Belmont Street School in late fall 2016/early winter 2017. These volunteers are very excited about their service at the school and are building relationships with the students they are serving. Being in the school on a weekly basis and getting to know students face to face is giving the Journey volunteers a much more intimate understanding of the neighborhood and its needs. It is also pulling them out of their comfort zones and stoking their compassion for the people of the Bell Hill community. An added benefit is that the teachers and staff at Belmont Street School are delighted with the Journey volunteers who are serving in their school. One of the teachers at Belmont Street School is starting to attend Journey Church services.

Action Steps for Principle Two

Again the researcher advises that Journey Church leverage the existing structures and programs to become an incarnational and sacrificially loving presence at Belmont Street School. First, the researcher recommends that Journey highlight the school volunteer efforts of its members by having volunteers give testimonies of their experiences in the weekly worship services. This would be a way to get more people to volunteer at the school. Second, he suggests that Journey Church offer to collaborate with Belmont Street School in developing after school and summer programs for the children and youth in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

One of the objectives of the Journey life groups is that each life group engages in mission together. Within just four blocks of the church there are at least thirty different refugee families. Life groups could be an incarnational and cross-shaped presence in the neighborhood by each “adopting” one of these refugee families. Adopting a refugee family would include praying for the family regularly, offering and receiving hospitality, helping the family members learn English, providing some of their material needs, driving them to appointments, teaching them how to drive, and telling them about Jesus.

Principle Four: Effective Ministry Focuses on Promoting Positive Change Not on Extending Charity

Effective ministry focuses on bringing about desired results. Good intentions are not sufficient. The goal is not simply to express compassion; it is to effect transformation. It is capacity-building not charity giving. It is asset-based not deficit-based. It focuses on identifying, leveraging and increasing the skills, abilities, confidence, personal agency and community building of the people in the neighborhood. The neighborhood begins to flourish as the people in the neighborhood become more united, stronger, more skilled

and more confident about their capacity to initiate action and exercise leadership. The researcher believes that Journey should focus its capacity-building efforts on Belmont Street School, the refugees and immigrants in the neighborhood, and on the addiction recovery community that is in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Research has shown that children who cannot read at grade-level by third grade are at high risk of not graduating from high school and of being mired in poverty. Leila Fiester, an education researcher and senior consultant to the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, writes:

A wealth of new research supports the *goal* (grade-level reading proficiency for more children) and the sense of urgency attached to reaching it, the *hypothesis* (that third-grade reading proficiency is crucial for continued academic success and to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty), and the *key factors* in solving the equation (school readiness; regular attendance at school; summer learning opportunities; healthy, unstressed families; and high-quality teaching). Although not everyone agrees on the best path to get there, experts across many fields and sectors have targeted the same outcome and their findings are, for the most part, mutually reinforcing.

The knowledge base continues to grow. And with each new finding, we gain more insight, resources and confidence for the challenge of helping more children, especially those from low-income families, read at grade level by the end of third grade.¹⁴

Helping the children of Belmont Street School attain grade level reading proficiency would have a dramatic effect on their life prospects and would add to the skills and capacity in the Bell Hill neighborhood. In the fall of 2016 Journey Church funded a school wide reading program and in the late fall to the present is providing volunteer readers for the kindergarten and first grade classes.

¹⁴ Leila Fiester, "Early Warning Confirmed," *The Annie E. Casey Foundation* (February 6, 2013), 22, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-EarlyWarningConfirmed-2013.pdf>.

Action Steps for Principle Four

The researcher strongly recommends that Journey Church continue and extend its partnership with Belmont Street School. In addition to providing on-going funding and volunteer readers to Belmont Street Community School, the researcher suggests that Journey Church should pursue the possibility of partnering with Belmont Street School to start an afterschool program that would offer homework help, enrichment opportunities like music and art lessons, and recreational options such as basketball, volleyball, arts and crafts, and various games.

Many refugees and recent immigrants living in the Bell Hill neighborhood lack English language proficiency. Becoming proficient in English would significantly help them navigate the systems of American culture (things such as enrolling their children in school, getting access to health care, negotiating for an apartment, and getting a driver's license). It would aid them in integrating into American society. It would also improve their job prospects. To increase the skills and capacities of the refugees and immigrants in the Bell Hill neighborhood, the researcher proposes that Journey Church begin weekly ESL classes. There are several people at Journey Church with some prior experience in teaching ESL so this is something that could be started relatively soon. There is also a clear need to help refugees get a driver's license. So, the researcher suggests that Journey Church explore the possibility of offering driving lessons.

Journey Church is located within a half-mile of Worcester's largest addiction recovery hospital and very near a cluster of addiction recovery half way houses. People in addiction recovery programs know that they need help. They need spiritual, emotional, relational, and practical support and encouragement. They need prayer and accountability

to stay sober. They need mentors and advocates who will walk with them and stand up for them. They also need practical, concrete life skills training to reintegrate into mainstream society and earn a living. They need to know they are welcomed and loved and they need to be part of a community of grace and truth. They need God and they need the church. Beginning in the fall 2016 a number of people in addiction recovery programs started coming to Journey Church regularly. That number has been slowly increasing as the people who have been coming have been telling their friends about Journey. The researcher believes that Journey Church could be a major help to those struggling with addiction. He proposes that Journey start a recovery ministry that includes a Christian version of 12-Step programs (possible Celebrate Recovery) but extends beyond this to discipleship, life and job skills training as well.

Principle Five: Holistic Cross-Cultural Ministry Values Relationships Over Efficiency

American culture tends to be very time conscious and task-oriented. The goal is to get things done, to complete tasks in as efficient a manner as possible. In this orientation, the drive to get things done often gets in the way of building deep relationships with others. When the focus is on completing tasks, the danger is that people get treated as objects or as projects. A friend from Ghana told the researcher, “You Americans have all the watches; we Africans have all the time.” His observation was that the Americans he had met were too busy to spend meaningful time in conversation with him. They were too busy to really try to get to know him and his family. They were content with friendly but superficial relationships.

Action Steps for Principle Five

To reach and bless a neighborhood where white Americans are a minority, Journey Church must seek to maximize opportunities for relational engagement and deep friendship making. The researcher has already proposed that Journey Church life group adopt refugee families. To adopt is to treat them like family, to sit with them and talk, to listen and share. It is to visit refugees in their homes and to invite them into your homes. In terms of programs, means hosting dinners or cultural events where there are as many Journey volunteers as there are guests and the goal is to maximize opportunities for conversation. Programs with the main goal of relational engagement might mean teaching ESL one on one in the home of the English language learner rather than offering a group class based in the church. It will mean being willing to put aside the watches and clocks, letting go control of the schedule, giving up the desire to get things done, and simply relaxing and enjoying the opportunity to interact and talk.

Principle Six: Kingdom-Centered Ministry is Collaborative

Local Churches that are kingdom-centered recognize that the kingdom of God is bigger than the local church and choose to seek the kingdom as their ultimate goal. They want to see the kingdom of God advance and not just their own local church. A kingdom orientation frees them to engage in ministry in a posture of humility. It allows them to collaborative with other churches, Christian ministries and even secular agencies. Kingdom-centered churches recognize that they do not know everything and cannot do everything by themselves. They freely acknowledge that they need partners, and they give up any desire to always lead and be in control.

Action Steps for Principle Six

The researcher believes that Journey Church is a kingdom-centered Church and will be eager to support the efforts of other churches and Christian ministries. He advises Journey Church to pursue a partnership with the Nepali Church in Worcester to reach the Nepalis in the Bell Hill neighborhood. There is the beginnings of a relationship with the Nepali Church at present but there is opportunity to make that relationship much more substantial. The likelihood is that very few Nepalis would join Journey Church because of language and culture barriers. But if Journey helped the Nepali Church to reach the Nepalis in the Bell Hill neighborhood this would be a great win for the kingdom. Among the things Journey Church could offer would be free meeting space and some funding to purchase evangelistic and discipleship material in the Nepali language. One hope that a couple leaders in the Nepali church expressed was that Journey Church would help them purchase material to teach the Nepali language and culture to their children. There is a great concern within the Nepali community, among both the Christians and non-Christians, that their children are losing their Nepali identity and values. Leaders in the Nepali church believe that offering classes to their children that would pass on the Nepali language and culture would be a great way to reach the non-Christians in their community. Journey Church agreed to this request, materials were purchased and these classes began on February 20, 2017.

The researcher also urges Journey Church to deepen its partnership with the Worcester Alliance for Refugee Ministry (WARM). WARM seeks to be a bridge between the refugee resettlement agencies and the church so that refugees are better served. In particular, WARM offers training to equip churches to develop on-going

relationships with refugee families. Journey Church could support WARM's ministry by providing meeting space, funding and volunteers. Even better, Journey Church has the opportunity to "adopt" new refugee families that are moving into the Bell Hill neighborhood. This is an opportunity that Journey Church should embrace wholeheartedly.

Principle Seven: Lasting Ministry Requires On-Going Learning and Regular Evaluation

Both the neighborhood and the church will be continually changing. No strategy is perfect and no strategy will work forever. Journey Church must engage in on-going learning, must stay on top of demographic and other changes both in the church and in the neighborhood, and must remain willing to adapt and change as its circumstances and ministry environment change.

Action Steps for Principle Seven

The researcher proposes that Journey Church create a Journey Urban Learning Action Team (JULAT) to continue doing action research in the Bell Hill neighborhood. This team would be tasked to both continue learning about the Bell Hill neighborhood and about urban ministry and would engage in ministry to the neighborhood. Part of the learning component would be to keep up with demographic trends in the neighborhood and with student profiles at Belmont Street School and City View School. It would also include identifying areas of need and opportunities for ministry. Additionally, it explore models of urban ministry taking place elsewhere and would continue to refine Journey Church's theology of ministry and its ministry model.

The action component would be to apply what is learned through the research. This would include building personal relationships and service partnerships with Bell Hill

residents and community stakeholders, addressing neighborhood needs that have been discovered, being neighborhood advocates and ministry catalysts within Journey Church, and recruiting and mentoring Journey Church volunteers to serve in the Bell Hill neighborhood in Jesus' name.

Project Evaluation: Key Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

The greatest strength of this project may be the actual topic that was pursued. Given the growing urbanization, secularization and ethnic and cultural diversity of New England, attempts to understand and reach cities are a strategic necessity.

The ultimate objective of the project was to develop an urban model of ministry that Journey Church could use to reach and contribute to the flourishing, the shalom, of the Bell Hill neighborhood. The researcher was successful in this and Journey Church is now implementing this model. Progress in the level or depth of shalom being experienced in the Bell Hill neighborhood is hard to quantify. There are, however, some encouraging signs that the urban ministry model will prove to be effective. An increasing number of Journey members are getting out into the neighborhood to serve and in the process are building relationships with Bell Hill residents. At the same time, Journey Church is beginning to see a number of Bell Hill residents attending the church and becoming a part of the Journey community. Several refugee families have been "adopted" by Journey refugee volunteer groups and are being exposed to the love of Jesus and the good news of the gospel. The partnership with Belmont Street School continues to grow and more and more opportunities for service keep emerging. On Easter Sunday 2017, among the people

being baptized were nine people from the Bell Hill neighborhood. All of them were new believers who had come to faith largely through the influence of Journey Church.

A subsidiary goal was to develop a model of ministry that could be adapted and used by other churches. While the data that was gathered is very specific to Journey Church and the Bell Hill neighborhood the action research methodology and process that was used may prove helpful to other researchers.

The value of using an action research methodology was that the very conduct of the research itself was an aspect of ministry. Everything learned was almost immediately applied. In the process of the research, on-going relationships with community gatekeepers and stakeholders were developed, neighborhood voices were heard, and felt needs were identified and have begun to be addressed. Trust and partnership was built between Journey Church and diverse communities in the Bell Hill neighborhood. The opportunity to hear many stories from a diverse group of people enabled the researcher to gain a broad understanding of the neighborhood, its residents, and its dynamics. Using different types of research, including case study, demographic research, and ethnography, added to the breadth of analysis. On a personal note, the researcher feels strongly connected to a number of people in the Bell Hill neighborhood and is deeply committed to pursuing the shalom of the neighborhood despite not living in the neighborhood.

Weaknesses

The researcher sees three chief weaknesses or limitations in his project. First, the research is very narrow in scope. It focuses on Journey Church and the Bell Hill neighborhood. While the researcher thinks that there will be helpful elements that other researchers can use, he cannot know if his research will have broad applicability.

Second, the research time frame was very short. The ministry model is now being implemented and there are some initial results that are encouraging, but it has not passed the test of time. The researcher believes that the urban ministry model has enough breadth and flexibility to have long-term usefulness, but he cannot be certain that this will be the case.

Third, the research topic and the project design flowed directly from the background and experience of the researcher. The researcher comes from an immigrant family and grew up in a poor, working class, ethnically, racially and culturally diverse neighborhood that was very similar to the Bell Hill neighborhood. The frustration of coming from a linguistically and culturally isolated household and struggling to learn English and fit into American culture gave him a measure of empathy, understanding, cross-cultural competency, and credibility as he interacted with Bell Hill residents. The researcher's family background has unquestionably been an asset as he has conducted his action research. However, the researcher has also been immersed in communities of privilege and power both in his university years and in his work life, particularly while on the staff of a very affluent church in Wayland, Massachusetts. This experience has helped him be a bridge person between Journey Church and the Bell Hill neighborhood. People without this diverse background can develop the empathy, relationships and cross-cultural competencies to be bridge builders between diverse communities but it would take a lot longer to do so.

The researcher is acutely aware of how much more there is to learn about the Bell Hill neighborhood and its diverse communities, and about urban ministry itself. The Bell Hill neighborhood is in a state of ongoing change, people will come and go, political

climates will likely always be in flux, and what is true today may not be true a year from now. So, the research is only beginning, there are many open questions, and many new lessons to be learned and applied.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION

Personal Growth

Throughout this project the researcher has been forced to confront his past and face his fears and idolatries. He grew up in a working class immigrant family in a hard neighborhood. He vowed when he was a teenager that he would escape his neighborhood and never come back. The researcher did escape his neighborhood and began to pursue the American Dream. But in college, he was drawn to faith in Jesus and eventually called into professional ministry. This shifted his life priorities but it did not eradicate his desire to escape the environment that had caused him so much anger, frustration and shame. The Bell Hill neighborhood is very much like the researcher's childhood neighborhood. On a weekly, sometimes daily basis, the researcher encountered someone or something that brought up painful memories from his past. This project has forced the researcher to face his past, to try to glean its lessons, and to allow God to use this to prune and shape his character.

Hearing the stories and getting to know a number of immigrants and refugees now living in the Bell Hill neighborhood, and seeing the day to day effects of the brokenness of the immigration and refugee policy of the United States inflamed the researcher's passion to be an advocate for them. It also helped the researcher appreciate afresh the courage, tenacity and resilience of his parents. They came to the United States with nothing, persevered, sacrificed and suffered, endured prejudice and opposition, and

overcame obstacles large and small to create a home and a future for themselves and their children.

Intellectual Development

The biblical and theological reflection has enabled the researcher to explore and test ideas new to him in the Scriptures. Trying to read the Bible through an explicitly urban lens led the researcher to ask different questions of the text than he had done previously. This urban lens helped him see some things he had not seen before.

Prior to this project the researcher had not had much interest in engaging with different views of eschatology. But it became clear that the views people had about the fate of the world at the return of Jesus affected how they viewed the present role of the church in the world. Reading Christopher Wright, N. T. Wright and Richard Middleton and John Nugent was a feast for his mind and a challenge to his soul. Along with being exposed to different views concerning eschatology, the researcher also had the opportunity to engage with a variety of views concerning the interplay between ecclesiology and missiology. Here again there is a very rich biblical and theological landscape to explore.

The field research gave the researcher the opportunity to experiment with a variety of research methods and strategies, which have expanded his ability to better see and understand his neighborhood. The demographic research provided clues as to where to focus his action research and the action research provided context and meaning to the demographic findings. The case study provided further historical context while the

ethnographic study added to the researcher's cultural understanding of the various peoples in the Bell Hill neighborhood. Adding tools and strategies to his research toolbox has enriched his understanding of what research can be and can accomplish.

Further Research Questions

The urban ministry model presented by the researcher is largely untested and incomplete. The researcher would like to explore and understand various urban ministry paradigms that are being employed in Northeastern cities of the United States. Among the paradigms he would like to investigate are those that have emerged from the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). In addition to attending CCDA conferences, he would like to visit some urban communities where a CCDA model of holistic community development is taking place. The researcher also wants to visit the CityNet communities that Coz Crosscombe works with in Philadelphia.

One of the key tenets of the CCDA movement and of CityNet is that effective urban ministry requires living in the community to be served. The researcher lives in Worcester but not in the Bell Hill neighborhood. He has been talking with his wife about moving into the Bell Hill neighborhood but there is no real interest at this time. Nor is there any interest in relocating to Bell Hill by anyone else at Journey Church. Key questions the researcher wants to answer include: Are there effective ways to get to know and love a neighborhood without living in the neighborhood? Is it possible to build trust and become an insider without living in the neighborhood? Is it sufficient that Journey Church meets in the neighborhood?

Four key issues that affect the quality of life in the Bell Hill neighborhood are sub-standard housing, the inability to find living wage jobs because of a lack of job skills

and work history, drug and alcohol addictions, and active gang presence. The researcher would like to discover what initiatives other churches have taken in each of these areas.

To help Journey Church meet the needs of the refugee communities in the Bell Hill neighborhood the researcher must deepen his cross-cultural understanding and competencies. This includes better understanding the difference between guilt and honor/shame cultures, the ways different cultures understand and use time, and the ways different cultures express hospitality and friendship. Developing his cross-cultural knowledge, understanding and skills will enable him to train others in Journey Church to welcome and serve refugees and immigrants in the neighborhood. The researcher also wants to become acquainted with how to start and sustain English language learning classes. In addition, because many refugees and some immigrants have experienced extraordinary trauma and now suffer from post-traumatic stress, the researcher would like to explore if and how churches have developed support structures for refugees (and others such as veterans or women or children who have been abused) that might guide Journey Church as it seeks to provide holistic care to people in the Bell Hill neighborhood.

Journey Church, despite being multi-ethnic and multi-cultural in its makeup, is mono-cultural in its worship style and church culture. The culture, worship style and preaching reflect the white, middle class, suburban background of its founding pastor and most of its members. Almost all the people of color in the Journey Church are students and young professionals who have been steeped in white, middle class culture. The researcher is intrigued by the possibility of Journey Church moving toward becoming an intercultural church. According to the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning:

Intercultural describes communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships.

In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together.¹

Although the researcher has never seen a truly intercultural church, a church that allowed the fullness of its diversity to be represented in its worship practices and common life together, he believes that such a church would best display the beauty of God's image to the world. And, he believes that such a church would be attractive to many Bell Hill residents. So, he would like to identify and visit intercultural churches and try to discern the process they used to develop inter-culturality in their congregations.

¹ Michelle Soli, "What's the Difference Between Multicultural, Intercultural and Cross-cultural Communication?" *The Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning*, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://www.springinstitute.org/whats-difference-multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication/>.

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