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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

COUNTERING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF YOUTH: A DENOMINATIONAL
STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING A HOLISTIC ECCLESIASTICAL APPROACH

Written by

RICHARD W. GRIFFITH

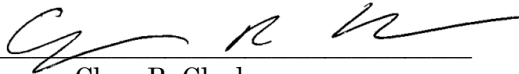
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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


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Date Received: January 10, 2019

COUNTERING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF YOUTH: A DENOMINATIONAL
STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING A HOLISTIC ECCLESIASTICAL APPROACH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

RICHARD W. GRIFFITH
DECEMBER 2018

ABSTRACT

Countering the Criminalization of Youth: A Denominational Strategy for Developing a Holistic Ecclesiastical Approach

Richard W. Griffith

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2018

The purpose of this project is to create a strategy within the North Georgia United Methodist Church Conference (NGUMC) structures to counter the criminalization of youth by engaging in opportunities that bring awareness to the NGUMC and then engage in mentoring and other activities designed to counter this criminalization of youth through holistic and intergenerational approaches at the various ecclesiastical levels within the Conference. There is a growing concern among educators and other youth service professionals in regards to what has been called “the school to prison pipeline.” While a growing number of youth are at risk of falling victim to a culture of criminalization, youth of color and lower socioeconomic status and those in foster care are at particular risk. Few churches are aware that various social agencies are engaging in processes of systemic and systematic criminalization of youth.

This paper is divided into three parts. Part One explores factors contributing to the criminalization of youth in order to gain an understanding of the development and progression of this phenomenon. This portion also examines how criminalization impacts youth, families, and society. Part Two offers an overview of theology found in the Bible and the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, each mandating that the Church come to the aid of those most vulnerable.

Part Three suggests how the Church can be a vital part of curtailing the criminalization of young people, especially foster children who are at a greater risk of criminalization. To fulfill the goal of addressing and curtailing this, a collaborative effort with other churches and child/youth service agencies within the community is developed in order to strengthen, equip, educate, and encourage foster and adoptive families. Support also comes in the form of a monthly support group providing training and fellowship. Part Three concludes with an evaluation.

Content Reader: Chapman Clark, PhD

Word Count: 300

To my sons, Aaron and Dylan, who have pushed me to become a better dad and pastor and engage with children and youth coming from hard places, for the glory of Christ

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who have been an encouragement to my sons and me. Being a parent is no easy task. Being a single-adoptive parent has given me a new appreciation for the many single parents in our society. I do not know how I would ever have been able to raise my boys, pursue a doctoral degree, and simply make it through daily life if it were not for the support of the churches I have served. In truth, these churches have served us. I also would like to thank the many individuals at Fuller Theological Seminary who have encouraged me in countless ways. You know who you are!

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INTRODUCTION

After spending nearly twenty-nine years in youth ministry, I began to notice a paradigm shift in the behaviors, actions, and struggles of young people but did not have a clue as to what the paradigm shift was. It was not until I entered the Doctor of Ministry Program at Fuller Theological Seminary that I was able to put a name to the phenomenon: “systemic abandonment.” Systemic abandonment happens when society permits “the institutions and systems originally designed to nurture children and adolescents to lose their missional mandate.”¹ Child development experts have shown that systemic abandonment includes an emphasis on adult-driven agendas.² In particular, I am grateful to Chap Clark for helping me understand this phenomenon, which is occurring in today’s society. As a result, I am able to more deeply appreciate the struggles of youth and families in our modern culture.

As I continued to engage in further study and dialogue with colleagues, peers, and parents, it became apparent that many sensed a shift in how we think about and treat current adolescents in culture.³ I believe this lack of knowledge has kept most churches and youth ministries ill-equipped to engage in ministry. A much deeper level of understanding and ministry is needed to address the results of systemic abandonment, because this very real problem can contribute to the criminalization of youth.

¹ Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 20.

² Chapter 1 will discuss this more at length.

³ Clark, *Hurt*, 20.

There is a growing concern among educators and other youth service professionals in regards to what has been called “the school to prison pipeline.” This is “the intersection of the K-12 educational system and the juvenile justice system, which too often fail to serve our nation’s at-risk youth.”⁴ While a growing number of youth are falling victim to a culture of criminalization, youth of color and of lower socioeconomic status as well as those in foster care are at particular risk. Few churches are aware that various social agencies are engaging in processes of systemic and systematic criminalization of youth.

Criminalizing young people has devastating effects. The results of criminalization begin a perpetual cycle of personal and relational failures functioning in the areas of education, employment, family, and personal achievements. As sections of the juvenile justice system have been privatized, those who are a part of the industrialized incarceration of young people have the most to gain by continuing the cycle and process of criminalization. Beyond the individual, communities and society as a whole also suffer by a growing culture of distrust and criminalization of their young people. While some churches are aware of the process of criminalizing young people, the Church in the United States seems to have little understanding of systemic abandonment, let alone criminalization. The goal of this paper is to bring awareness of the issue and encourage churches to find ways to combat the problem within their communities.

This discussion will show how countless young people not only are criminalized but also exploited by systemic abandonment. In particular, children in foster care are

⁴ Catherine Y. Kim, Daniel J. Losen, and Damon T. Hewitt, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Structuring Legal Reform* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 1.

systemically abandoned and victimized in a way that contributes to their criminalization and exploitation. The purpose of this project is to create a strategy to counter the criminalization of youth by engaging in opportunities that bring awareness and then engage in mentoring and other activities designed to counter the criminalization of youth through holistic and intergenerational approaches.

The intended target audience for this project is primarily structures within the United Methodist Church framework of the North Georgia Conference and any stakeholder who values young people and their families. While the North Georgia Conference advocates for vulnerable children and even has a Children's Home,⁵ the Conference only now is branching its services into the foster care arena. This being said, and given that I am a local licensed pastor, any attempt to address a possibility of curtailing the systemic abandonment, criminalization, and exploitation of foster care children will have to be done in a local church and community context. In a broader spectrum, it is my desire that conversations happen on a much larger scale involving the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church (NGUMC), educators, policy makers, parents, and anyone else who cares about the lives of young people.

Since many churches have a significant composition of young people and families, it is imperative that the Church take notice of what is going on in adolescent lives and society. In the areas of systemic abandonment and criminalization of young people, the Church can be a voice of reason and advocate for the most vulnerable young people. When the Church mobilizes and cares for vulnerable children, much positive change can happen.

⁵ United Methodist Children's Home, "FAQs," <http://www.umchildrenshome.org/about-us/faqs/> (accessed April 11, 2016).

On a more personal note, I come into this particular project both objectively as a scholar doing research and with a subjective perspective, formed after having worked with young people for nearly three decades and seeing the culture change in ways that have left many children and youth lacking in areas of support from caring adults. Adults seem to have forgotten how to care for kids in a way that sacrifices the adult agenda for the benefit of children. Furthermore, I have been privileged to adopt my two sons from the foster care system. The process of adoption has opened my eyes to perspectives that are only possible by embarking on the road on which I now travel with my boys. The theme of adoption, both in practice and in theology, surfaces regularly throughout this paper. This is because the concept of spiritual adoption can dramatically curb the challenges of systemic abandonment and criminalization in many young lives. It is one thing to theorize and espouse platitudes from a lofty tower; it is another to gain practical experience that challenges those platitudes.

I have encountered a plethora of challenges by having adopted children who have been dealt some very bad hands in life and, through no fault of their own, have had to journey their own paths marred with pain, confusion, anger, insecurity, doubt, and even at times self-loathing. I have had to encourage them constantly in my love for them—and more importantly, in the love that God their perfect Father has for them. These lessons alone have shed a whole new light and understanding on the theology of adoption. It is these lessons in life, ministry, and parenthood that have culminated in this work of recognizing that not only are our children becoming increasingly systemically abandoned, they now are being criminalized because they have not been afforded the benefit of healthy foundational practices and environments in which to flourish.

It seems today's youth, children, and families are in a mode of survival only to view thriving as some distant dream they wish they could obtain. As I look at the gift that adoption has been in my life as an adoptive father, it has led me to conclude that we as adults, and we as the Church, need to take much more seriously our theological covenants that espouse adoption in order to curb and combat the criminalization of our young. I have shared with many potential adoptive parents the following advice:

If you are considering adopting a child, you must understand that in no way, shape, or fashion can that decision be about you! If you are looking to be loved back by a child, scratch that off of your list because many of these children are so hurting and that your greatest gamble is that after all your effort, time and energy, you may only get repaid with disdain, heartbreak and disrespect. If you decide still to adopt, you must realize that you have to commit to loving that child no matter what. These children have been hurt and abandoned too many times. These children will test you. These children will reject you. These children will hurt, confuse, and frustrate you. The good news though is that if they eventually choose to love you back, that love will be immeasurable and it will reflect the immeasurable love that you gave them first.

I believe that the hardest people to love are the ones who need it the most.

Adopting children has great theological significance in the areas of love and redemption. There is no greater love than the love God shows us through His adoption of us (2 Corinthians 6:18). The love of God is reflected when parents, of either biological or adopted children, live beyond their own selfish desires by being willing to lay down their lives for their children (John 15:13). This is why there will be no greater solution to the systemic abandonment and criminalization of young people than a love expressed by a body of believers, who can adopt these young people and families into the family of God. I know this from firsthand experience because my family has benefitted greatly from many adopted "grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins" and brothers and sisters in Christ who have loved, mentored, and co-adopted my boys with me. Although my oldest son comes from a

childhood plagued by abuses of the most unimaginable kind and could have been on a road to criminalization, he would have to intentionally break through many preventative roadblocks that have been set up to protect him by his family in Christ.

The reasons I share this more personal aspect is to encourage readers to understand what happens to children when they are pawns used in adult-driven agendas. These children do not receive what is best for them to grow and mature in healthy ways. This project will show that the result is a weak or absent foundation in life skills, decision making, emotional development, academics, and overall maturity. When these children reach an age where they are considered adults, the very people who failed to give them solid foundations then criminalize these youth for their mistakes. However, the good news is that there is a solution to these failures, but it takes a lot of difficult and intentional work in the area of spiritual adoption to help youth overcome the results of systemic abandonment.

The overall purpose of this endeavor is to create a strategy within the local church and community structures to counter the criminalization of youth by engaging in opportunities that offer mentoring and other activities designed to counter this criminalization through holistic and intergenerational approaches at the various ecclesiastical levels within the NGUMC. As mentioned, this work will have to begin in the local church. Consequently, this present discussion explores the contextual considerations that have contributed to the criminalization of foster care youth in the United States. The loss of significant and meaningful interactions with adults not only has stunted the healthy development of young people, it has put them at risk of increased criminalization. Like the foster care system, the demographic makeup of the North Georgia United Methodist Conference is comprised of many different settings that

include ethnic diversity, urban, suburban, traditional, contemporary, progressive, conservative, and various socioeconomic communities of faith. What all these churches share in common is a concern for young people and a connectional nature that can provide collaborative efforts for the spiritual mentoring of youth. It is the hope that strategic efforts toward spiritual adoption can make a significant difference against the movement to criminalize youth. All of this will be discussed in Part One of this paper.

Part Two explores the theological considerations and implications for developing a new paradigm of ministry for youth and families at the local church level. It develops an understanding of the theologies of adoption, mentoring, community, and Kingdom work. Additionally, it offers a holistic understanding of intergenerational and family ministry and their theological base in Scripture. Holistic ministry approaches are especially helpful for foster and adoptive parents. As a single parent of two adopted children, these approaches have proven invaluable to my ability to raise these children.

Part Three moves toward a plan for faithful action based on the theological and contextual research. It encourages partnership with community agencies to develop strategies for communication, education, and intentional models for intergenerational partnership at the local church level. The evaluation of these approaches will be ongoing throughout investigation and the processes of implementation. Research alone is not enough to address the issues of systemic abandonment, criminalization, or exploitation of young people in foster care. The issue is also of such great magnitude that my current contextual environment would be difficult to “go it alone” as a single church. With this in mind, partnering with like-minded agencies is essential in order to bring hope into such an overwhelming situation.

PART ONE

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTEXT OF ABANDONMENT AND CRIMINALIZATION OF YOUTH

This chapter describes the movement of criminalization that has come from the systemic abandonment of the young. As today's culture increasingly has become separated from meeting the real needs of healthy youth development due to adult-driven agendas, the pattern of criminalizing young people at ever younger ages has led to these same young people growing up with a lack of foundational skills necessary for healthy individuation. This unhealthy movement has profound implications on the social, psychosocial, and spiritual well-being of youth and society.

Definition and Examples of Systemic Abandonment of Youth

In its simplest form, systemic abandonment of young people can be defined as any action that surrenders best practices for the healthy development of young people to the pursuit of adult-driven agendas.¹ These adult-driven agendas produce unforeseen outcomes resulting in non-optimal circumstances that impact the very young people the agenda was intended to help. As Michael Langford observes, "Perhaps what makes the

¹ Clark, *Hurt*, 20.

crisis of adult abandonment of youth so compelling is that it is a phenomenon that cuts across all traditional demographics used in studying adolescence. In a strange way, abandonment is a rather egalitarian affliction. Rich and poor, dominant and minority culture, boys and girls, younger and older adolescents of many different ilk suffer from systemic abandonment.”² With systemic abandonment being a contributing factor, contemporary culture has seen an increase in the criminalization of today’s children and youth through adult-driven agendas in media, public education, and decaying home life. These multifaceted and complex dynamics have generated impersonal relationships and a lack of connectivity in many families and communities, leaving many youth to figure life out on their own.

Fractured family and societal disconnections have caused adults to turn inward and focus on seeking their own pursuits. Clark observes, “Unfortunately, such selfishness reflects a growing trend of parents placing their own needs ahead of those of their children.”³ It is also evident that this selfishness does not stop at the family level. Society is selfish in its political parties, industry, marketers, media, and so many other elements of a culture that puts its needs ahead of the needs of children. For instance, there has been a move to protect adolescents from aggressive marketers, such as Coca-Cola, in the areas of social media. Despite a growing obesity rate in American children and adolescents, which threatens their health on many levels, fast food and soft drink industries continue

² Michael D. Langford, “Troubled Complexion: Adolescent Abandonment as Spiritual Facelessness in the Thought of James,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 13, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 89.

³ *Ibid.*, 103.

to contribute a heavy dose of marketing toward this target market.⁴ This means obesity-related sickness and disease are not too far behind for today's generation of young people. Similarly, with the lack of parental involvement and increasing media portrayal of youth as violent, combined with adult-driven agendas in public education, today's children have become easy targets not only for marketing but for criminalization as well.

Nowhere have these observations been more palpable than in the lives of foster children. The statistics of homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, drug addiction, domestic abuse, and reliance on public assistance among current and former foster care children are staggering. A whopping 30 percent of the homeless population, and in some cases as much as 80 percent of incarcerated adults, are comprised of former foster children.⁵ While these statistics have led many to question the effectiveness of foster care, the development of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) has been shown to provide more stability and less movement in the system of at-risk children. This is a welcome additional support to already overworked Child Protective Agency caseworkers.⁶

A CASA worker advocates for the needs of a child by collecting information through investigation and interviews with family members, neighbors, teachers, and others involved in the life of a child. In a study investigating the effectiveness of CASA workers, there was clear evidence showing that children who had a CASA worker

⁴ Simon Williams, "Action Needed to Combat Food and Drink Companies' Social Media Marketing to Adolescents," *Perspectives in Public Health* 133, no. 3 (May 2013): 146.

⁵ Rick Thoma, "A Critical Look at the Foster Care System: Foster Care Outcomes," *Lifting the Veil: Examining the Child Welfare, Foster Care, and Juvenile Justice Systems*, <http://www.liftingtheveil.org/foster14.htm> (accessed January 22, 2016).

⁶ Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), "About Us," http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.5301303/k.6FB1/About_Us__CASA_for_Children.htm (accessed April 4, 2016).

appointed to them required fewer placement changes and less time spent in out-of-home care.⁷ The CASA program came about as a result of what is already known about the overworked child and family services: inadequate legal presentation, Child Protective Services' inadequacy in addressing safety and permanency of abused and neglected children, and court system delays in placing children in safe and permanent homes.⁸ Making additional resources, such as CASA, available to at-risk children has been helpful in avoiding unnecessary criminalization of young people.

Counseling is another essential element in helping children overcome life challenges, difficulties, and traumas. As shown in an *ABC News* investigation, children in foster care often are overmedicated in an effort to control them rather than taking the time to assess them and properly provide the therapies they require, simply because medication is cheaper and easier to obtain and administer.⁹ In this stunning report by Diane Sawyer, children as young as one year are prescribed powerful psychotropic drugs and foster children are prescribed powerful medications at a rate of thirteen times higher than other children.¹⁰

While the outside world naturally has some degree of instability and concern, in the past the family unit often offered a reprieve from external factors beyond the home.

⁷ Victoria Weisz and Nghi Thai, "The Court-Appointed Special Advocate (Casa) Program: Bringing Information to Child Abuse and Neglect Cases," *Child Maltreatment* 8, no. 3 (August 2003): 205.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ David Ford, "ABC News Investigation: Diane Sawyer and Sharyn Alfonsi to Report on the Overmedication of Children in the U.S. Foster Care System," *ABC News*, November 30, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2011/11/abc-news-investigation-diane-sawyer-and-sharyn-alfonsi-to-report-on-the-overmedication-of-children-in-the-u-s-foster-care-system/> (accessed January 22, 2016).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

However, with the destabilization of families in the United States, the home is no longer a place of refuge as it once was. Fractured families, whether due to divorce or a child being removed from the home, prove harmful as even older children still rely on an attachment to both parents for healthy development.¹¹ Research indicates that even if children have non-kinship relationships, they build much stronger bonds in homes where a marriage is intact, even where multigenerational and collateral ties are important.¹² While these statements indicate the societal need to re-evaluate and address the damage done by broken families, when children come from broken families and enter foster care, there must be even more intentional approaches of placing children in healthy environments and relationships while getting them the help they truly need.

Broken family and economic issues compound the problem of healthy child and youth development. S. Wayne Duncan states that economic factors of broken families result in less financial capital, as single-mother households earn 70 percent of what was available when fathers were present.¹³ With less financial stability, children and youth face a variety of difficult challenges that can impact their home, academic, and social lives dramatically. Broken homes are a significant contributor to individual and societal dysfunction. For instance, divorce is but one traumatic threat to the psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual well-being of adolescents in the United States. The society in

¹¹ Melissa Lieberman, Anna-Beth Doyle, and Dorothy Markiewicz, "Developmental Patterns in Security of Attachment to Mother and Father in Late Childhood and Early Adolescence: Associations with Peer Relations," *Child Development* 70, no. 1 (January/February 1999): 203.

¹² Karen Wall and Rita Gouveia, "Changing Meaning of Family in Personal Relationships," *Current Sociology* 62, no. 3 (January 30, 2014): 369.

¹³ S. Wayne Duncan, "Economic Impact of Divorce on Children's Development: Current Findings and Policy Implications," *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* 23, no. 4 (December 1994): 447.

which adult-led/child-centered organizations systemically abandon their young is destined to systemically abandon that society's future. "From this perspective, stressful events, such as divorce, can lead to an unfolding of failures to resolve developmental tasks and increase susceptibility to mental health problems and impairment in developmental competencies."¹⁴ Moreover, single-parent homes tend to house adolescents who have more independence and power in decision-making. These youth are expected to be more mature and exercise more responsibility around the home than adolescents in two-parent homes. It cannot be assumed that this is a healthy consequence of divorce. For single mothers especially, lower income and limits in time resources—due to taking on the responsibilities of two-parent homes—contribute to stress and anxiety in the home.¹⁵ In other words, the various support systems a young person needs to thrive are removed as a result of broken homes causing disruptions that contribute to trauma, delinquency, instability, mental health issues, and more.

Among other contributing factors, financial and emotional instability resulting from broken homes can lead to systemic abandonment issues. When parents become too consumed with their own concerns prior to, during, or after a divorce to address the traumatic impact of divorce upon their children, children often are forced to navigate the unintended results of divorce on their own. Furthermore, children of divorce are expected to take on more adult roles in order to contribute around the home, often cutting out

¹⁴ Clorinda E. Velez et al., "Protecting Children from the Consequences of Divorce: A Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Parenting on Children's Coping Processes," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (January/February 2011): 246.

¹⁵ Jessica L. Hartos and Thomas G. Power, "Relations among Single Mothers, Awareness of Their Adolescents Stressors, Maternal Monitoring, Mother-Adolescent Communication, and Adolescent Adjustment," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 15, no. 5 (September 2000): 547.

recreational and social engagements. These systemic abandonment issues have led psychologist David Elkind to say that today's children work much more than they play and that this is the reason they are so stressed.¹⁶ A reaction to these stressors can lead to behavioral problems at home and school and contribute to a child's disruptive behaviors, thereby making it easier for a child to face criminalization.

The possibility of criminalization is multiplied for foster care children, who experience a greater degree of instability than non-foster care children. At particular risk are children who have aged out of long-term foster care. These young people are at higher risk of teen pregnancy and incarceration as juveniles. This is because the transition to becoming healthy adults who can provide for themselves becomes hindered when children age out of the Child Protective system. Child Trends, "the nation's leading nonprofit research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth, and their families,"¹⁷ offers the following comment:

Youth who "age out" of foster care (instead of returning home or being adopted) may face challenges to making a successful transition to adulthood. According to the only national study of youth aging out of foster care, 38 percent had emotional problems, 50 percent had used illegal drugs, and 25 percent were involved with the legal system. Preparation for further education and career was also a problem for these young people. Only 48 percent of foster youth who had "aged out" of the system had graduated from high school at the time of discharge, and only 54 percent had graduated from high school two to four years after discharge. As adults, children who spent long periods of time in multiple foster care homes were more likely than other children to encounter problems such as unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration, as well as to experience early pregnancy.¹⁸

¹⁶ David Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2006), 198.

¹⁷ Child Trends, "About Us," <http://www.childtrends.org/about-us/> (accessed May 1, 2016).

¹⁸ Child Trends Data Bank, *Foster Care: Indicators on Children and Youth* (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends Data Bank, December 2015), 2. Arriving to the above conclusion, Child Trends relied on the combined expert research of Thom Reilly, "Transition from Care: Status and Outcomes of Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care," *Child Welfare* 82, no. 6 (November 2003): 727-746, and Kym R. Ahrens, Michelle M.

Simply put, youth who lack adequate support systems have a more difficult challenge of avoiding criminalization.

With the complexities, challenges, and speed of life of contemporary Western society, along with the lack of foundational supports traditionally found in intact homes, it seems that children now are being forced to grow up and mature beyond their capabilities. This push to mature too quickly comes as a result of adult-driven agendas that expect children to grasp knowledge and behave in ways that they have not been intellectually or emotionally equipped to handle. In other words, the rush to pressure “kids” to act like “adults” circumvents a more natural and gradual process. Children in foster care are especially at risk of being pressured to act like adults and engage in advanced self-care, since there is a lack of intimate and familial care. It is as if adults expect young people to play a complex game without explaining the meaning or rules of the game. Robert Keegan states it well. He writes:

In fact, if a wide range of mind-oriented developmental studies, including my own, are to be believed, it makes more sense to conceive of the period between twelve and twenty as a time during which normal mental development consists in the gradual transformation of mind from the second to the third order. This means that it would be normal for people during perhaps much of their adolescence to be *unable* to meet the expectations the adult culture holds out for them! If the two halves of this story make for a problematic whole, how do we understand adolescents who consistently do not meet these expectations? The answer to this will depend on the answer to the first question in the last Chapter: What sort of thing is it that adults expect of adolescents? If we think of these expectations as primarily about *behavior*, then the adolescent who cannot meet them will be seen as misbehaving or incompetent, someone who will not or cannot do what he or she should.¹⁹

Garrison, and Mark E. Courtney, “Health Outcomes in Young Adults From Foster Care and Economically Diverse Backgrounds,” *Pediatrics* 134, no. 6 (December 2014): 1067–1074. For more information, see Child Trends, “Foster Care,” http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=foster-care#_edn3 (accessed May 1, 2016).

¹⁹ Robert Keegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 37.

Not only do adults fail young people when they do not give them the developmental tools needed to navigate the journey to adulthood, adults actually put more undue pressure on them when they expect children and youth to act or perform like adults when they are not emotionally or intellectually capable of doing so.

Keegan further states that the expectations society places upon young people without proper supports is “painful and generates feelings of anger, helplessness, futility or dissociation, all of which can be heard in the familiar adolescent complaint, ‘Whaddaya want from me?’”²⁰ Keegan’s statement validates the fact that society is raising a generation of young people who are given unrealistic expectations without providing these young people the tools they need to navigate the expectations. When these young people then fail to live up to one’s hopes, especially in the ways of behaviors, the sad response is to begin a process of criminalizing them due to what is perceived as unruly behaviors.

Definition and Examples of Criminalization of Youth

In *From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, Nancy Heitzeg tells some eye-opening stories. A nine year old on the way to school found a manicure kit with a one-inch knife and was suspended for a day. “In Massachusetts, a five-year-old boy attending an after-school program made a gun out of Legos and pointed it at other students while ‘simulating the sound of gunfire,’ as one school official put it. He was expelled.”²¹ In another cited situation, “an honors student in Houston, Texas, was forced to spend a night in jail when she missed class to go to work to support her

²⁰ Ibid., 43.

²¹ Nancy Heitzeg, “Criminalizing Education: Zero Tolerance Policies, Police in the Hallways, and the School to Prison Pipeline,” in *From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, Priya Parmar, and David Stovall (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 22.

family.”²² These are only a few of the ridiculous reasons children are suspended, expelled, or criminalized at school. These individual stories reveal underlying adult-driven agendas, particularly with contributions from media and public education, such as “Zero Tolerance” and “No Child Left Behind” policies. Zero Tolerance policies are procedures intended to keep schools safe by doling out tough penalties for students who bring any sort of weapon onto a school campus but instead have become common-place for even minor infractions.²³ However, Zero Tolerance was not intended for minor infractions and typical public school classrooms. Kevin P. Brady sums up well its misuse: “Zero Tolerance policies, while initially directed at the most serious and dangerous criminal behaviors by students, have been used liberally to punish other violations of school policies such as use of tobacco, possession of drugs, suspected gang-related activities and fist fights.”²⁴

No Child Left Behind was an educational, philosophical, and legal approach that embraced standards, accountability, and the guarantee of high-quality education for all children and especially focused on equity toward children who were being overlooked due to racial and economic prejudices within the educational system. The policies also implemented standardized testing intended to gage effectiveness of teachers and educational practices. However, Hackney Gray LaRuth asserts, “The plan potentially victimizes minority parents and students and sets a negative set of goals. It does not take

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Kevin P. Brady, “Zero Tolerance or (in)Tolerance Policies? Weaponless School Violence, Due Process, and the Law of Student Suspensions and Expulsions: An Examination of Fuller V. Decatur Public School Board of Education School District,” *Brigham Young University Education & Law Journal* 1 (January 2002): 161.

into account the much lower educational resources that poor African American and other minority students start out with nor does it propose to remedy the discrepancy.”²⁵

Along with the deconstruction of stable families, Zero Tolerance and No Child Left Behind have contributed systemically to the criminalization of young people. The factors of broken families, heavy-handed consequences at school, and little room for failure combine to increase a growing distrust between adults and adolescents. The distrust is seen heavily in legislature and news media outlets that have portrayed young people as “super predators.”²⁶ Acted upon in education through fears among parents and legislators, this distrust gives license for adult authorities to start viewing children and youth as criminals when they commit even the tiniest infraction of the rules. In particular, this criminalization process is happening by those who are the power brokers in today’s society.

On the most innocent level, policies such as those listed above have been shown to be biased against the poor and minorities; yet at its most insidious layer, it is thought that these policies have been put in place to control and oppress those who are economically challenged or are in a minority category. Victor M. Rios elaborates:

Recent juvenile justice policies and practices, however, have criminalized this coming of age process for youth of color. Inner-city Black and Latino youth do not have much opportunity for redemption and rehabilitation after acts of delinquency. Instead, punitive policies push youth deeper into the criminal justice system, routing them directly into what the Harvard Civil Rights Project has called the “school to prison pipeline.”²⁷

²⁵ Hackney Gray LaRuth, “The 2004 Charles H. Thompson Lecture-Colloquium Presentation: No Child Left Behind: Opportunities and Threats,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 95.

²⁶ Heitzeg, “Criminalizing Education,” 20.

²⁷ Victor M. Rios, “The Racial Politics of Youth Crime,” *Latino Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 98.

There is a correlation between the high numbers of youth of color and those in foster care, cultural and media bias, and criminalization of youth. If this were not so, African-American children would not make up nearly two-thirds of the foster care population and currently remain in care longer.²⁸

In an era of actually fearing children due to media hype with reports that they are becoming super-predators, it is no wonder that children have come under intense scrutiny. However, the degree of scrutiny has gone beyond rational. Another example is the absurd case of Josh Welch, an elementary school student who was suspended for two days for turning a pastry into the shape of a gun.²⁹ There have been similar cases where children have been disciplined and even handled in a criminal manner for doing things that are simply childish, whether it is pointing fingers in the shape of a gun or joking about bubble guns. It is becoming more common to see police cruisers at every school level, from high schools all the way down to elementary schools. According to the National Association of School Resource Officers, “School-based policing is the fastest growing area of law enforcement.”³⁰

Furthermore, the rising number of juvenile infractions point to the unnecessary criminalization of children and youth and breaks through the common assumption that children and youth are becoming more violent. For example, media and social science

²⁸ “Facts for Families,” *Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology* 64 (May 2005): 2.

²⁹ Joe Burris, “Student Suspended for Pop-Tart Gun, Josh Welch, Files Appeal with Maryland County School System,” *HuffPost DC*, March 18, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/18/student-suspended-for-pop-tart-gun_n_2903500.html (accessed August 19, 2015).

³⁰ Maurice Canady, Bernard James, and Janet Nease, “To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools Serve,” *National Association of School Resource Officers* 1 (October 2012): 2.

portrayals paint a picture of children and youth becoming more violent in schools with peer-on-peer violence.³¹ However, in reality, juvenile crime statistics have been on the decrease.³² To the contrary of popular perception, a child or adolescent is statistically more likely to die at the hands of a parent or caregiver than at the hands of a peer or in school. As Amy E. Swain and George W. Noblit point out, “Distortions in youth crime coverage in the media are commonplace and dangerously misleading, often heightening moral panic unnecessarily.”³³ These authors rely on the research of V. Schiraldi and J. Ziedenberg, who agree and offer the following facts: “Twelve kids died in the shooting at Columbine High School, and 11 kids die at the hands of their parents or guardians every 2 days in America.”³⁴

As a reaction to the perceived increase in school violence driven by media reports, government entities have enacted policies designed to make public schools a safer place. As with any broad-sweeping legislation, systemic failures are bound to happen. In the 1980s, there was a prevailing perception that urban school settings were becoming more violent and unsafe. In the 1990s this perception moved to suburban school settings. At the same time during these two decades, the United States was engaged in a national “war on drugs.”³⁵ The perceptions of unsafe schools, the war on drugs, and the subsequent school shootings that

³¹ Brian G. Sellers, “Community-Based Recovery and Youth Justice,” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 59.

³² Jun Hong and Mary Eamon, “Students’ Perceptions of Unsafe Schools: An Ecological Systems Analysis,” *Journal of Child & Family Studies* 21, no. 3 (April 19, 2011): 428.

³³ Amy E. Swain, and George W. Noblit, “Education in a Punitive Society: An Introduction,” *The Urban Review* 43, no. 4 (November 2011): 471.

³⁴ V. Schiraldi and J. Ziedenberg, “How Distorted Coverage of Juvenile Crime Affects Public Policy,” in *Zero Tolerance: Resisting the Drive for Punishment in Our Schools*, eds. W. Ayers, B. Dohrn, and R. Ayers (New York: The New Press, 2001), 118.

³⁵ Stephanie Martinez, “A System Gone Berserk: How Are Zero-Tolerance Policies Really Affecting Schools?” *Preventing School Failure* 53, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 153.

occurred in the decade that followed all led to the implementation of public school policies that began the process of criminalizing youth and children. Foster care children who come from unstable environments often are seen as more problematic when it comes to the process of criminalization, due to the behaviors they display as a result of the variety of instability they experience in their lives.

School shootings—such as the ones in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Bailey, Colorado; and Cazenovia, Wisconsin³⁶—have continued the escalation of public fear leading to tougher policies. Stephanie Martinez writes: “The tremendous media coverage only galvanize[d] public opinion in favor of zero-tolerance and harsh penalties for students who bring weapons to school. In the face of such publicity, legislatures do not wish to appear soft on crime and violence.”³⁷ Other violations that have a tough stance taken against them now include fights on school grounds, terroristic threats, bullying, and bringing empty shotgun shells and small pocketknives. Zero Tolerance became the battle cry of a fearful nation that is convinced that its children have become violent, bear little respect for authority, and behave like hardened convicts. Standards that once were applied only to the most disruptive and antagonistic students now are applied for minor offenses.

Martinez points out an interesting fact:

Zero Tolerance finds its roots as a program developed by U.S. Customs to target drug lords. This policy was then put into effect in both elementary and secondary schools. In essence, the “crackdown” on school violence, which was blown out of proportion by media, began to reflect the approach designated for hardened

³⁶ LancasterPA.com, “Amish School Shooting,” <http://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-school-shooting/> (accessed March 20, 2016); Sean Alfano, “Cops: School Shooting Was ‘Horrific,’” *CBS News*, September 27, 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cops-school-shooting-was-horrific/> (accessed May 1, 2016); Sean Alfano, “Principal Shot, Killed in Wis. School,” *CBS News*, September 29, 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/principal-shot-killed-in-wis-school/> (accessed May 1, 2016).

³⁷ Martinez, “A System Gone Berserk,” 153.

criminals, drug traffickers and murderers. As school systems began to implement zero tolerance policies, U.S. Customs were actually phasing out such approaches as they were found to be ineffective.³⁸

While Zero Tolerance initially was implemented to be used against hardened drug lords and the most violent of criminals, it eventually took on a life of its own as school administrators began to use the policy “to crack down” on everything, from nail files to inappropriate language and clothing to anything an administrator might consider distracting to the educational process. “Hence, zero-tolerance policies have become a cop-out for school administrators, allowing them to bar students from receiving an education.”³⁹ Students who have frequent behavior problems are targeted for removal from the classroom, especially when it comes time for standardized testing. The purpose of removing students with behavioral issues is to avoid potential lower test scores. Lower test scores are perceived as a direct correlation between the school or teacher’s abilities to educate and therefore impact school ratings and funding.

In some cases, Zero Tolerance has become “zero common sense.” This is revealed in the circumstances such as the infamous “Hello Kitty Bubble Gun” incident, where a five-year-old kindergarten student was suspended for mentioning she was going to shoot her friend with bubbles from a Hello Kitty bubble gun.⁴⁰ At its worst, Zero Tolerance has become an intentional tool of discrimination when used as a targeting mechanism against low-income or at-risk families. Rios has discovered the following in his research:

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁰ Nikki Krize, “Hello Kitty Bubble Gun Controversy,” WNEP, <http://wnep.com/2013/01/18/hello-kitty-bubble-gun-controversy/> (accessed July 4, 2013).

In today's punitive urban setting, even the typical juvenile transgressor—the truant, the “tagger,” the peripherally involved gang member, the small-time drug dealer and the petty thief—feels the detrimental impact of zero-tolerance policies in his community; young people of color are constantly policed, surveilled, criminalized and severely punished for even the smallest of transgressions.⁴¹

Zero Tolerance policies have gone beyond the scope of targeting drug lords and gang-related violence in schools, weapons in schools, and the war on drugs. Zero Tolerance has become a way to use “criminalization as a strategy for managing social problems,” even if the problems do not threaten public safety.⁴²

This criminalization of young people not only affects their education adversely, it influences the family units in which they live. Zero Tolerance has become a way that hastens the path to jails for young people who have been in trouble for even the smallest infractions. In an article for *Social Justice*, Diane F. Reed and Edward L. Reed write: “The national trend to use incarceration to punish even minor offenses guarantees that children will continue to be adversely affected by policies enacted with no consideration of harm done to family systems.”⁴³ Criminalization of young people, even for minor offenses, makes it difficult for young people to break a cycle of continued failure. Swain and Noblit further observe:

Zero-tolerance reduced the ability of schools and society to educate students about misbehavior and replaced it with the criminalization of youth and, as we have shown, youth of color in particular. Without educative responses to initial infractions, youth are punished both with criminal records and exclusion from

⁴¹ Rios, “The Racial Politics of Youth Crime,” 98.

⁴² Clare Sears, “Introduction: Sexuality, Criminalization, and Social Control,” *Social Justice* 37, no. 1 (October 2010): 1.

⁴³ Diane F. Reed and Edward L. Reed, “Children of Incarcerated Parents,” *Social Justice* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 152.

school. They then become more likely to be arrested again and imprisoned—at a high cost to all of us.⁴⁴

While all these Zero Tolerance policies continue to be implemented, research shows that they not only are damaging the educational process, they are ineffective—especially when dealing with at-risk youth. Jun Hong and Mary Eamon point out, “Scholars caution against creating a jail-like, heavily structured environment. Relying solely on punitive measures may actually exacerbate the danger by inflaming at-risk youth.”⁴⁵ In other words, if society begins a process of treating young people like criminals, they can live up to societal expectations of them becoming criminals. Martinez agrees and concludes the following regarding the failure of Zero Tolerance: “Hence, if zero-tolerance is truly an effective deterrent, then it would be expected that there should be a reduction in the use of suspension, but in reality there has been an increase in the use of suspension.”⁴⁶ Zero Tolerance policies that were intended for the worst of criminals only add to the politicizing of public education and the criminalizing of today’s children and youth. It now seems that the children and youth of America are being viewed through the same punitive consequences that were designed originally for the most hardened criminal. Sadly, these consequences often have their root in the public school setting.

The policies also implemented standardized testing, which intended to gauge effectiveness of teachers and educational practices. It seems that the standards were raised for all children, while reaching them became unobtainable for children who did not

⁴⁴ Swain and Noblit, “Education in a Punitive Society,” 471.

⁴⁵ Hong and Eamon, “Students’ Perceptions of Unsafe Schools,” 436.

⁴⁶ Martinez, “A System Gone Bezerk,” 155.

have access to the necessary resources needed to achieve the expected results from standardized testing. Similar to Zero Tolerance failures, No Child Left Behind misses the mark in that “it encourages educators to set aside best practices in favor of ‘teaching to the test’ and contradicts much of what we know from research.”⁴⁷ Researchers such as Jennifer L. Jennings and Jonathan Marc Bearak have noted: “As a result, many have charged that test-specific instruction—often referred to as ‘teaching to the test’—has led to score inflation on state tests, where score inflation is defined as gains in student test scores larger than gains in student learning in the domain to which the test intends to generalize.”⁴⁸ What this means is that schools are no longer teaching children how to think; rather, they are focusing on teaching children what to think. This does little for the academic and intellectual development of the nation’s young.

To further point out the mixed messages sent to children and youth, there are elements within the public education that have more sinister adult-driven agendas. One such adult-driven agenda is that of an extremely progressive sex education for today’s children. The goals of this type of education are to undermine parental influence and authority in the lives of their children. For instance, in an issue of *Radical Teacher*, Anne-Elizabeth Murdy, Scott Mendel, and Elizabeth Freeman write: “Working towards those goals, Just Say Yes is frank, upbeat, and as explicit as possible. Our pro-sex page offers a list of hot, safe, sexy things to try with a partner or alone; we give no less than

⁴⁷ Stephen Rushton and Anne Juola-Rushton, “Classroom Learning Environment, Brain Research and the No Child Left Behind Initiative: 6 Years Later,” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 36, no. 1 (April 15, 2008): 87-92.

⁴⁸ Jennifer L. Jennings and Jonathan Marc Bearak, “Teaching to the Test in the NCLB Era: How Test Predictability Affects Our Understanding of Student Performance,” *Educational Researcher* 43, no. 8 (November 1, 2014): 381.

ten steps for proper condom use. Just Say Yes has been called ‘offensive’ and ‘shocking.’”⁴⁹ Since children are not typically emotionally ready for sexual interactions, and since most parents attempt to dissuade premature sexual interactions, this is one clear example of an adult-driven agendas pushed within the halls of public education that go against the moral teachings of many parents. The next statement clearly indicates that the authors of the “Just Say Yes” material are not concerned about parental moral input. They push their agenda by saying, “Perhaps our most utopian ambition is that others will come to see, as we have, that the responsibility for the protection and education of young people lies beyond the boundaries of schools and the nuclear family.”⁵⁰ Messages such as these undermine any sense of moral authority parents feel they must speak into the life of their child when it comes to sexuality.

A principle that points to mixed messages about teen sexuality and criminalization can be seen by how the juvenile justice system treats both male and female adolescents engaging in sexual activity. Lisa Pasko explains, “Despite a juvenile justice system that has deinstitutionalized noncriminal behavioral problems, pushed more juveniles to adult court, and widened the net for identifying sexually assaultive male youth, the capture and commitment of girls for sexual indecency mirrors that of the earlier era, even as the process and definitions have changed.”⁵¹ In context of the Just Say Yes material that encourages sexual activity, students receive mixed messages when they

⁴⁹ Anne-Elizabeth Murdy, Scott Mendel, and Elizabeth Freeman, “Teaching Outside the Curriculum: Guerrilla Sex Education and the Public Schools,” *Radical Teacher* 45, no. 17 (Winter 1994): 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Lisa Pasko, “Damaged Daughters: The History of Girls’ Sexuality and the Juvenile Justice System,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 100, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 1099-1130.

act upon the Just Say Yes teaching of freedom in sexuality but then are criminalized for it. In this sense, public education sends these convoluted messages, which often confuse children for acting out on what they have been encouraged to do but then finding themselves in legal trouble.

Public education not only seems intent on sending mixed messages, there also seems to be an attempt to wrestle away authority from parents.⁵² It is possible that public education has felt the need to take on this authority, because many parents have abdicated their right to be the moral influencer of their child. As such parental abandonment occurs, through busy schedules and personal pursuits or unintentionally when parents believe that professional educators and child development specialists know what is best for their child, state institutions will continue to influence with more authority as a result. State foster care institutions serve even more of a parental role in the lives of foster care children. Broad, sweeping policies intended to keep children safe often do not take into account individual needs or circumstances. Much like the failures of Zero Tolerance and No Child Left Behind policies, institutionalized foster care rarely advocates for the needs of the individual child.

Despite the mixed messages of the public education system, adult-driven agendas, and the skewed perception that children and adolescents are becoming more violent, schools are still secure places despite attempts to criminalize more children and youth. Roger, J. Ashford et al. write: “It is important for educational leaders, policy makers, parents, and community members to realize that although violence can and does sometimes

⁵² Michael James, “MSNBC: We Have to Break through This Idea ‘That Kids Belong to Their Parents,’” CNSNews.com, April 8, 2013, <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/msnbc-we-have-break-through-idea-kids-belong-their-parents> (accessed July 4, 2013).

occur in schools, it is rare. Although the potential for school violence cannot be ignored, studies such as this one indicate that schools are relatively safe places.”⁵³ Principals and administrators echo these sentiments. Ashford et al. quote studies that schools are generally safe places for students regarding risk of serious, violent victimization; however, bullying, harassment, and mean-spirited teasing remain substantial concerns. The authors state how school superintendents consistently reported taking many steps to stop violence at school and maintain a safe learning environment for students, teachers, staff, and administrators.⁵⁴ With such a hypervigilance toward the perceived need for school safety and other adult agendas, students simply are not getting the education they need. Policies that focus on behaviors, criminalization, and standardized testing rather than preparing children and youth academically are creating a generation of young people who are ill-prepared for the future. Robert A. Lewis, Jr. has discovered the following:

A common concern of college professors is the unpreparedness of incoming freshmen for the demands of college scholarship. Recently, the media have brought this problem into the national spotlight. When addressing the preparation (or the lack of it) of high school students for college history, historians should realize that in many of our urban and rural public school systems, school boards, administrators, and teachers have a hierarchy of concerns, and, unfortunately, the academic preparation of high school students for postsecondary education often has the lowest priority. Public relations and local (as well as office) politics frequently demand the most immediate attention and have the biggest impact on not only the quality of high school history classes but all of secondary education. Generally, public school systems have sacrificed the quality of education for their students to public relations and the personal advancement of teachers and administrators.⁵⁵

⁵³ Roger, J. Ashford et al., “Perceptions and Record of Violence in Middle and High School,” *Behavioral Disorders* 33, no. 4 (August 2008): 230.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁵ Robert A. Lewis, Jr., “Public Relations and Politics in the Public Schools: Barriers to Academic Preparation for College,” *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 3 (December 1994): 1008.

It seems university professors who are not even in the secondary educational environment notice this flaw. Society is failing its children due to the influence of perceptions and politics. When schools become more about public relations, politics, and personal advancement for teachers and administrators, children and youth pay the price on the altar of adult-driven agendas. Unless it is stopped, this approach will continue to leave a generation more woefully ill-prepared to meet the challenges of life for which academics taught through public education was supposed to equip them.

Despite schools being safer than media portrayals, sweeping mandates and ineffective policies such as Zero Tolerance and No Child Left Behind are kept in effect. Although parental input is recognized as the most influential voice in a young person's life, public education policies often undermine parental voices. This problem is all the more accentuated for foster care children, who rarely have parental advocacy against a process of criminalization. These destructive policies and practices on the part of public education further perpetuate a sense of distrust between youth and adults, leading to further criminalization of children and youth.

The Societal Impact of Criminalization on Youth

The cost of incarcerating a child is consistently, and minimally, ten times greater than educating a child. Nell Bernstein explains, "On average, we spend \$88,000 per year to incarcerate a young person in a state facility—more than eight times the \$10,652 we invest in her education. In many states, this gap is even wider. In California for example, the cost of a year in a youth prison reached a high of \$225,000, while education spending

dipped to less than \$8,000.”⁵⁶ Whereas a quality education in the long term results in quality contributions to a community, the lack of quality education inside the juvenile justice system’s prisons can be seen as a misuse of taxpayers’ funds, since most taxpayers likely would prefer to have their money spent improving education in communities where the educational needs are greatest and funds can be more effective.

There are indications that youth are not being corrected through proper education and their academic and social problems are only being exacerbated. Bernstein reveals an even worse reality: “In fact, multiple studies have shown that putting youth behind bars not only fails to enhance public safety; it does just the opposite, driving low-level delinquents deeper into criminality and increasing the likelihood that they will wind up behind bars again and again.”⁵⁷ More than one scholar has noticed that young people who are removed from mainstream schools and placed either in alternative schools or a juvenile institution have a very difficult time re-entering mainstream education due to the punitive nature of the alternative “educational” options.⁵⁸

With the high cost of incarcerating today’s children, the lack of positive transformation, and increasingly negative outcomes to communities, a glaring question begins to surface: “If incarcerating our children has little positive outcome on their education or rehabilitation, and if society is not benefitting from that incarceration, who gains from incarcerating our children?” It seems that the prison industrial complex does. As

⁵⁶ Nell Bernstein, *Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison* (New York: The New Press, 2014), 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁸ Marsha Weissman, *Prelude to Prison: Student Perspectives on School Suspension* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 63.

children and youth begin to experience incarceration, and with little success in rehabilitating through education, they enter a pipeline known as “the schoolhouse to jailhouse track” that ultimately services the financial pockets of the prison industrial complex. As Heitzeg notes:

While Advance Placement high school courses and vocational tracks prepare students for their respective positions in the workforce, it is the “schoolhouse to jailhouse track” that prepares students for their futures as inmate neo-slave laborers in the political economy of the prison industrial complex. The age of mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex calls for the continual replenishment of the ranks of the imprisoned, and it is youth of color who are the most often selected to fill that onerous role.⁵⁹

One significant contributing factor to avoiding the schoolhouse to jailhouse problem is a recommendation of due process for a student who has gotten in trouble. While there are few procedural processes available to students who incur short-term consequences, such as a ten-day or less suspension, youth advocates have had some success in providing procedural protections against long-term suspensions or expulsions.⁶⁰ As it has been stated, clearly the disruption of education is not in the best interest of the youth or the community where they live. Simply put, advocacy for youth who make poor decisions and are truly not criminal might be in the best interest not only of the youth but also for educational institutions, the community, and the economy.

The Impact of Criminalization on Youth Psychosocial Development

Education

While this discussion highlights how the current educational climate has an overwhelming bent to criminalize today’s youth and children, the long-term effects of

⁵⁹ Heitzeg “Criminalizing Education,” 19.

⁶⁰ Kim, Losen, and Hewitt, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 81.

criminalization on the academic abilities of youth are even more heinous. Things that law-abiding citizens take for granted become a true stumbling block for youngsters who find themselves trying to acclimate back to life outside the prison system. Once an individual has been involved in any type of institutional living, the skills needed for independent living are more difficult to obtain and maintain. Institutional living is often regimented and regulated by individuals—for example, corrections officers and caseworkers.

Such evidence only can be seen in the individual stories of actual youth. Don C. Sawyer III and Daniel White Hodge share the experience of “Larry,” who began to get caught up in the drug trade at the age of twelve and wound up in prison by sixteen. After years of institutionalization, Larry wept when he went into a public restroom and did not know how to use the sinks as they were now using hands-free technology. He was used to old-fashioned, handled sinks in prison. This was simply one basic technology to which Larry was not acclimated due to his years of being imprisoned. Besides a lack of training in technical adaptations, Larry had no employable skills. Furthermore, the lack of education and training Larry received while incarcerated extended to a lack of social skills, such as day-to-day conversations beyond institutional life. On so many fronts, the lack of education in Larry’s life made “life on the outside” a seemingly insurmountable challenge to function in a healthy manner, making reintegration into society increasingly difficult. Larry’s story is not dissimilar to many individuals who were criminalized at a young age and sent to prison. Larry initially got caught up in the drug culture at a time and location when many of the large drug dealers in South Central Los Angeles were on

the Central Intelligence Agency's payroll, which shows how youth inadvertently become caught in the web of adult-driven agenda.⁶¹

Once young people enter the juvenile system, the difficulties they face in completing their education are even greater. The substandard education offered in alternative schools and juvenile prisons makes it impossible to keep up with grade-level requirements. Even if youth wanted to re-enter school, and if it were an option to be able to do so, such young people would find themselves in need of much remedial assistance just to be on par academically with peers. As Anne Burns Thomas states, "Even if a youth is required by the terms of his/her release and probation to be enrolled in school, the transition is far from natural or guaranteed."⁶²

The perpetuating cycle of criminalization easily can be attributed to school districts that are impoverished. Larry's situation reflected this cycle. As he became an adult and had little to no education beyond his incarceration experience, he was forced to take a minimum wage job. This placed him in a socioeconomically challenged demographic and neighborhood, which was the only place where he could afford to live. If Larry remains unable to engage in educational opportunities, then his children are forced to go to a sub-standard school where educational opportunities are not even close to being on par with more affluent schools. While students may have a right to a free

⁶¹ Don C. Sawyer III and Daniel White Hodge, "Back on the Block: Community Reentry and Reintegration of Formerly Incarcerated Youth," in *From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, Priya Parmar, and David Stovall (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 237.

⁶² Anne Burns Thomas, "Youth in Transition and School Reentry: Process, Problems, and Preparation," in *From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, Priya Parmar, and David Stovall (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 251.

education, they only are guaranteed the minimal, or adequate, education that their district can provide. Even when an adequate education cannot be provided due to low resources, state courts are reluctant to legislate remedies for a failure to provide an adequate education.⁶³ The cycle of subpar education before, during, and after the process of criminalizing a young person seems to prey particularly on minorities and those who are socioeconomically deprived. These realities make it extremely difficult for the victims of youth criminalization to climb out of an increasingly deep pit.

Self-Actualization

Many young people have a difficult time adjusting back into mainstream school systems due to the various levels of trauma they have experienced before, during, and after incarceration. A child or youth's family life contributes significantly to such trauma as a result of several risk factors occurring simultaneously, which only increase the prevalence of mental health problems.⁶⁴ Trauma often is caused by domestic abuse, divorce, addiction, lower socioeconomic status, and other difficulties. All of this must be dealt with while struggling to stay focused in school. Trauma consumes a young person's energy and attention and creates a lack of focus, which can lead to a child or youth being labeled as disruptive. Children need both a positive and stable home life that provide family resources such as time with parents, social capital, economic support—all of

⁶³ Kim, Losen, and Hewitt, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 14.

⁶⁴ Nora Wille, Susanne Bettge, and Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer, "Risk and Protective Factors for Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health: Results of the Bella Study," *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 17 (December 2008): 133.

which are particularly strained in single-parent families.⁶⁵ Along with family resources, youth and children fare better when exposed to social resources that include social clubs, teachers, friends, and sports activities.⁶⁶ When either or both of these elements are absent from a child's life, disruptive behaviors are bound to occur.⁶⁷ It already has been shown that the juvenile justice system fails to adequately educate children while incarcerated. Being forcibly removed from family and social supports by the juvenile justice system only adds to trauma and lessens the chance of a much needed education.

When incarcerated, children and youth often see or participate in more violence than they did on the street or at school—especially violence that is perpetrated against them.⁶⁸ In most juvenile jails, young people lose any sense of personal identity as they are warehoused, put in uniforms, fingerprinted, given a number, strip-searched, put in solitary confinement, and struggle simply to adjust to their new surroundings and survive.

Juvenile detention centers often reflect their adult counterparts. For example, even if a young person is not in a gang prior to being incarcerated, he or she quickly finds an affiliation with a similar demographic in order to stay protected. Bernstein reports that young people are told by fellow inmates not to become a “bitch” by showing fear or walking away from a challenge; this advice also is given to new youth inmate arrivals by adult guards who want to silence complaints or snitching. Young people are told by those

⁶⁵ Hartos and Power, “Relations among Single Mothers,” 547.

⁶⁶ Wille, Bettge, and Ravens-Sieberer, “Risk and Protective Factors for Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health,” 134.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bernstein, *Burning Down the House*, 112.

same guards that they can expect to be beaten up, have their nose and teeth broken, but they will not die.⁶⁹

To make things worse, “more than 12 percent of juvenile prisoners will experience sexual assault behind bars, and many more will live in fear of it each day they spend locked up.”⁷⁰ One in fifty youth are sexually abused by other youth, while one in ten are sexually abused by a member of the staff. Sexual abuse rates are much higher in juvenile jails than they are in adult jails, because many of the younger and more vulnerable youth are easier prey for those adults who are charged with their care.⁷¹ Ultimately, the realities of both physical and sexual abuse within the juvenile jail systems work against the healthy development of young people.

Long-Term Effects

Individuals who have been involved in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as being incarcerated, often become self-destructive due to an inability to believe they are loved or worthy of receiving love. The results of these ACEs are significant influences on the health of children and adolescents and increases their predisposition to teen pregnancy, smoking, alcohol abuse, illicit drug abuse, sexual behavior, mental health, risk of re-victimization, and unstable relationships and performance in the workforce. These are simply a few of the risks related to individuals who experience

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22. The entire first chapter of Bernstein’s book recounts some of the atrocities that go on inside the juvenile jails. Ironically, the very system that is supposed to “rehabilitate and educate” the wards of the facility actually wind up doing more damage.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 103.

⁷¹ Ibid., 104.

trauma during their childhood. This list even extends to include what many might consider more adult-type risks—such as heart, lung, and liver disease.⁷²

Long-term effects occur on such a deep level due to the very nature of pre-adolescence and adolescent development. Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar defines adolescence in this way:

[It is] a transitional stage of human development that involves biological (i.e., pubertal), social, and psychological changes in preparation for adulthood. This stage of development is marked by a socialization process whereby youth are actively engaged in social interactions with various individuals, authority figures, groups, and networks, within a complex social universe composed of the sociocultural worlds of the family, community, peer group, the school and other predominant institutions (e.g., police and judicial system; the labor sector).⁷³

As adult authority figures and systems ranging from in the home to in schools continue to fail young people, the negative effects on them and the community are profound and perpetuate a cycle of dysfunction for both the individual and the community. To add to Stanton-Salazar's definition of adolescence, Hans Sebald considers six different attributes or dimensions that define and impact adolescence. These are sociological, psychological, physiological, legislative, economic, and traditional dimensions.⁷⁴ The sociological has to do with social supports engaged in the life of a child. The psychological supports have to do with health emotional development while the physiological pertain to the healthy physical development of a child. Legislative and economic dimensions are larger societal

⁷² Robert F. Anda et al., "The Enduring Effects of Abuse and Related Adverse Experiences in Childhood: A Convergence of Evidence from Neurobiology and Epidemiology," *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 256 no. 3 (November 2005):183.

⁷³ Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar, "A Social Capital Framework: A Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents and Their Role in the Empowerment of Low-Status Students and Youth," *Youth and Society* 43, no. 3 (October 11, 2010): 1068.

⁷⁴ Hans Sebald, *Adolescence: A Social Psychological Analysis*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 3-8.

elements that impact the child when it comes to laws that regulate the behaviors of the individual and society, while economic dimensions describe financial and other value assets available to the child and family. Finally, the traditional dimensions are elements of consistency and rituals both within the family and society. If these dimensions in the life of a child are healthy and nurturing, each child has the ability to thrive and gain healthy individuation. Clearly, when children are incarcerated, as has been described in this paper, each of these dimensions in the life of an adolescent becomes distorted at best or completely harmful.

It is helpful to have a better understanding of the effects of trauma on brain development and mental health. Robert F. Anda et al. state, “We now know from breakthroughs in neurobiology that ACE’s disrupt neurodevelopment can have lasting effects on brain structure and function—the biologic pathways that likely explain the strength of the findings from the ACE study.”⁷⁵ It could be stated like this: As the brain goes, so goes the person. “Neuropsychological research suggests that exposure to traumatic events and the consequent alterations in stress hormones cause alterations in the structure and functioning of the brain, affecting brain systems involved in learning, memory and affective regulation.”⁷⁶ Frequently, ACEs contribute to the inability of a child to control emotional outbursts or inappropriate behaviors and are signs of trauma, abuse, or other adverse childhood experiences. Rather than seeking the appropriate help needed for the child to develop toward healthy individualization, the child or youth is penalized

⁷⁵ Anda et al., “The Enduring Effects of Abuse and Related Adverse Experiences in Childhood,” 175.

⁷⁶ Iris-Tatjana Kolassa and Thomas Elbert, “Structural and Functional Neuroplasticity in Relation to Traumatic Stress,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science (Wiley-Blackwell)* 16, no. 6 (December 2007): 322.

due to the very behaviors that signify a problem. The long-term effect of this continued cycle of unmet needs continues to propagate both the juvenile and adult prison systems.

Furthermore, the long-term impact of systemic abandonment, childhood and youth traumas, and criminalization of young people comes with a staggering financial price. In the big picture of these societal failures toward youth, including juvenile incarceration, the cost comes to an estimated \$124 billion to \$585 billion per year.⁷⁷ While financial implications are staggering, the emotional and developmental toll on the individual young person and community in which he or she resides is immeasurable.

The Impact of Criminalization on Youth Spiritual Development

When children and youth are incarcerated and removed from their home, community, and support systems, healthy individuation is much more difficult to achieve. When healthy individuation does not occur, youth become unhealthy adults. Unhealthy adults can become destructive, which damages society. As Bernstein puts it, “By worsening the problems that often contributed to their crimes in the first place, and increasing the odds that they will commit more crime in the future, these institutions actually undermine public safety in the longer term.”⁷⁸

For this reason, attachment and bonding between parents and child should not be undervalued. “Studies examining children longitudinally from infancy to middle childhood (i.e., ages 9 and 10) have demonstrated that children classified as securely attached in infancy are more likely to be rated as popular with peers, to be involved with

⁷⁷ Xiangming Fang et al., “The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 36, no. 2 (October 2011): 156.

⁷⁸ Bernstein, *Burning Down the House*, 10.

reciprocal friendships, and have a higher number of friends than insecure children.”⁷⁹ Secure attachments foster positive self-image, giving a child a head start on healthy individuation. Furthermore, “insecure children are likely to have a negative view of themselves, and a view of others as unresponsive to their needs. Consequently, insecure children are likely to expect further rejections, and may behave in ways which elicit them.”⁸⁰ The best thing that can happen for a child’s healthy interaction with society is to have nourishing attachment and bonding experiences within the earliest dyad of mother and child. Finally, Melissa Lieberman, Anna-Beth Doyle, and Dorothy Markiewicz suggest that healthy attachment relationships with parents give children opportunities to learn how to handle intimacy and closeness, which may be more important for the formation of close friendships, rather than peer acceptance.⁸¹

Children who have experienced insecure attachments in their early life have difficulty achieving identity formation. This is due to the fact that children develop their identity within their family, community, and cultural contexts. When families, communities, and cultural contexts are ever changing, children, youth, and adults have difficulty developing their own identities, because they have no emotional anchor. In the *American Journal of Family Therapy* Anthony J. Faber et al. write: “The identity-achieved status describes adolescents who have successfully achieved an identity through

⁷⁹ Lieberman, Doyle, and Markiewicz, “Developmental Patterns in Security of Attachment to Mother and Father in Late Childhood and Early Adolescence,” 204.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 209.

experiencing a crisis, exploring, and committing to a set of values.”⁸² Young people experience successful identity achievement not as a result of the crisis, but because the young person had caring adults that help guide them through the crisis. Successful navigation of crisis occurs, because a young person has had secure relationships to explore solutions to it. Caring adults serve as a safety net for the adolescent throughout dilemmas. This ability to explore starts at a young age.

Young people in a punitive juvenile prison system are rarely, if ever, involved with caring and nurturing adult relationships that further help healthy development. What is worse is the practice of solitary confinement of young people. The intent of solitary confinement is to “destroy the mind and break the spirit.”⁸³ This is a practice that directly conflicts with what young people need in their holistic development. In 2012, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry issued a statement strongly opposing the practice of solitary confinement on youth and children:

The potential psychiatric consequences of prolonged solitary confinement are well recognized and include depression, anxiety and psychosis. Due to their developmental vulnerability, juvenile offenders are at particular risk of such adverse reactions. Furthermore, the majority of suicides in juvenile correctional facilities occur when the individual is isolated or in solitary confinement.⁸⁴

This statement alone should wreak havoc on the minds and spirits of any youth workers concerned with the spiritual development of youth.

⁸² Anthony J. Faber et al., “Family Structure: Its Effects on Adolescent Attachment and Identity Formation,” *American Journal of Family Therapy* 31, no. 4 (July-September 2003): 243.

⁸³ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, “Solitary Confinement of Juvenile Offenders,” https://www.aacap.org/aacap/policy_statements/2012/solitary_confinement_of_juvenile_offenders.aspx (accessed March 16, 2016); see also Bernstein, *Burning Down the House*, 131.

⁸⁴ Bernstein, *Burning Down the House*, 131.

Spiritual development is a construct that involves dimensions such as beliefs and attitudes, behaviors and rituals, personal experiences, emotional phenomena, and varying levels of consciousness and awareness, and personality.⁸⁵ This spiritual development for youth can help determine how young people view their relationship between self and God as well as how that they see their individual role in the larger context of life. Life circumstances often shape a young person's spiritual development. In a recent interview Christian Smith, researcher for the National Study of Youth and Religion and a co-author of *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*,⁸⁶ states that childhood spiritual development has a significant impact on the religious attitudes of emerging adults.⁸⁷ Issues ranging from abuse, divorce, removal from the home, broken and multiple homes as well as other family dysfunctions are frequently hidden from most church leaders. These issues have been given the name of "millennial morbidity."⁸⁸

In light of all that has been presented thus far, the criminalization of the young, often over petty circumstances, takes its toll on the overall development of the individual youth and society. It has been shown that minimal positive correction occurs within the walls of a juvenile facility. Constructive education is sparse and inadequate. Juveniles face fear of harassment from their peers as well as the adult guards. With few caring

⁸⁵ Y. Joel Wong, Lynn Rew, and Kristina D. Slaikeu, "A Systematic Review of Recent Research on Adolescent Religiosity/Spirituality and Mental Health," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 27, no. 2 (February 2006): 163.

⁸⁶ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸⁷ Jane Thayer, "Inside Story of a Landmark Study on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults: An Interview with Christian Smith," *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (October 2011): 342.

⁸⁸ Wille, Bettge, and Ravens-Sieberer, "Risk and Protective Factors for Children's and Adolescent's Mental Health," 134.

adults and minimal provisions toward healthy physical and emotional maturation, it is safe to say that spiritual development is near non-existent as well. Even if the State sought to consider a young person's spiritual needs, a youth who is simply surviving physically and emotionally could find it difficult to thrive spiritually. There is hope in the way of ministry to incarcerated juveniles, as explained in the words of Raymond J. Council: "The chaplain stands as the one who is free to approach him as a person, not as a thing to be dissected nor as an object of investigation. The chaplain is freed from his own wants and needs to nourish the resident. He is free to touch the resident as one concerned about and valuing him for the person he is."⁸⁹ As Council points out, chaplains and other juvenile jail ministries have great opportunity to provide healing and spiritual development in the life of an incarcerated juvenile.

There are many incarcerated young people who have been deprived of this compassion and healing touch. It is as if they are lepers in today's society. It is reminiscent of Matthew 8:1-4, when a man with leprosy comes to be healed by Jesus. The leper was an outcast with a contagious and incurable disease, who likely had not felt human touch for many years. Isolated, lonely, and hopeless, the leper takes a chance on Jesus. However, this is not the crux of the story. The amazing thing about this occurrence is the chance that Jesus took on the leper. The leper comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean" (Matthew 8:2).⁹⁰ Before Jesus speaks words of healing, something He could have done from a distance, Jesus reaches out and touches the man and says, "I am

⁸⁹ Raymond J. Council, "Exilic Children," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 30, no. 3 (September 1976): 174.

⁹⁰ All Scripture has been taken from *Holy Bible: New International Version* (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1983), unless otherwise noted.

willing. Be clean” (Matthew 8:3). Immediately the leper is healed. In a similar vein, the Church must ask what it is willing to do to minister to young people and keep them from feeling the stigma of being criminalized. Engaging in this mission can help youth reclaim their dignity, while being healed emotionally and spiritually.

Regarding criminalization, during incarceration, or upon release from incarceration, Bernstein writes what many in youth and family ministry have known for years:

The kids I’ve seen make it have followed various trajectories, but they all have a consistent relationship with at least one trusted adult. Young people struggling with the pull of the street, as well as the trauma that often accompanies it, need someone walking with them as they do the difficult work of changing how they think, act, and react; how they view themselves and others and their own place in the world.⁹¹

As the facts of the process of criminalizing youth have been presented, along with the understanding that positive relationships with at least one adult role model can make a significant impact on avoiding or curtailing criminalization, it is the intent of this paper to advocate for effective support groups for vulnerable youth—particularly for youth who have a higher statistical rate of being targeted for criminalization and who have been or are in foster care. The local church can be the most influential entity in identifying and assisting these youth in its particular context, as it take seriously the charge found in James 1:27: to care for orphans in their time of distress.

⁹¹ Bernstein, *Burning Down the House*, 10.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT OF THE NORTH GEORGIA UNITED METHODIST CONFERENCE

This chapter introduces the connectional nature of the North Georgia United Methodist Church and why this structure is best poised to tackle the issue of criminalization of youth and bring ecclesiastical solutions to it. Local churches within the United Methodist connectional system can be informed and trained on how to advocate better for young people through effective ministry foci for a more holistic approach to ministry to the young. The “No More Malaria” Campaign will be used as an example of how educating from the “top level down” can make a significant impact on vital issues.

A Look at The North Georgia United Methodist Conference

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is a “connectional” ministry comprised of the local church, districts, and three conferences: Annual Conference, Jurisdictional Conference, and General Conference.¹ The UMC is connectional in that all churches are connected in structure, polity, and legislation from the local church level to the United

¹ United Methodist Church, “Organization: The Church as Connection,” <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/organization-church-as-connection> (accessed May 2, 2016). All UMC organizational information is taken from this source, unless otherwise noted.

Methodist Church internationally. The structure of the United Methodist connectional ministry begins at the congregational level and is administered by a licensed pastor or an ordained elder. The bishop of a Conference, in collaboration with the various district superintendents, appoints local church pastor and elder positions. The district is comprised of multiple churches, and supervision is provided by a district superintendent. Overseeing the district superintendent is the bishop:

The Council of Bishops gives general oversight of the ministry and mission of the church and spiritual leadership to the entire church connection. Composed of all active and retired bishops, the council meets as a group at least once a year. Bishops are elected by Jurisdictional Conferences and assigned to a particular area, made up of one or more annual conferences. Each bishop provides oversight of the ministry and mission of annual conferences in his or her area and appoints all clergy to their places of service.²

The NGUMC is the largest Conference in the United Methodist system in the United States. It is comprised of 930 churches, 1,500 clergy, and 361,000 lay members whose goal is to develop Christian leaders and inspire young people to fulfill the Church's mission statement: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."³ Within the stated goal, there is hope that the NGUMC can play a role in curtailing the impact of criminalizing young people since this demographic is incorporated in a significant statement. While there is guidance through the various agencies within the United Methodist Church, there is much freedom within the local church context to pursue various ministries as long as they are in line with the governing

² The North Georgia United Methodist Church, "Who We Are," <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/constitutional-structure> (accessed September 16, 2015).

³ The North Georgia United Methodist Church, "About Us," <http://www.ngumc.org/aboutus> (accessed August 3, 2015).

text of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.⁴ The *Book of Discipline* is up for revision by votes at the quadrennial gathering, and then it is edited and ratified by the United Methodist Church worldwide every four years.⁵

With the structural and connectional nature of the United Methodist Church, change and direction often are facilitated with greater speed from the top down rather than from a grassroots movements. As such, ministry approaches and programs will have to be instituted at the local level with the hopes of moving up the hierarchy to the district and then conference levels. Attempts to address the issues of criminalization of youth and those in foster care, along with ministry-based solutions will need to be successfully implemented at the local and district levels first. The implementation of ministry approaches at the various levels are possible, as will be described later in this paper using the “No More Malaria” campaign as a key example.

A Look at Local United Methodist Churches

Each local church is assigned a pastor or an elder through a cooperative effort engaged in by the Conference bishop, district superintendent, and a local church pastor-parish relations committee. The financial stability, size of the congregation, and personality of each local church determines who is assigned at the local church. Typically, larger churches with financial means are assigned elders as clergy who are ordained in the United Methodist Church. Elders are considered the administrators of church order and ministers of the sacraments (marriage, weddings, and communion). Elders are

⁴ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 2011).

⁵ United Methodist Church, “GC2012: How Book of Discipline Comes To Be,” <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/gc2012-how-book-of-discipline-comes-to-be> (accessed April 11, 2016).

required to have a minimum of a Master of Divinity from a UMC-approved institution of higher learning.⁶ Barring any ethical or moral issues, Conferences almost always guarantee a position at a local church for an elder. Appointed elders receive a minimum base salary and compensation that includes provision of housing of some kind as well as health and retirement packages.

Deacons also are ordained in the United Methodist Church but must find their own placements and are not guaranteed any type of placement assistance from the Conference or districts. Deacons cannot administer the sacraments, unless an elder is present. Deacons are those who have determined that they have a specific ministry focus and call such as counseling, youth, children, and the like. Ordained deacons can participate in preaching and other worship activities. Deacons also participate in some of the benefits of an ordained elder, such as a base salary (generally less than the elder) and receiving health and retirement packages.⁷

Smaller churches typically are ministered to by local licensed pastors. Local licensed pastors can be placed at any local church and oversee more than one church. These are called “charges” and a local licensed pastor may have multiple charges and visit on a rotation called a “circuit.”⁸ Retired elders also may serve smaller churches. Local licensed pastors can administer the sacraments but only at their actual local church location.⁹ Local licensed pastors are not guaranteed any type of placement, and the

⁶ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 335.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

congregations they serve are not required to give housing and health or retirement benefits. Most of these local licensed pastor positions are filled by seminary students as they work their way through school and the ordination process.

I currently serve as a local licensed pastor at Chapel Hill United Methodist Church. Chapel Hill is located in the Rome-Carrollton District, which falls under the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. While this is typically a part-time appointment, my current lifestyle allows me to give more than a part-time schedule. I ended up serving at Chapel Hill through decisions I made that would afford time to bring stability to my second adopted son and to complete my doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary. As the lead pastor, I have been attempting to instill a sense of mission within the congregation. Floyd County, in which Chapel Hill UMC is located, is currently struggling in the area of providing adequate services for children who are in Child Protective Services and the foster care system.

Chapel Hill United Methodist Church is a congregation that has been struggling for the past twenty years.¹⁰ Once a vibrant church, its health became imperiled when the founding elder was assigned to another church by the Conference. The founding elder was a very charismatic and dynamic pastor, teacher, preacher, and organizer. Due to some dramatic situations within the Conference and the need to find a dynamic pastor to fill the appointment of another pastor at a large church, the elder at Chapel Hill UMC was quickly moved to a large congregation in the metro-Atlanta area. The local church had little say in this move. When the elder was transferred, half of the congregation left. It

¹⁰ Branson Gayler, interviews by author, Rome, GA, June 2014. All Chapel Hill United Methodist Church historical information has been provided by Gayler, congregational historian and founding member.

should be noted that Chapel Hill UMC had just broken ground on a new facility with a debt load of over \$1 million.¹¹ Feeling the weight of the loss, Chapel Hill UMC began its long descent from a church pushing over three hundred in attendance on Sunday morning worship to approximately 150.¹²

The dynamic elder was replaced by another elder, who was the exact opposite of the previous pastor. The previous elder was a dynamic, outgoing, and gifted Caucasian male in his early thirties. The replacement was a middle-aged, quiet African-American female who, unfortunately for her, walked into a church and community that has racially divisive tones. This led to a loss of another half of the current congregation, leaving the attendance at approximately seventy-five on any given Sunday.¹³ With the loss of congregants, and reduced finances that usually accompany it, Chapel Hill UMC had to start hiring part-time, local licensed pastors. Over the past twenty years, there have been fourteen pastoral appointments, with each departure contributing to a growing instability of the congregation and distrust between the congregation and the Rome-Carrollton District and North Georgia Conference. Every new pastor who comes to serve Chapel Hill UMC brings a “new vision,” while experiencing resistance to the vision for a number of reasons. The most simplistic reason is the response from volunteer church leadership, “We have tried that before.”¹⁴ Although the United Methodist Church is supposed to be connectional, it also

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ On October 11, 2014, four months after my appointment, I held a “Strategic Leadership Meeting” from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. This meeting was comprised of long-time members and key organizational members of various committees. “We have tried that before” came up several times during

has a very high hierarchical and institutional nature. This often leaves churches like Chapel Hill trying to figure out how best to do ministry in their local context.

The most detrimental factor in the instability of Chapel Hill UMC has been this constant turnover in leadership. While some pastors have been at the church for five years (which has been the longest stay), the average pastor has stayed two years. There was even one pastor who was there for less than three months.¹⁵ The instability and lack of longevity have been a significant contributor to the church's inability to develop a successful "missional DNA." Missional DNA is comprised of six interrelated elements as described by Alan Hirsch in his book, *The Forgotten Ways*. These six elements are beliefs that churches ascribe to in their missional focus. These elements are a belief that Jesus is Lord, the Church is about making disciples, the Church is relational in its culture, the Church facilitates movements of God, the Church has organic movement, and a sense that a church's mission moves beyond itself.¹⁶ It would not be difficult to draw similarities between the lack of health and growth Chapel Hill UMC has experienced and the lives of foster care and other at-risk children. Instability often contributes to confusion and difficulty in gaining positive forward momentum in the life of a congregation or the life of a child.

the course of the meeting. Those involved in this meeting expressed a weariness of continuing to make previous or new attempts at drawing in the community.

¹⁵ Rita Jones, phone interview by author, Rome, GA, April 11, 2016. Jones served as the administrator at Chapel Hill United Methodist during this particular pastor's tenure. She shared that the pastor was removed for "questionable and inappropriate relationships."

¹⁶ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 24.

Another difficulty in developing missional ministries is not only due to the smaller size of the congregation but the fact that the congregation is advanced in age, where a majority of the congregants are retired. Another frequent comment from congregants is that of being “tired”—and who would not be after so much instability and changes in leadership. The difficulty in engaging older members of the congregation in youth or children’s ministry is the simple physical inability for most seniors to “keep up” the energy needed to lead a weekly children or youth ministry. A final factor in the difficulty of developing ministries to youth and children at Chapel Hill United Methodist is that a good number of the seniors in the congregation cannot drive at night due to vision problems. With these factors in mind, any ministry that intends to build mentoring relationships between youth and seniors must take these limitations into consideration. With these considerations, there is a necessity of collaborating with other churches and organizations in an effort to reach out to vulnerable young people and their families.

Still, seniors bring to the ministry table a variety of missional values that often are neglected by those who have a hectic lifestyle. For instance, they have more time to engage in intercessory prayer as a group or as individuals and to write notes of encouragement for young people in their congregation. Many can serve as surrogate grandparents, aunts, uncles, and “adopted” family. Walking alongside young people in areas of service both within and outside the church can serve as a great intergenerational model.

The Need for Holistic Ministry Initiatives within the North Georgia United Methodist Conference

In the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, Part V, Social Principles, Nurturing Community, Paragraph 161, section A entitled “The Family” states:

We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity. We affirm the importance of loving parents for all children. We also understand the family as encompassing a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children (the nuclear family). We affirm shared responsibility of parenting where there are two parents and encourage social, economic and religious efforts to maintain and strengthen relationships within families in order that every member may be assisted toward complete personhood.¹⁷

As a connectional ministry, the United Methodist Church desires to take seriously the necessity of family bonds for the nourishing development of children toward healthy individuation. This social principle speaks to the truth that when a child faces instability or experiences abuse, neglect, and removal from a home, that child will face difficulty in healthy maturation processes. Furthermore, the Nurturing Community section addresses adoption and foster care by stating in part:

We support and encourage greater awareness and education to promote adoption of a wide variety of children through foster care, international adoption, and domestic adoption. We commend the birth parent(s), the receiving parent(s), and the child to the care of the Church, that grief might be shared, joy might be celebrated and the child might be nurtured in a community of Christian love.¹⁸

This statement alone should be enough for United Methodist clergy to take more seriously the plight of the 402,378 young people presently in foster care in the United States as of July 2014.¹⁹ The good news is that there is a significant decrease in the number of foster care children being placed since 2007. This came to light as I explored

¹⁷ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 109.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁹ Administration for Children and Families, “The AFCARS Report,” <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport21.pdf> (accessed October 26, 2015), 1.

the theology of adoption and discovered that the 2008 government statistics showed nearly 500,000 children in foster care in the United States.²⁰

Another significant statement within the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* pertaining to youth and the issue of systemic abandonment and criminalization can be found in the Social Principles section. The statement has to do with the rights of young people:

Our society is characterized by a large population of young people who *frequently find full participation in society difficult*. Therefore, we urge development of policies that encourage inclusion of young people in decision-making *processes and that eliminate discrimination and exploitation*. Creative and appropriate employment opportunities should be legally and socially available for young people [italics mine].²¹

It is encouraging to see that organizations such as the United Methodist Church understand the results of societal systemic abandonment of young people and are projecting an outcome of exploitation if the Church does not curtail those actions against them.

The goal of this paper and related project is to implement policies and programs at the local church level as supported by the statements found above in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*. It also is the hope that this grassroots movement might find its way to educating the larger UMC structures in order to implement programs and policies that could help educate local communities and curtail the criminalization and potential subsequent exploitation of our young in more diverse settings. The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states: “Moreover, children have the rights to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional well-being as do adults, and these rights we affirm as theirs regardless of actions or inactions of their parents or guardians. In particular,

²⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families, “Statistics and Research: Adoption and Foster Care Statistics,” http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm (accessed November 22, 2011).

²¹ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 118.

children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.”²² This acknowledgment is almost prophetic in regards to the topic of this paper. While these principles are contained in the writings of the *Book of Discipline*, clergy within the United Methodist Church and at all levels of its structure must ascertain what degree of seriousness to take these charges and implement much needed change.

Rome, Georgia has eleven UMC congregations listed within its city limits alone.²³ There are numerous other churches in Floyd County. Despite the visible number of congregations in Floyd County, there is also a high number of children placed in foster care between October 2014 and September 2015, with 425 children in care. Floyd County ranks third highest in placements in the entire State of Georgia.²⁴ With such a high number of children in foster care in Floyd County, it is difficult to find enough foster homes to take them in. Of the 425 children in foster care, only 25 percent actually are placed in foster homes in Floyd County. The other 75 percent are distributed throughout the State of Georgia.²⁵ With such a visible presence of congregations in the city of Rome and Floyd County, it is disturbing that so many children are being sent out of the county for care. These numbers alone point to the need for a more holistic approach on the part of the United Methodist Church in Rome and Floyd County, when it comes to addressing

²² Ibid., 118.

²³ The North Georgia United Methodist Church, “ROCA Churches,” <http://www.ngumc.org/roca> churches (accessed April 11, 2016). There are nearly 100 UMC churches in the Rome Carrollton District alone.

²⁴ Fostering Court Improvement, “Statistics for Floyd County.,” <http://fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga/County/Floyd/> (accessed April 11, 2016). See Appendix 1 for more information.

²⁵ Kristina Wilder, “Students, Church Groups Hosting Events to Raise Money for Floyd County’s Foster Children,” *Rome News-Tribune*, March 14, 2016, http://www.northwestgeorgianews.com/rome/news/education/students-church-groups-hosting-events-to-raise-money-for-floyd/article_2b1f4f0c-e989-11e5-998a-2bce636a0020.html (accessed April 11, 2016).

the foster care crisis. This collaborative effort must reach even beyond the United Methodist Church and join with other organizations interested in child welfare in order to move in the direction of positive changes needed.

There is one juvenile detention facility in Rome, named the Bob Richards Regional Youth Detention Center, which serves six counties and has a capacity for sixty-four juvenile offenders.²⁶ Such centers “provide education, individual guidance and counseling, medical services, recreation, and arts and crafts. Clothing, meals, and medical and emergency dental care are a part of each center’s basic care program.”²⁷ However, there is no indication of any religious or spiritual support on the Regional Youth Detention website. This lack of spiritual provision is all the more reason why the context of this paper is to be more preventative in nature and keep at-risk youth, especially foster children, out of the juvenile criminal system.

While the UMC’s has its Children’s Home located in Decatur, Georgia, it only can serve approximately fifty to eighty children.²⁸ This does not include the Murphy-Harpst Children’s Home in Cedartown, Georgia. Murphy-Harpst is a United Methodist affiliated group home that serves the most emotionally challenged youth and children, providing therapeutic and specialized foster care for approximately 235 children with 50 percent coming from the metropolitan Atlanta area.²⁹ Despite the number of children served by the UMC and Murphy-Harpst, it still does not reach the total of children coming into foster

²⁶ Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, “Regional Youth Detention Center,” <http://www.djj.state.ga.us/FacilitiesPrograms/fpFacilityInclude.asp?F=17&CBy=1> (accessed April 11, 2016). This facility serves the counties of Bartow, Chattooga, Floyd, Gordon, Polk and Walker, with capacity for forty-eight males and sixteen females.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ United Methodist Children’s Home, “FAQs.”

²⁹ Murphy-Harpst, “FAQ,” <http://www.murphyharpst.org/who/faq.php> (accessed April 11, 2016).

care from Floyd County alone. There is still a great need for holistic approaches in both the community and the local church in order to address the foster care crisis in Rome.

“No More Malaria”: An Example of Collaboration and Positive Impact

The ability to impact societal needs at various levels within the United Methodist Church is not without precedent or success. In 2008, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church committed financial, missional, and organizational resources to combat malaria in sixteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The goal was to raise \$75 million in an effort to save 7.5 million lives. Forty-five Annual Conferences now are engaged in this effort. At this point in time, \$62 million have been raised representing 6.2 million lives saved from this preventable disease. By 2013, United Methodists helped to reduce the death rate to a child dying every sixty seconds, a 50 percent reduction in just seven years.³⁰

The good news is that the No More Malaria project shows possibilities of what can happen when the UMC comes together to tackle a problem or a need. Unfortunately, No More Malaria was not a grassroots effort. This project became a primary focus of the UMC passed from the highest level down. In light of hierarchy, it can be difficult for grassroots movements to catch on and be implemented. The goal of this paper and programmatic approach will be to effect change at the level of the local church, Chapel Hill UMC, in the community of Floyd County with hopes of gaining some momentum and focus at the Conference level.

³⁰ Jamie Jenkins, “United Methodists Are Working to Eradicate Malaria: North Georgia Can Help Cross the Fundraising Finish Line,” The North Georgia United Methodist Conference, <http://www.ngumc.org/newsdetail/171876> (accessed October 26, 2015).

CHAPTER 3

FOCUSING ON HOLISTIC MINISTRY THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORING

With the loss of the traditional family model, the Body of Christ can become a place where strong and lasting foundations for healthy individuation of the young can be built. As a growing distrust of youth develops in today's society and moves toward criminalizing them, individual and small group relationships are even more necessary. They are necessary not only for the healthy development of youth but also for their protection. More than simply developing ministries segregated by age, a new focus must be placed on the spiritual mentoring of youth and families within a holistic framework in the congregational body.

Spiritual Mentoring

A good number of the foster parents who are involved in shepherding Floyd County children are members of various local Christian congregations. Department of Family and Children's Services has acknowledged the great need to partner with

churches in the county to address the foster care crisis,¹ and youth who “grow up in the system” are in great need of spiritual mentoring. In the context of a missional DNA, spiritual mentoring does not have to take place only within the walls of the local church. Caring relationships are key. In speaking of how a criminalized youth by the name “Jared” regained trust in humanity after incarceration, it is no surprise that Bernstein points to the one thing churches should exemplify. She states:

I thought of Jared who had come out of San Quentin: the suspicion in his gaze, the gun in his hand. How had he regained his trust in humanity after what he experienced there? What had allowed *me* to regain my trust in him? How had he become the man I met today?

Like every other young person I’ve interviewed or known who has come back from crime and profoundly changed his life, Jared answered this question by talking about a relationship: a long-standing bond with an adult who stood by him; a connection that wouldn’t evaporate overnight and wasn’t contingent on his own good behavior. A bond, in other words, that was unconditional, as freely offered as it was returned, predicated on nothing besides mutual affection, evolving over time into a sense of family. *That* had changed his life, the only thing that ever does.”²

Bernstein’s description of what it took for Jared to regain trust in adults and humanity after his painful experiences of juvenile incarceration sounds very much like what the Church should be providing. Youth are easier targets for criminalization, because they lack social capital or empowerment. A significant contribution of mentoring is that of empowerment. According to *The Mentoring Handbook*, by J. Robert Clinton and Richard W. Clinton, empowerment “refers to the fact of progress made in the mentoree’s life, that is, development of any kind, whether in leadership character, leadership skills or

¹ Elizabeth Battles and Jessica Sherman, interviews by author, Rome, GA, January 13, 2016. Battles and Sherman are Floyd County Department of Family and Children’s Services caseworkers. They stated that collaborative efforts between their department and local churches are essential to helping solve the foster care crisis and that they were looking forward to partnering with me, Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, and other congregations in this effort.

² Bernstein, *Burning Down the House*, 256.

leadership values, that results from the mentoring relationship—*that is the transfer of resources from mentor to mentoree* [emphasis mine].”³ At-risk children and youth, particularly those who lack resources and stability as a result of being in a foster care system, are especially in need of a transfer of resources. The guidance, advice, and relationship that a caring and consistent mentor can give to a mentoree also can bring about the very stability a foster child needs in order to avoid criminalization.

Spiritual mentoring is best done in the context of community. In particular, as Mary C. Boys points out, grassroots, spiritually based communities are effective support tools for people groups who are “usually poor and almost always marginal to the power structure of society.”⁴ These communities often come together to engage in reflection, often based on biblical stories, in order to act for justice. This becomes a theological and spiritual praxis through action and reflection.⁵ Mentors can offer the much needed stability foster children require. Instability is one of the injustices of foster care in that many foster children, who already come from difficult circumstances, often are thrust into one environment after another. With these frequent moves, there are no guarantees that the new environment is any better than the last from which they were removed. This leads to a greater degree of instability in the life of a child or youth, thereby making it difficult to obtain any social capital.

³ J. Robert Clinton and Richard Clinton, *The Mentor Handbook: Detailed Guidelines and Helps for Christian Mentors and Mentorees* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas, 1991), 2-11.

⁴ Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 138.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

As these children grow up in a welfare system, it is frequently this very system that breeds children of violence, who then perpetuate a cycle of violence. More disturbing is the fact that so many children in the care of the welfare and foster care systems are considered “special needs” by the age of five.⁶ Still other research shows that “children who enter foster care at age twelve or older are more likely than others to age out (of the foster care system) rather than be reunified with their families or adopted.”⁷ Once again, this is where the Church can step in and offer resources to entire biological and foster families. Training foster parents, proactive parenting classes, and whenever possible resourcing parents before a child is placed into foster care all can form part of a mentoring strategy in a local church setting.

Churches that engage the foster care crisis would do well to remember that resourcing is a key component to mentoring. Physicians have acknowledged that social support systems “can have a significant effect on an abusive family’s well-being as well as increasing the chances for an abused child’s development.”⁸ More pointedly, the Church must become the extended family and support system to families and individuals who choose to adopt. As one struggling single mother put it, “My church is welcoming, with constant support, constant prayer. It became home very quickly. This family, this church,

⁶ Kathy P. Zamostny et al., “The Practice of Adoption,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 31, no. 6 (November 2003): 652.

⁷ Martha Shirk and Gary Stangler, *On Their Own: What Happens To Kids When The Age Out Of The Foster Care System* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2006), 6.

⁸ Candace Kruttschnitt, David Ward, and Mary Ann Sheble, “Abuse-Resistant Youth: Some Factors That May Inhibit Violent Criminal Behavior,” *Social Forces* 66, no. 2 (December 1987): 504.

has molded my life.”⁹ It is vital to note the terminology of “family” as referring to the local church this mother uses to describe her support system.

Considering that many children of color are often placed in foster care, African-American congregations easily can impact the foster care crisis through engaging in efforts to curtail criminalization of foster children. African-American children make up nearly two-thirds of the foster care population and remain in care longer.¹⁰ Since the African-American Church has historical and ongoing influential roles in its community, churches have become an ideal place for promoting health community activism for African Americans.¹¹ Community activism can mean more than just offering classes, it can give a voice to the marginalized. Historically, the African-American Church has been a significant provider of community mental health services.¹² Considering the mental health challenges that many foster children and foster families face, a church that can be proactive in pointing families to mental health services offers a positive influence in turning a negative situation around.

Intergenerational Mentoring

Models of ministry that serve best in mentoring at-risk children and youth are those that are both highly challenging and supportive in nature and are not “student-

⁹ Amy Davis et al., “Stories of Hope for Families,” *Family and Community Ministries* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 6.

¹⁰ “Facts for Families,” 2.

¹¹ Susan Markens et al., “Role of Black Churches in Health Promotion Programs: Lessons from the Los Angeles Mammography Promotion in Churches Program,” *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 5 (May 2002): 805-810.

¹² Michael B. Blank et al., “Alternative Mental Health Services: The Role of the Black Church in the South,” *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 10 (October 2002): 1668-1672.

centered” but rather have sufficient interactions with mature adults.¹³ Research suggests going against the normal church model of separate youth ministry apart from significant interaction with adults as mentoring often is done best in a community.¹⁴ Patricia Hersch comments:

A clear picture of adolescents, of even our own children, eludes us—not necessarily because they are rebelling, or avoiding or evading us. It is because we aren’t there. Not just parents, but any adults. American society has left its children behind as the cost of progress in the workplace. This isn’t about working parents, right or wrong, but an issue for society to set its priorities and to pay attention to its young in the same way it pays attention to its income.¹⁵

While it might seem very difficult for some individuals within a church to foster a child, adult church members might consider mentoring foster parents or foster children—and even in a more proactive manner, parents who are at risk of losing their children to the foster care system. One such organization in Georgia who is partnering with churches to help mentor at-risk families is The Washington Group. In part, the description of those who belong to this group and what they do allude to this proactive approach of mentoring families to avoid entering the system. The Washington Group promotes itself as “a consulting firm serving child welfare and behavioral health organizations spanning sectors from public to private, and church to government” and seeking to “assist these groups as they provide the most efficient operations and highest quality care for children and families, as well as the ability to advocate successfully for their needs.”¹⁶ David

¹³ Mark W. Cannister, “Mentoring and the Spiritual Well-Being of Late Adolescents,” *Adolescence* 34, no. 136 (Winter 1999): 771.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 769.

¹⁵ Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 22.

¹⁶ The Washington Group, “Who We Are: Our Approach,” <http://www.washingtongrp.com/about-us/our-approach/> (accessed February 13, 2016).

Shaw of The Washington Group specifically invites churches to become involved in this mentoring process, due to an intergenerational nature of congregations as well as the stability most church members can provide to a struggling family. One great asset a church can offer is an aging congregation, who tends to have more available time to meet with families, advocate for them, and pass on obtained life skills.¹⁷

It is clear that an intergenerational approach to addressing foster care needs can be a preventative tool in keeping families out of the system; however, it is also a way to keep a bad situation from getting worse. An intergenerational mentoring approach can offer a resource of emotional support for potential foster children, thereby keeping those children from entering a perpetual cycle of involvement in the welfare system. Churches must step up in an effort to break these damaging cycles. Mark DeVries provides this perspective on the issue:

Increasingly isolated from the adult world, more children and youth simply fend for themselves, often under the dispassionate care of television and other technology, sometimes under the thumb of shameful abuse and neglect. Emotionally available neighbors, grandparents, teachers or coaches are quickly moving to the endangered species list, as the pace of life topples over itself and the number of children who need care vastly outpaces the number of adults who choose to be available to them. And even when young people are with adults, it's usually in a large group setting in which the teenagers are being entertained, informed or directed by those adults, leaving little opportunity for the dialogue and collaboration required for youth to learn adult values.¹⁸

¹⁷ David Shaw, interviews by author, Rome, GA, February 11, 2016, We met to discuss the mission of The Washington Group and how Chapel Hill UMC might become involved in partnering with The Washington Group to address the crisis of foster care in Floyd County. When describing the demographics and context of Chapel Hill's congregation, Shaw expressed great interest for what congregants might be able to contribute as part of this proactive approach to keep families from entering or remaining in "the system." He viewed the congregation as a great asset, because Chapel Hill has many retired individuals.

¹⁸ Mark DeVries *Family Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 38.

Shepherd Zeldin et al. assert that healthy relationships between adults and youth prevent young people from engaging in problem behaviors, while concurrently they help to promote knowledge, competency, and initiative among youth. Organizations, coalitions, and communities derive benefits when youth and adults work collaboratively toward a common cause, and society benefits when youth are connected to adults. Community programs, including out-of-school and after-school programs for youth, are an important context where this intergenerational isolation can be bridged.¹⁹ Any church that has facilities and available human resources can establish an intergenerational mentoring and tutoring program that empowers at-risk children. This can help alleviate the stress on parents who are overwhelmed by the demands of socioeconomically challenging circumstances. A church-run mentoring and tutoring program can be of great assistance, since few of these families can afford additional tutoring for their children. Furthermore, the mentoring can aid overworked parents, who find it difficult to develop support systems consisting of other caring adult relationships. Essentially, the Body of Christ can assist in meeting some of their children's needs.

Re-establishing Trust between Generations

For children who have experienced abuse and neglect at the hands of their parent or caregivers, trust can be very difficult to establish with other adults no matter how caring an adult may be. Roger D. Goddard points out when one's social relationships are characterized by low trust and norms that discourage academic engagement, low

¹⁹ Shepherd Zeldin et al., "Intergenerational Relationships and Partnerships in Community Programs: Purpose, Practice, and Directions for Research," *Journal of Community Psychology* 33, no. 1 (January 2005): 2.

academic achievement is the result. Intergenerational relationships are important to obtaining social capital that help a child achieve academically and socially.²⁰ Goddard also points out that “social trust gives group members confidence in the expectation that others will act reliably and competently. Moreover, individuals engaged in relationships characterized by high levels of social trust are more likely to openly exchange information and to act with caring and benevolence toward one another than those in relationships lacking trust.”²¹

Children who come into care can succumb to further “distrust” by being placed in a home or environment where the child’s heritage, ethnicity, and family roots are not only misunderstood but rarely considered as a viable part of their identity. An example of this cultural distrust is written about extensively by Jessica R. Goodkind, et al. in their study of disadvantaged American Indians and Alaskan Native populations.²² Distrust felt by youth from these backgrounds is profound due to a history of governmental abuses toward Native peoples. Goodkind et al. discovered distrust is better addressed when therapeutic approaches to behavioral issues take into consideration the culture of the youth and children rather than traditional “Western” cultural perspectives. In other words, the greatest approach to healing young people is to consider their specific cultural needs and contexts. For rebuilding trust, the personal heritage and background of children must

²⁰ Roger D. Goddard, “Relational Networks, Social Trust, and Norms: A Social Capital Perspective on Students’ Chances of Academic Success,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 60.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jessica R. Goodkind et. al., “Rebuilding Trust: A Community, Multiagency, State, and University Partnership to Improve Behavioral Health Care for American Indian Youth, Their Families, and Communities.” *Journal of Community Psychology* 39, no. 4 (May 2011): 454.

be considered when interacting with them. In essence, another way of rebuilding trust is taking the time to get to know a child for who he or she is. Understanding the individual children's needs and what they hope to accomplish are part of this.

When developing a trusting relationship, it is important to remember that intimacy and trust are two significant elements of what is defined as relationship. Mentoring (and parenting) cannot occur, when there is a lack of intimacy and trust. When building mentoring relationships, openness, boundaries, and hospitality must be considered. Openness refers to removing any impediments to learning. Boundaries help make individuals feel safe within time and schedules and encourage trust and confidentiality. Hospitality refers to receiving each other as honored guests.²³ Foster children often experience the opposite of openness, boundaries, and hospitality but nevertheless hunger for these experiences. Churches that have training and vetting processes for potential intergenerational mentors can provide these elements in their mentoring program.

When a child has not received the necessary care and support from adults, the child likely will do poorly academically and face a domino effect of subsequent failures, which can lead to a life of perpetual and cyclical underachievement. Simply stated, trust is essential to academic success and the acquisition of general life skills. A church that can provide a nurturing environment that is consistent, patient, understanding, and supportive offers foster children a way to rebuild a system of trust. Children who have become distrustful of adult relationships due to abuse or neglect are the most in need of stability. This is why any mentoring, tutoring, or advocacy program or ministry must not

²³ Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 77.

be entered lightly. Children who begin to re-develop trusting relationships cannot afford to lose that relationship.

As a part of any mentoring or tutoring program, the element of play should be considered. When a program has a high focus on being task-driven, such as academic achievement alone, a child or youth's needs for relational connectivity and building trust may not be met. In *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, Elkind suggests playing as a way to counter adult-driven agendas of pushing childhood accomplishment and achievement at the cost of healthy development. Unfortunately, even play has been turned into work, asserts Elkind.²⁴

He says, "Basically, play is nature's way of dealing with stress for children as well as adults."²⁵ When play can be incorporated into a program or ministry that helps children minimize stress and simply enjoy being a child in a safe, supportive, and intergenerational environment, trust can grow. Where positive, supportive, helpful, playful, and relational approaches and environments are put into place and offered to at-risk children and families, great strides can be taken to help children rebuild confidence in adults.

Holistic Church Ministry

The word "holistic" can mean all-inclusive, well-rounded, or complete. It also can mean meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others.²⁶ Children at risk of criminalization and those in foster care certainly need environments that are holistic in

²⁴ Elkind *The Hurried Child*, 214.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁶ Robert A. Seiple, "From Bible Bombardment to Incarnational Evangelism: A Reflection on Christian Witness and Persecution," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 7, no. 1 (March 2009): 31.

nature. The Church can be such a place for them. Once conferred into the foster care system, frequent movements and disruptive placements contribute to a lack of social capital and stability in the life of a child. This instability is difficult to overcome when a child has no sense of belonging or community. A holistic church ministry model can go a long way in contributing a community that brings stability to children in need. In a preventative manner, if a church intentionally pursues and engages with at-risk children from struggling homes, a caring and involved adult can spot potential problems and become proactive in helping to resolve the concern. This approach also can stop a child from being removed from his or her home.

A church that is disconnected from children's and youth ministries has little chance of playing a preventative role when a crisis is pending. Another consideration is that if a child is removed from his or her home, a caring adult from the church can be the first resource to whom Child Protective Services can reach out. This is not to say that there is not room in a church for child- or youth-focused programs, rather each church should be intentional in connecting children and youth in relationships with caring adults. Not only can home disruptions be averted, this intentionality of holistic and relational ministry can foster a sense of community.

By holistic and relational ministry, the intent is for the local church to supply a variety of support systems, such as additional food, clothing, and other needs for foster children and families as well as additional training supports and respite care opportunities. With these supports put in place, relationships are built between foster or struggling families and the Body of Christ. When foster or struggling families are supported with resources and relationships, families are apt to stay together and be less stressed.

Furthermore, a sense of mission is given within the “church family” that begins to create community for and with church, foster and struggling families.

Developing a sense of community is essential. When a child comes into the foster care system, there is an attempt to place the child in a foster home within the county of residence, but this does not necessarily guarantee that a sense of community will be retained for the child. A child placed in foster care may not be permitted to attend the same school, live in the same neighborhood, or even maintain the same friendships and peer contacts from the area of their birth home. Children often develop a healthy sense of identity based in the family and community, with family being their first sense of belonging.²⁷ When a sense of community and belonging is interrupted or becomes non-existent, great difficulties prevail in the areas of self-identity as well as the ability to function in a healthy manner in society.

For children who already have been removed from one family system to another, they can be overwhelmed by a sense of isolation. Churches that intentionally engage in the mission of reaching out to at-risk children and youth who feel isolated can bring stability and acceptance into a child’s life by including that child into the life of the church. At the same time, the church seeks ways to support the child and the child’s family. By having developing holistic ministries and engaging in spiritual conversations, “we work toward the youngsters’ (and our own) Shalom, the peaceful wholeness of

²⁷ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 232.

integrating all of life, made possible by reconciliation first with God and thereby with ourselves and our neighbors.”²⁸

The local church typically is comprised of different ages, occupations, skill sets, and abilities. With these diverse gifts and given the right guidance, intentionality, and resourcing of a holistic or all-inclusive approach to ministry “with” youth and children rather than “to” youth and children can go a long way to help curb the criminalization process of at-risk minors. In other words, giving places for children and youth to serve and have ownership of the various aspects of ministry can contribute to their feelings of inclusion and of being valued. Children and youth thereby minister “with” adults rather than simply being involved in programs where adults minister to children and youth.

Holistic ministry can help repair the culture of distrust children have been raised in and possibly may have fostered themselves. Most importantly, a holistic and preventative ministry that reaches out to struggling families can make a significant and positive impact against family separations. Reaching out to the poor, needy, and most vulnerable has always been a hallmark and ministry of the Body of Christ (Matthew 19:21; Luke 4:18; Acts 9:36; 10:4; 24:17; Romans 15:26). It is time to re-engage in that mission. This is the focus of Part Two of this discussion.

²⁸ Marva J. Dawn, “Until Christ Is Formed in You: Nurturing the Spirituality of Children,” *Theology Today* 56, no. 1 (April 1, 1999): 84.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

CHAPTER 4

UNITED METHODIST AND OTHER THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will identify several key resources that pertain to developing a distinctly United Methodist strategy for holistic ministry to young people. United Methodist resources as well as others that aid in theological reflection will be used to examine new ministry philosophies and strategies that shape a more holistic church ministry experience. Of special importance on the subject of holistic ministry to young people will be the UMC *Book of Discipline*, *The Shape of Practical Theology*,¹ and *Understanding God's Heart for Children: Toward a Biblical Framework*.²

These works are particularly important when reflecting on the value of grace given from the Church to young people. These sources, each with its contributions and limitations to the considerations at hand, can prove beneficial toward developing groundwork for a theological lens of reflection regarding the need for social justice in regards to criminalized

¹ Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001).

² Douglas McConnell, Jennifer Orona, and Paul Stockley, eds. *Understanding God's Heart for Children: Toward a Biblical Framework* (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Publishing, 2007).

children and youth. This theological reflection will prove instrumental in developing the concept of intergenerational mentoring as spiritual adoption for Kingdom impact, a concept that will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

**United Methodist Theological Reflections: *Book of Discipline* (2012)
and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral**

The United Methodist Church places a high value on children, youth, and families and desires to seek best practices that ensure provision and wholeness for families in the areas of well-being, education, and social justice.³ The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* has much to say about many social issues regarding the healthy development of children. These include adoption, education, community, and children’s rights—specifically under Part V, Social Principles. To help meet the needs of children, United Methodists are encouraged to “support the development of school systems and innovative methods of education designed to assist every child toward complete fulfillment as an individual person of worth. All children have the right to quality education, including full sex education appropriate to their stage of development that utilizes the best educational techniques and insights.”⁴ What is especially noteworthy here is that the UMC *Book of Discipline* does not define what type of family a child comes from in order to support developmental needs being met. Ray Anderson essentially concurs in *The Shape of Practical Theology*, when he validates the worth of all human beings apart from modern contextual definitions.⁵

³ See Chapter 2 of this discussion for details.

⁴ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 117.

⁵ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 250.

Nurturing and meeting the needs of all children sprouts from their worth as beings created in God's image rather than culturally defined norms.

Furthermore, the people of the United Methodist Church understand that a quality education is essential to helping a child reach healthy individuation. However, once a child enters foster care and more easily becomes a target of criminalization due to lack of proper support systems, that child's future becomes very bleak and employment nearly unobtainable. The United Methodist Church is committed to social principles with an understanding that there are many "outcasts" in society who have found themselves in their current situation due to circumstances beyond their control. Children who are removed from their home due to no fault of their own—placed in a system that is rife with both systemic and systematic failures and lacking the security offered by a stable home life—are penalized academically due to traumas, instability, and lack of community.

Theologically, these are the very people to whom Jesus calls His followers to minister. In fact, this was the very mission statement of Jesus in Luke 4:16 -21 as He reads from Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." The theological filter that United Methodists use in determining polity and praxis is comprised of Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience and is often referred to as the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral."⁶

⁶ Scott J. Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 136.

Scripture

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* holds the following view of Scripture:

“United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace.”⁷ In light of this statement of polity and United Methodist perspective of Scripture, Methodists are given a moral imperative to take care of those who are less fortunate socially (Exodus 23:9) and economically (Exodus 23:6). Duane K. Friesen argues for the notion of a more political and ecclesiastical scriptural engagement when it comes to taking on injustice—a notion that the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* also could make as an argument. Friesen writes:

The reigning paradigm of fifty years ago of traditional Mennonite nonresistance and Reinhold Niebuhr’s view of non-resistance as passive withdrawal from politics is dead. The old view that to follow Jesus entails an apolitical quietistic withdrawal from society has been transformed by active nonviolent peacemaking grounded in a political Jesus who engages the principalities and powers.⁸

It should be noted that Friesen’s work is reflective of many denominational perspectives beyond the United Methodism alone and yet one that is shared among Methodists.

With this in mind, most United Methodists assign much relevance to 2 Timothy 3:16-17. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” “Every good work,” as found in the Scripture, certainly would include how United Methodists specifically—and all Christians in general—reach out and minister to the most vulnerable in society. Ministering to children who are systemically

⁷ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 81.

⁸ Duane K. Friesen, “The Moral Imperative to Do Justice within Christian Pacifism: Tensions and Limits,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76, no. 1 (January 2002): 63-71.

abandoned, criminalized, removed from homes, and in need of nurture and care are a part of that good work. In this way, the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, along with Scripture and other Christian traditions, encourages United Methodists to take on the cause of those unjustly oppressed.

Tradition

The United Methodist Church has a long history of understanding the Christian call to care for all children, but especially those children who are not cared for. Multiple sections in the *Book of Discipline* outline how the Church is to nurture infants, children, and youth. Of great significance is the meaning of membership, baptism, and spiritual nurturing. Paragraph 216 under “The Meaning of Membership the *Book of Discipline* states:

Christ constitutes the church as his body by power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13, 17). The church draws new people into itself as it seeks to remain faithful to its commission to proclaim and exemplify the gospel. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the body of Christ. After baptism, the church provides the nurture that makes possible a comprehensive and lifelong process of growing in grace.⁹

Sacraments are a way of welcoming others into the Body of Christ, and baptism is a sacrament that figuratively immerses newcomers into the life of the Church through rituals that show nurture and care. The people of the United Methodist Church are called to embrace this concept, along with the doctrine of prevenient grace,¹⁰ and provide nurture for individuals who do not yet know Christ.

The United Methodist Church views the sacraments as a means of grace to bring others into the family of God. The United Methodist Church, through the sacrament of

⁹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰ This concept will be discussed further in the “Families of Grace” section, later in this same chapter.

baptism of children and infants, asks the following question of the parents: “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”¹¹ The sacrament also reminds Christians to take a stand against any injustice that presents itself. This reflects the desire of United Methodists to be involved in social issues by bringing them into the light of God’s Kingdom. In the same ceremony, the congregation is asked, “Will you nurture one another in Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?” The congregation is to respond, “With God’s help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.”¹² For youth who are in danger of being criminalized due to circumstances beyond their control, a church must remember its covenant vows. Adult believers are to do this by providing what these children need most: nurture.

A tradition of caring for the marginalized is a reflection of living out Romans 5:8, which reads: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Furthermore, Psalm 127:3 states: “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.” In this context, those within the UMC are reminded that children and youth are gifts from God. It is the Church’s responsibility to reach out particularly to those who are hurting and very well may be difficult to love due to the abuse, neglect, or abandonment they have suffered. There is truth in knowing that

¹¹ United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 1989), 34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

those who are the most difficult to love are the ones who need it the most, for Christ loved us even while we were sinners (Romans 5:8).

Reason

The third pillar of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is reason. Oliver D. Crisp points out that many classical Christian theologians valued reason as a part of their theology: “They reason that the whole created order is grounded in the divine mind, as a set of divine ideas. For such theologians, there is no mind-independent reality provided we mean by this something like ‘there is no created reality that is not grounded in the divine mind.’”¹³ Based on God’s heart for children, reason reveals that God has a heart for the downcast and disenfranchised in a society. Scripture and reason also show that God has a heart for adoption as a way for caring for the less fortunate (James 1:27). Reason highlights that it is the physical adoption of children that often helps human beings grasp the spiritual adoption God undertakes when calling them His children. When a family welcomes a child into their home, they are welcoming that child in order to meet his or her needs and involve that child in family life. This is true also of what happens when God adopts us as His children.

In a sense, adoption is both a legal practice and a spiritual practice. Richard Beard states:

To adopt children in this manner has, it is well known, been a custom generally prevailing in all ages, and probably in all nations. Thus children were adopted among the Egyptians, Jews, and Romans, and other nations: and the same customs exists among Christian nations of Europe, in our own country, among the American aborigines, and, so far as my knowledge extends, throughout the world.

¹³ Oliver D. Crisp, “Reason, Style, and Wisdom: More on Analytic Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 3 (September 2013): 610.

Of the same general nature is that transaction in the divine economy by which mankind become the children of God.¹⁴

Adoption is not a new concept. Beard's observation reveals that orphans or children without parents always have been part of the overall human experience. Adoption has occurred in various cultures, religions, and tribes through legal and contractual agreements. As the author asserts, there is something divine about adopting children in that it offers a reflection of God's love and care.

In Luke 18:16, Jesus gives a clear example of spiritual adoption by stating, "But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" As such, spiritual adoption insinuates that the Body of Christ should do all it can to nurture all children, as if they were their own biological children. As with their own biological children, a family that adopts children desires to provide for all the needs a child has. In this case, the family of the church adopting children must be willing to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families. This leads to two primary adoption views relevant to a UMC perspective, informed by biblical and extra-biblical examination: spiritual adoption and physical adoption. The elements of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, particularly those of Scripture and reason help balance each other when it comes to the call to spiritually adopt children who are not biological children. As Anderson writes: "We belong to communities that help shape our perception of reality. The distrust of reason as a sole basis for truth leads to the conviction that truth must be experienced to be believed. It is in the church as the community of believers that the truth of the gospel is experienced and

¹⁴ Richard Beard, *Lectures on Theology* (Nashville: Committee of Publication, 1873), 9.

lived out.”¹⁵ From Anderson’s perspective, it is easy to see the necessity of employing the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a filter for engaging in theological praxis. Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience work as a refining process that is instrumental in engaging the Church in the world.

Experience

This fourth pillar of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is that of experience. Scott J. Jones defines experience as “the personal appropriation of God’s forgiving and empowering grace. It is not only individual, but also corporate, and draws attention to many facets of human experience that pose problems for us.”¹⁶ God’s forgiveness and grace, displayed by individuals and groups to other individuals and groups, helps disarm oppression, intolerance, dehumanization, criminalization and all other actions that strip humanity of the reality of being created in the image of God. When writing on the life of theologian William Porcher DuBose—a chaplain of University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee and professor of Moral Science (1871)—Robert Boak Slocum gives a perfect example of theology and experience intersecting and thereby directing lives: “DuBose’s theology was deeply rooted in his personal religious experience, which was followed by theological reflection. It was likewise intended to be tested in light of the experience of others. True theology would ‘ring true’ to the experiences of real life, making sense of experience and

¹⁵ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 251.

¹⁶ Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine*, 139.

proving itself sensible in light of experience.”¹⁷ Although DuBose was an Episcopal priest, his thoughts on experience and theology are shared with United Methodists.

Experience and theology work together when it comes to ministering to the most vulnerable. Believers must recognize both their own vulnerability and their own capacities. Anyone can end up in circumstances of brokenness that go beyond his or her control. Brokenness is a condition of human nature, yet it is what Christ-followers are called to engage as they do ministry. In his book, *Broken to Broken*, Jim Ellison writes:

What I have discovered about my own brokenness is that we experience God’s healing often by serving marginalized persons, the most vulnerable in society, in their poverty and brokenness. When we as broken and wounded Christians engage the marginalized with authenticity, just being with other broken persons can be a sure path for mutual growth, spiritual fulfillment, and genuine healing for all parties.¹⁸

Human beings who have experienced personal brokenness and receive the love, forgiveness, and redemption of Jesus Christ are compelled through their own experiences of restoration to reach out to those who are vulnerable and broken.

Romans 8:14-17 paints a clear picture of what it means to be adopted and redeemed. This spiritual adoption removes from people their brokenness and a spirit of fear. Since believers have been adopted into God’s family, they are called to adopt others into the faith. This means the Church must live out its call to bring new life to those who are in most need of it. Children and youth who are in the foster care system can be moved out of a system of cyclical and systemic slavery into a system of nurture and care.

Research, as well as the collective human experience, shows that children thrive when

¹⁷ Robert Boak Slocum, “The Lessons of Experience and the Theology of William Porcher DuBose,” *Anglican Theological Review* 79, no. 3 (1997): 342.

¹⁸ Jim Ellison, *Broken to Broken: Urban Missions as a Path to Spiritual Growth* (Atlanta: Restoration Press, 2014), 11-12.

they are placed into a family of care that has a strong community of support.¹⁹ The local church is one place where a community of support can be experienced and appreciated.

In both the cases of preventative interventions for families who may be losing their children to the foster care system as well as for foster families who have taken in foster children, the Body of Christ can be a community of support that provides education and resources for these families. A church can identify counseling and care systems and supply facilities for training events, foster care awareness, curriculum, professionals to resource foster and biological parenting classes, and food and clothing pantries to help resource at-risk children and families. When families are better resourced, thereby preventing the disruption of homes, children and families fare better. Experience also shows that when families are in positive environments together, where they feel a sense of connection to community—and, when necessary, are provided much needed resources—these families thrive.

Such experience shows that churches can and should be a part of a larger family of families. “In particular, researchers contend that churches provide a powerful source of social capital, *i.e.*, social networks and the trust and reciprocity they engender.”²⁰ Experience also demonstrates that a church who can give support in the way of social capital for at-risk children can help them overcome many of the challenges they face. Another preemptive and helpful option for at-risk youth and children to form social capital and identity is for a congregation to provide mentors. Both informal and formal

¹⁹ Myrna L. Friedlander, “Adoption: Misunderstood, Mythologized, Marginalized.” *The Counseling Psychologist* 31, no. 6 (November 1, 2003): 747.

²⁰ Susan Crawford Sullivan, “Unaccompanied Children in Churches: Low-Income Urban Single Mothers, Religion, and Parenting,” *Review of Religious Research* 50, no. 2 (December 2008): 158.

mentoring has had a significant and positive impact on the lives of at-risk youth. In an article for *Child Welfare*, Rosemary J. Avery writes:

The positive effects of mentoring are generally thought to be derived from the support and role modeling these relationships offer through three interrelated processes: (1) enhancing youth's social relationships and emotional well-being, (2) improving their cognitive skills through instruction and conversation, and (3) promoting positive identity development by serving as role models and advocates.²¹

When it comes to helping youth obtain social capital, caution should be taken in that the mentor needs to understand the need for a long-term relationship to develop between the mentor and the child or adolescent. Avery says that “high ‘turnover rate’ mentoring relationships can be experienced by youth as yet another loss topping off a host of previous relational disruptions they have experienced.”²²

Due to the trifold nature of social capital consisting of bonding, bridging, and linking, churches need to reconsider implementing more of a “large family” construct in order for well-rounded nurturing and networking to occur. Churches can help families bond together by networking with other families to help relieve parental stress and to provide worship services and programs where families connect together rather than separate while at church. The Body of Christ is also a relational environment where bridging to other families, cultures, and diverse social groups is a way to connect with an isolated and struggling family. This provides not only resources but accountability for

²¹ Rosemary J. Avery, “The Potential Contribution of Mentor Programs to Relational Permanency for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care,” *Child Welfare* 90, no. 3 (May 2011): 10.

²² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

vulnerable families. Finally, linking is a way to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community.²³

Families and Grace

Chapter 2 of this paper acknowledged how the United Methodist Church recognizes the need for family ministry beyond a traditional nuclear family. Grace is an attribute that is necessary to both give and receive when it comes to living in a family. Grace also may be needed in the way that “family” is defined in the current American context. Anderson points out, “The Bible does not describe one cultural form of family intended to serve as an ideal, nor does the Bible focus on the family as the primary form of the kingdom of God.”²⁴ Family, no matter how it is defined, is essential to the healthy development of young people. This is because “early family relationships are the source of our most emotionally intense loyalties and attachments, as well as our capacity for combatting irrational and destructive commitments and prejudices through reasoned thinking.”²⁵ No matter what the “family” setting of any child, the Body of Christ represents the fulfillment of a family that can extend love, care, acceptance, and nurturing. This is a worthy pursuit. *Understanding God’s Heart for Children* offers this exhortation: “One thing is certain, based on the patterns and mandates of Scripture, local churches

²³ Ibid., 158.

²⁴ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 252.

²⁵ Anne C. Dailey, “A Developmental Perspective on the Ideal of Reason in American Constitutional Law,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 53, no. 4 (December 2005): 1176.

must rise up *as extended families* prepared to accept children into their midst [emphasis mine].”²⁶ This is the primary thrust of this paper:

The Church must become a “new kind of family” to young people who need family the most. Congregations only can do this through a thorough understanding of grace. Grace is essential when it comes to ministry to families, children, and youth who are marginalized, at-risk, and potential targets of criminalization. Ultimately, God intends for families to be relational places of grace. Wesleyan theology ascribes to three types of grace: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.

Prevenient Grace

Prevenient grace is described as “the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God’s will, and our ‘first slight transient conviction’ of having sinned against God.”²⁷ In other words, God is at work in human lives before people are even aware of His work. Often, it is in retrospect that people are able to see God’s hand at work in their lives. This understanding of spiritual prevenient grace can be applied to a process of maturing in youth and young adults. For example, frequently it is not until individuals mature as adults that they begin to understand the many sacrifices parents made in providing for and loving them. The same can be said of a young person’s experience in church life. It is not until adulthood that people understand the grace, love, compassion, and care a church has poured into their

²⁶ McConnell, Orona, and Stockley, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, 7.

²⁷ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 50.

lives. Human families and the Body of Christ are often the first places youth and children experience grace or a lack of grace. If anything, abused and at-risk children may require a bit more grace, since grace is not experienced naturally in an abusive environment.

There is a need to display an extraordinary amount of grace toward hurting families and children considered “at risk.” Joseph J. Allen states, “Fragility and sensitivity to which humility leads are the very conditions for God’s grace. Only when barriers are broken down by humility can God’s grace enter *in*, and *among*, members of the community.”²⁸ If church leaders show a lack of grace toward at-risk youth, children, and families, authentic community cannot be built. This message shouts that the Body of Christ wants only people who come from well-adjusted families who appear to experience little to no dysfunction; yet followers of Christ are called to minister to “the least of these,” as Jesus points out in Matthew 25:31-46. Specifically mentioned in the list of those who were considered “the least of these” are those in prison. In *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, the “least of these is defined” as “children in especially difficult circumstances or in high-risk environments”²⁹ This would include children who are at risk of, or already have been, criminalized. These children especially need an understanding of God’s prevenient grace.

Church leaders need to keep in mind the words of Jesus in Mark 2:17. He said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” All are broken and dysfunctional, because all have fallen short of the glory

²⁸ Joseph J. Allen, “Renewal of the Christian Community: A Challenge for the Pastoral Ministry,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (January 1985): 314.

²⁹ McConnell, Orona, and Stockley, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, 3.

of God (Romans 3:23). “The divine love” of prevenient grace³⁰ acknowledges the need for help and opens the path to connect with others. Preventing family disruptions through educating and providing resources to hurting families not only shows a significant amount of prevenient grace; it is these acts of prevenient grace that can go a long way in curbing the criminalization of at-risk families and youth. According to *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*:

The effects of the fall so often create mistrust that destroys the chance for relationships within families and communities to help restore God’s image and order. Those of us who work with children are likely very aware that the fall is systemic (affected all levels of society) and cyclical in nature (problems on one level of society cause problems in other levels, which worsen problems in the first level). One doesn’t have to be a family systems psychologist to see this.³¹

Churches can create places of trust where children (and families) at risk can catch a glimpse of healing, restored trust, and redemption out of a broken system. This only can happen by allowing at-risk families and individuals to function under prevenient grace, not by showing them where they are but rather showing them where they could be. The Body of Christ can do this by becoming agents of trust by caring for the “least of these,” who have been caught up in systemic dysfunction and potential criminalization by helping those at-risk reclaim the image of God in whom they were created.

In reality, most churches fail to be the purveyors of prevenient grace due to the fact that churches seems to contribute little in the areas of parenting or children.

Understanding God’s Heart for Children offers this perspective:

Although the church certainly upholds the importance of parenting and does offer a variety of programs for families, there are also elements in the church that

³⁰ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 50.

³¹ McConnell, Orona, and Stockley, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, 66.

undermine support for children and parents. For example, the church does not have strong teachings about parenting or children. The church basically says that parents are to teach children the faith and that children should obey their parents. Beyond this, little is said about the nature of children, about a child's spiritual life, or about our precise obligations and duties toward children.³²

When it comes to displaying prevenient grace, there would be no better way for the church to help undermine the systemic abandonment and criminalization of at-risk children, youth, and families than to be more proactive in teaching parents about parenting. This involves education about the nature of children, imparting the value of strong family, and providing healthy family supports. When churches are proactive in these areas, prevenient grace becomes more than a theological term; prevenient grace actually becomes “the sacred task of parenting.”³³

Justifying Grace

Wesleyan theology teaches that justifying grace is the righting of relationships by God through Christ by calling forth faith and trust as believers experience regeneration, thereby making new creatures in Christ.³⁴ In other words, God continues His work in human lives by calling people to Himself and by making them new. Therefore, justifying grace corrects what is wrong and restores things. Kara Powell and Clark state, “Righting wrongs is only possible when we understand the difference between service and social justice. Service is vital to the life of faith, a high calling modeled for us consistently by

³² Ibid., 53.

³³ Ibid., 54.

³⁴ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 80.

Jesus. But his call to love is also a call to look for more lasting solutions.”³⁵ Churches who reach out and provide resources can be a part of righting wrongs. Moreover, when families experience unconditional love and prevenient grace, justifying grace is sure to follow. For instance, Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta’s vision for ministry to at-risk drug addicted children is “to see an empowered and transformed community of children in terms of rights, privileges and resources with the promise of hope and a future.”³⁶ This vision statement sounds much like the biblical analogy of those who are justified in Christ (Romans 3:22-24), made new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), and have an inheritance in the Kingdom (Galatians 3). Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta shows churches that even the most difficult child can be reached through acts of grace.

Through education and resourcing, “wrong thinking” in dysfunctional families, and even churches, can be made right. A significant part of becoming a disciple is to bring about “right thinking.” Romans 12:2 instructs, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” This means theology and praxis come together in a way that transforms not only how one thinks; it also transforms how one acts in light of the change of thinking. A prime example of practical theology transforming how Christians think and practice can be found in James 2:14-17. Theological faith must show itself in practice in how believers ministers to those in need. “Scripture-shaped thinking, in other words,” Richard S. Briggs says, “will begin to offer the framework within which we tackle the questions that practical theologians

³⁵ Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Deep Justice in a Broken World: Helping Your Kids Serve Others and Right the Wrongs around Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 10.

³⁶ McConnell, Orona, and Stockley, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, 45.

want to ask, be they concerned with ‘How should one live as a Christian?’ in a general sense or more specific questions, such as ‘How should one handle the topic of hell in Pastoral ministry?’³⁷ Briggs understands that practical theology means acting upon what the belief thought to be theologically true. In this case, caring for at-risk youth and children is correct theological praxis.

Another instance of spiritual leadership needing to understand practical theology begins with religious teachers fully understanding Scripture and its intent for right practice. In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus has a conversation with a teacher of Israel named Nicodemus. In this conversation, Jesus must transform Nicodemus’ mind through a new teaching about new life and being born again. Jesus even says to Nicodemus in John 3:10, “You are Israel’s teacher . . . and do you not understand these things?” This interaction reveals that those in spiritual leadership are in charge of fostering an environment where transforming and renewing of minds through theological praxis can happen spiritually and holistically.

As shown with Nicodemus, a significant part of justifying grace, or making things right, also has much to do with opening one’s mind beyond its current boundaries to understanding what may seem like a foreign or impossible concept. George Eldon Ladd—author, biblical scholar, and thirty-year member of Fuller Seminary faculty³⁸—describes the “privilege of discipleship” as having the ability to obtain further and more personal instruction from Jesus. Ladd asserts, “The more they [Jesus’ disciples] fail to understand,

³⁷ Richard S. Briggs, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Practical Theology: Method and Truth in Context,” *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 214.

³⁸ Kathryn Lofton, “A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America,” *Church History* 78, no. 3 (August 2009): 702.

the more Jesus concentrates on their private instruction, for it is on their eventual grasp of his mission that the continuation of that mission depends.”³⁹ Jesus’ private instruction to Nicodemus exerts a profound impact on his life. The Scripture seems to indicate that Nicodemus became a disciple of Jesus (John 19). A privilege of the Body of Christ is to offer discipleship in a way that assists all, especially parents and children, to become healthy in their ways of thinking. In the case of Nicodemus, prevenient and justifying grace can be embraced when these graces are practiced by churches and families.

In a situation where Jesus casts out demons from a possessed man, a former demoniac comes to a place of being in his “right mind.” Mark 5:15 states, “When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.” The entire scriptural passage of Mark 5:1-20 clearly shows that reaching out to the hurting and marginalized— extending to them prevenient grace, educating them in right thinking, empowering and resourcing them—can lead to justifying grace by bringing them into a right relationship with one another and Christ. Today, these hurting and marginalized people often take shape as at-risk families and youth.

Sanctifying Grace

Wesleyan theology describes sanctifying grace in this way: “New birth is the first step in this process of sanctification. Sanctifying grace draws believers toward the gift of Christian perfection. In the UMC *Book of Discipline*, Wesley is attributed as putting it this way: having a heart ‘habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor’ and ‘having

³⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 235.

the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.”⁴⁰ In loving one’s neighbors and walking as Jesus walked, the Church is called to have a presence in the midst of the struggles of at-risk families. “Right thinking” and becoming more Christ-like is a continual and never-ending process. Right thinking as a process of discipleship and living out sanctifying grace requires a dying to the self. Not only does dying to oneself require a new way of thinking; it requires a new way of living.

Once again, an example from Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta sheds light on the process of sanctifying grace. If sanctifying grace is grace given and received through a mutual growth process that is a collaborative effort between a human being and the Holy Spirit, at-risk children need to feel that they belong in a family and are given choices when it comes to their own healing process. For Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta, this involvement and choice comes in the form of empowering at-risk children. “A child’s first need is to belong. It is normal for addicts to feel that somehow, ‘we are different.’ Children take pride when given responsibility through the program, and they feel accepted because most of our caregivers and motivators have broken free from similar backgrounds.”⁴¹ Just as having say and ownership for a child in a recovery program is essential for their healing and recovery, sanctifying grace teaches that a person of worth is in a collaborative effort of becoming more Christ-like by cooperating and interacting freely with the Holy Spirit. For at-risk children, churches need to discover what Emmanuel Ministries has discovered when it comes to sanctifying grace: community is essential. “We help the boys to develop a sense of community by empowering them to share their thoughts and ideas with the entire group.

⁴⁰ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 51.

⁴¹ McConnell, Orona, and Stockley, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, 46.

The boys decide what should be done in a case of discipline or in a crisis, and the caregivers respect their decisions within reason.”⁴²

Similarly, churches can become significant contributors to imparting a sense of sanctifying grace to at-risk children and families. To show unconditional love by modeling right thinking within a family and by meeting the emotional, spiritual, and even physical needs of children, acts of kindness are shown that signify an expanded family that can meet the needs of children. *Understanding God’s Heart for Children* lists seven statements that show a significant biblical and missiological perspective of children and asserts its views of children as follows: God creates every unique person as a child with dignity, children need parental love in a broken world, God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture, society has a God-given responsibility for well-being of children and families, children are a promise of hope for every generation, God welcomes children fully into the family of faith, and children are essential to the mission of God.⁴³ When the church becomes an extended family, these needs met within these seven statements can bring about a process of sanctifying grace, not only in the lives of the children being served but in the lives of those who are doing the serving as well.

When the Body of Christ intersects the lives of at-risk children, youth, and families, new life that reflects sanctifying grace can happen. Ladd points out the radical nature of this new life of sanctifying grace. This sanctifying grace leads to a new way of living both in the here and now as well as the Kingdom to come. Ladd writes:

“Humanity’s destiny rests upon this decision. When people have made the radical

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

decision to deny and mortify themselves, when they have thereby forfeited their lives, they have the promise of the Son of Man that in the day of their parousia they will be rewarded for what they have done.”⁴⁴ The Church is called to make disciples (Matthew 28:17-20), and part of making disciples is teaching the necessity of dying to human selfishness, addictions, and dysfunctions. This is why, of all the organizations in the world, the Body of Christ can intervene in dysfunction and bring about healing. Healing is rarely a “one moment in time” event; it is often an ongoing process. This ongoing process is a common element in both sanctification and healing.

Healing broken families and individuals is a significant part of sanctifying grace. Grace must go beyond justification, which is Christ doing something for us. Grace also must be sanctifying in that Christ must do something in us.⁴⁵ In Wesleyan theology, sanctification comes about through teaching and accountability in the areas of Scripture and Tradition with fellow “pilgrims headed for the same destination.”⁴⁶ The Church can partner in the parenting pilgrimage with at-risk families in order to bring about new direction and new life into a difficult or hopeless situation.

The goal of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace is to bring others into a right relationship with God and one another as well as to help them continue a life of “right thinking.” Wesleyan theology and United Methodist structures work together so that a community of gladness, accountability, growth, and healing can be established. These communities of small groups helped the United Methodist and Wesleyan churches grow

⁴⁴ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 235.

⁴⁵ Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 310.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and contribute to the spiritual and numerical growth of families and individuals, similar to what is seen in Acts 2:41-47.⁴⁷ In *The Radical Wesley*, Howard Snyder comments:

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to “bear one another’s burdens,” and naturally to “care for each other.” As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And “speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ.”⁴⁸

It is through this process of caring for one another, as seen and experienced in the first-century Church (Acts 2:42-47; 24:7; 1 Corinthians 16:3) and Wesleyan churches, as described above, that families once can again be restored, healed, and sanctified.

Finally, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children* offers these sage words:

The critical challenge facing the contemporary church is how it takes up seriously the notion of being “the family of faith” for all who belong to it, especially children. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he paid a price through his blood to redeem and save all who had missed the mark. When, by faith, they turned to him and believed in his name, and gave them a new lease on life. He gave them “the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13). Out of the people, he created a forceful and dynamic community we know as the church.⁴⁹

These words summarize much of the theology of this section on grace as it interacts with at-risk youth, children, and families. There is a family of faith that some youth, children, and families are not yet aware of as being agents of change. This family of faith can become a dynamic community that displays prevenient grace, points to justifying grace, and helps in the continued healing of broken families by partnering in works of sanctifying grace until dysfunctional families are made whole once again.

⁴⁷ Donald L. Bird, “Early Methodism in the Chesapeake Region,” *Fides Et Historia* 21, no. 3 (October 1989): 41.

⁴⁸ Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1980), 57-58.

⁴⁹ McConnell, Orona, and Stockley, *Understanding God’s Heart for Children*, 238.

CHAPTER 5

INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORING AS SPIRITUAL ADOPTION FOR KINGDOM IMPACT

Mentoring and adoption have much in common. Typically, in both, a mature adult takes primary responsibility for a young person who needs a family. Family structures are in place for the provision, development, protection, and stability of the young person. With the erosion of the nuclear family structure in today's society, young people more than ever need to be part of a stable family. This consistency and stability offered by a family can be something the local and extended Body of Christ offers. As young people come to faith in a local United Methodist congregation, they are becoming part of a larger family, not only in that local church but also in the context of a larger United Methodist structure. This structure is designed to help a young person develop a lifelong relationship with Christ, the local church, and the larger United Methodist Church in order to engage in the Kingdom mission here on earth.

A Short History and Theology of Adoption in the Church

Adoption is nothing new to societies, theology, or the Church. Jack Miles convincingly argues that a theology of adoption in the biblical narrative is a concept that

is developed over time.¹ The title “children of God” became a progressive title, first among the people of Israel and then among individuals who chose to follow God. While ancient people may have practiced both formal and informal adoption-like transactions, the God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures eventually progressed to this idea of adoption of His children. Consequently, a difficult question begins to arise when meditating on the concept of God having children. In the earliest biblical text, God creates Adam and Eve, but there is no clear distinction of Adam and Eve being called “children of God.” Instead, there is a relationship of “Master” and “created.” Still, one of the first accounts of God having “sons” is found in Genesis 6:1-8.

There are several different views on the title of son. One view would be that in some sense God procreated these children,² and yet another would view these sons as adopted.³ Regardless of whether these “sons” are of men or God, the daughters clearly are referred to as the “daughters of men” (Genesis 6:4). This would lead one to believe in a clear distinction that, up to this point, God does not reveal Himself to be a father to the children of humankind. What is clear, however, is that the father/child between humanity and God is a relationship that develops over time. Humanity comes to be God’s children not through a “birth process” but rather through a process of adoption, as stated in John 1:12-13: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

¹ Jack Miles, “Israel as Foundling: Abandonment, Adoption, and the Fatherhood of God,” *Hebrew Studies* no. 46 (2005): 15.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

Moreover, human beings are “adopted” by God as His children at a point in time of their greatest need. Romans 5:8 shows God’s love for humanity in stating, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” All children are in need of physical care and nurture. Without that physical care and nurture, the child faces a traumatic and uncertain future. Jesus chastised His disciples when they prevented children from coming to Him to be blessed. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Luke 18:16b). Here it becomes clear that where culture fails to see the intrinsic value of children among them, Jesus is sure to chastise the unwelcoming culture and welcome children by blessing them. John Wall states it well when he says, “The gospel emphasis on Jesus’ nativity and its including children as first in the kingdom of God are taken to their logical conclusion, namely that children are the surest signs and representatives of God in this world.”⁴ Theologically, members of the Body of Christ are called to counter systemic abandonment and criminalization of the young by blessing them and recognizing. When children are in their midst, they are in the presence of the Kingdom of God. Since Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30)—that is, Jesus being the incarnation of God—when Jesus blesses children and takes them into His arms, they are shown the heart of a nurturing and caring Father.

During the time of the Early Church, the apostle James encourages the Church to look after orphans and widows. As a reminder, James 1:27 states, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their

⁴ John Wall, “Fallen Angels: A Contemporary Christian Ethical Ontology of Childhood,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8, no. 2 (October 2004): 168.

distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” If the harsh pagan world had a practice of taking orphans in, the Church is even more compelled to take in those who are at risk of being abandoned and exploited, especially because God the Father commands believers to take care of the vulnerable. The widows and orphans of James’ day had the same needs of children and widows in ancient times. To be an orphan means someone who is “cast out,” and a widow is someone who is vulnerable; both are unable to provide for themselves, and both are at the mercy of society since they do not live under the legal protection of a family.⁵ In his article, “Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents,” Meir Malul of the University of Haifa in Israel offers an excellent resource for understanding the subject of rescuing and adopting foundlings in ancient times. Malul uses the term “foundlings,” which would parallel what those in contemporary society call “disposable children.”⁶ The need for the Church to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in a society has not changed (James 1:27; Isaiah 1:17).

How Mentoring Mirrors Adoption: Inheriting the Faith

There are many Scriptures that speak of the concepts of adoption, becoming children of God, and how becoming children of God changes a human life. In particular, this section considers Romans 8:14-17, Galatians 4:1-7, and Ephesians 1:20-10. Each passage speaks of Christ-followers’ identity as adopted children of God. Whether that adoption brings deliverance from slavery, makes believers co-heirs with Christ, or brings blessings, each Scripture gives promises for what it means to be children of God who

⁵ Meir Malul, “Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16:1-7,” *Journal For The Study of the Old Testament* 46 (February 1, 1990): 101.

⁶ Ibid.

inherit the Kingdom. When taken into the family of God through adoption, believers are nurtured in the faith and gain rights as children of God. In the case of mentoring, children who normally would be “left out” of the Kingdom of God, particularly those children who come from difficult backgrounds, can be brought to faith through caring adult relationships. In this way, at-risk children have the opportunity to inherit the faith of their mentors.

Romans 8:14-17

When children are embraced into the life of a family, they are given a sense of identity and belonging. When God embraces human beings, they are given the message that they belong to Him, and it is in Him where they can find their identity. The Church can become the “head” of a new family for children and youth just as Christ is the head of the Church, and it is in these families where healthy emotional bonding can happen. “The dual proclamation of Jesus Christ as God’s son and of his disciples as sons or children of God was undoubtedly part of the early Christian *kerygma*. . . . It neatly encapsulated the vision of a familial bond under the headship of one heavenly Father.”⁷ Believers share a title with Christ: child(ren) of God. With God as Father and having been adopted into the family of Christ, believers are called to emulate this action by bringing others into the family of God. Romans 8:14-17 reads:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

⁷ Michael Peppard, “Adopted and Begotten Sons of God: Paul and John on Divine Sonship,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (January 2011): 92.

When children and youth experience challenging backgrounds and are at risk of being criminalized, thereby making them susceptible to incarceration, that is another form of slavery. When children are adopted into a family, whether literally or figuratively, into the life of a church, they can be nurtured in a way that helps them avoid the process of criminalization by giving them the support they need. That support may come in the way of advocacy, material provision, or mentoring. All of these actions are a part of nurturing a child. This nurturing can be the very thing that keeps a child from the “slavery” of a penal institution.

George C. Gianoulis states, “The sonship of believers is an important theme in Romans 8. Paul used the honorific title υἱοὶ θεοῦ twice (w. 14, 19), τέκνα θεοῦ three times (vv. 16, 17, 21), and υιοθεσία twice (w. 15, 23). These terms all define the status of believers before God, that is, those who have new life in the Spirit.”⁸ If there is any segment of a society’s population that needs a sense of a “new life,” certainly those who are in foster care, without a family and in need of mentoring and nurture, fit the bill. Supporting foster families by mentoring their foster children brings much needed support to both the children and the adults attempting to heal wounded spirits. Furthermore, spiritual adoption through mentoring can help foster children avoid being enslaved to a system where the odds are stacked against them. Spiritual mentoring of foster children can re-paint a picture of God’s faithfulness to them. In other words, seeing at-risk children as “our children” brings with it an opportunity at a new life that might not have

⁸ George C. Gianoulis, “Is Sonship in Romans 8:14-17 a Link with Romans 9?” *Bibliotheca sacra* 166, no. 661 (January 2009): 70.

been possible without intentional mentoring and nurture. Every child that comes from a challenging background needs the opportunity for a new life.

While their biological family may have abandoned them, God's Church—that is, the Body of Christ—can show foster children that they will not abandon them. When children are adopted through spiritual mentoring, they are no longer abandoned. Churches can remind children of the comfort that Jesus gave all believers, that He would never “leave or forsake us” (John 14:18). Their futures are redeemed (Galatians 3:14). With redeemed futures comes the promise of being heirs in the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:17). Since God adopted believers and this adoption was made possible by sharing in the suffering of Christ, as mentioned in Romans 8:17, they can help a child carry his or her burdens while mentoring that child. When Christ-followers mentor a youth or child through spiritual adoption, they can develop an understanding of their suffering. Hope for a child comes when, through mentoring, believers share in the glory of healing the heart and life of a child who might have continued in a life of rejection, fear, and criminalization.

Galatians 4:1-7

When a child experiences spiritual adoption, a whole new world of opportunities opens to that child. Resources that were at one time either unavailable or fleeting are now available. This allocation of resources changes the future of the child, youth, or family that has experienced spiritual adoption. In Galatians 4:1-7, the apostle Paul writes:

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because

you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Like Romans 8:14-17, this passage highlights redemption, sonship, *Abba*, Father, slavery, and heirs. In Galatians 4:1-7, Paul uses the imagery of slavery, children, and redemption to point out how those under the shackles of slavery have little control over their social, financial, personal, and current circumstances. Especially vulnerable to a system of slavery and abuse are those children who come from broken families or who have no family at all. Today, just as in Paul’s day, those who lack family connections and resources are vulnerable to the abuses of an unjust society. Even if children are more empowered with social capital, every child needs a guardian or mentor to help them understand how to best use and function within that empowerment. Much of this understanding only can be passed on through nurturing relationships with adults.

Parents, as well as guardians who have participated in the spiritual adoption of children, not only must advocate for children; they must help children live into the new life and limited freedom they have now been given. This is especially true for at-risk children once they are removed from the “spiritual forces in the world” that have oppressed them. Much of the terminology Paul uses here in Galatians 4:1-5 seems to come from an understanding of Greco-Roman laws and language.⁹ In other words, Greco-Roman laws recognized the validity of sonship, inheritance, and guardianship and how this impacted a family structure. Churches that have infant and child baptisms and dedications mirror this Greco-Roman understanding of guardian responsibility in a

⁹ John K. Goodrich, “‘As Long as the Heir Is a Child’: The Rhetoric of Inheritance in Galatians 4:1-2 and P.Ryl. 2.153,” *Novum Testamentum* 55, no. 1 (2013): 61-76.

spiritual way. In churches that practice any sort of covenant agreement with parents pertaining to spiritually raising children, an understanding of Galatians 4:1-7 shows a spiritual obligation to treat all children as heirs in their congregation. This obligation understands that it matters not whether the family is biological, foster, or adoptive.

Ephesians 1:2-10

For children coming from difficult backgrounds, forgiveness, redemption, and a sense of belonging are essential elements of healthy development. Spiritual adoption allows the Church to teach all youth and children what it means to live a spiritual life where they experience these essential elements. Moreover, in a mentoring relationship, either the mentor or the mentoree initiates the relationship by choosing the other. Ephesians 1:2-10 describes what it means to be chosen spiritually and how being chosen impacts relationships.

Ephesians 1:2-10 states:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

When youth and children are mentored, they can begin to understand the love that Christ has for them as shown through the Body of Christ. Foster care, adoption, and mentoring hold much in common with the theology shown. Of most importance is the concept of election as found in Ephesians 1:2-10—that is, the concept of being chosen

and predestined. In this particular Scripture, it is clear that God has chosen believers in Christ since the beginning of time, despite their brokenness. This is a call for those who are in Christ to model the same behavior: to choose to be in a relationship with young people who need nurturing and mentoring.

The most significant phrase in Ephesians 1:9 is *hēmas*, in Christ. This terminology denotes a position of election that is meant to both change the temporal and eternal position of an individual.¹⁰ Once people are “in Christ,” their temporal and eternal lives are changed from death to life (Romans 5:12). Similarly, when children are “adopted” into the life of a church, especially a church that understands the need to empower and nurture those most vulnerable, the temporal lives of children are changed from hopelessness to hope. This also carries hopes of changing a child’s eternal position. This hope alone is a significant contributor to helping a child develop a better sense of self.

Children who have been unable to form healthy attachments to their caregivers due to abuse, abandonment, or neglect often place on themselves an incredible degree of guilt, shame, and blame due to many of the negative circumstances and environments they have experienced.¹¹ Much work is needed when it comes to helping abused children understand that they are blameless for the circumstances from which they emerge. This message of blame can be countermanded by an understanding of Ephesians 1:4. The Body of Christ can help heal children’s feelings of guilt, shame, and failure that stem from criminalization and pass on a healthy understanding of what it means to be

¹⁰ Leslie James Crawford, “Ephesians 1:3-4 and the Nature of Election,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 75-91.

¹¹ Peter Muris et al., “Bound to Feel Bad about Oneself: Relations between Attachment and the Self-conscious Emotions of Guilt and Shame in Children and Adolescents,” *Journal of Child & Family Studies* 23, no. 7 (October 2014): 1278.

blameless in Christ. This is due to Christian theology that emphasizes forgiveness, redemption, and being chosen and loved as a child of God.

In all aspects of mentoring and adoption, part of gaining an inheritance is an act of receiving empowerment through what parents have accumulated and pass on to their heirs. Once again, it does not matter whether the parent is a spiritual or physical parent. In this way, spiritual mentoring mirrors adoption and the adopted receive an inheritance of a new life, both temporal and potentially eternal. With a plethora of Scripture that teaches what it means to be children of God (Matthew 5:9; Mark 10:14; Luke 20:36; John 1:12; Romans 8:14), churches are obliged to practice spiritual adoption through mentoring. Biblical mentoring is a way of passing on spiritual, financial, and emotional blessings as well as social capital to all families. Congregations embarking on this journey of mentoring will discover that they will receive many blessings as well.

Biblically there is a clear vision of what mentoring looks like, especially where children are involved. In Luke 1:39-56, a mentoring relationship can be seen between Mary and Elizabeth's greetings and encounters when it comes to the birth of their children. In her joy, related to receiving the news of her being with child, Mary seeks wisdom and affirmation from Elizabeth and is not disappointed, as the older woman gives what the teen mother needs. "The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth likewise underlines the place of key life transitions in the relationship between mentor and protégée. The two women's shared experience of pregnancy extends the bonds of kinship between them."¹² Going beyond a kinship bond to share mutual care and respect, as well

¹² Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Luke 1:39-56: Mary's Visit to Elizabeth as Biblical Instance of Mentoring," *Apuntes* 17, no. 4 (January 1, 1997): 104.

as the care for children, can show churches how mentoring can reflect a type of “spiritual adoption” that is in the best interest of all involved. When children experience mutual love and respect between the adult relationships in their lives, they too will benefit from these relationships. Terry W. York states, “A congregation cannot become the nurturing village it should be for its children until its identity and its responsibility in this regard are fully understood and embraced.”¹³ As York points out, it is the responsibility of the church, the ecclesiastical village, to nurture and pass on a spiritual legacy onto young people. This is best done through intentional mentoring relationships that help form healthy identities in young people. When it comes to helping a protégée find her identity, the biblical example of Luke 1:43 models Elizabeth as helping Mary understand her identity as “the mother of the Lord.”

Mentoring also can occur among peers, whether adult or child. Galatians 6:1-6 offers a great example and highlights the role of mutual accountability, with the assumption that the peers are Christians. Galatians 6:1-6 states:

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

This passage is a clear call to what it means to live in community and encourage each other to do what is right by holding each other accountable. When believers live in this

¹³ Terry W. York, “The Congregation as the Village.” *Family And Community Ministries* 22, no. 4 (January 1, 2009): 10.

type of community, where they carry each other's burdens and hold each other accountable to doing what is right, mentoring relationships and interactions among all age groups can help curb systemic abandonment and criminalization and encourage positive decision-making. Such peer mentoring can include even younger children who have come from difficult and challenging backgrounds.¹⁴

Within a church, mentoring is a helpful option for at-risk youth and children to form social capital and identity. Where trust is built, those young people become better adjusted emotionally, academically, and empathetically. All of these qualities are the opposite of the qualities displayed by youth who are typically targeted for criminalization as described in Part One in this paper. In essence, spiritual mentoring relationships benefit all who are involved.

Theology of Spiritual Family Life and Protection

Family relationships are the first environments where children are nurtured and cared for. When cycles of dysfunction are pervasive and unbroken, children and youth are at a higher risk of developmental trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences, as discussed in Part One of this discussion. The results of ACEs are significant contributors to the process of criminalization. However, life and protection in a spiritual family can interrupt the cycle of ACEs. Healing can begin, and criminalization can be curbed. Where a biological family might fail in nurturing their children due to ACEs, the local church

¹⁴ Jean E. Rhodes, Wendy L. Haight, and Ernestine C. Briggs, "The Influence of Mentoring on the Peer Relationships of Foster Youth in Relative and Nonrelative," *Journal of Research on Adolescence (Lawrence Erlbaum)* 9, no. 2 (April 1999): 185.

can become an agency of healing by intentionally reaching out to these children and families by becoming a second, or spiritual, family.

Genesis 4:8-10

Genesis 4:8-10 paints a clear picture of what can happen when an individual feels rejected and unloved. This was the underlying dynamic between Cain and Abel. Genesis 4:8-10 reads:

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

Preceding this particular text, the reason Cain slew Abel was due to Cain's jealousy over God's favor with Cain's sacrifice but not his own. The rejection Cain experienced led to him having feelings of envy and a loss of love, which eventually turned to rage and murder. Like Cain, many children and youth in dysfunctional families suffer the consequences of feeling rejection, loss and anger. In order to overcome the dysfunction and ACEs experienced by many young people within their family context, another "family" that has healthy boundaries, structure, flexibility, and nurturing must be created in order for children to heal and thrive.

While reflecting on the early Church and how it provided healthy environments, Wayne A. Meeks observes the following about churches today: "In order to persist, a social organization must have boundaries, must maintain structural stability as well as flexibility, and must create a unique culture. The second factor, the social structure of the organization, is concerned largely with leadership, the allocation of power, the differentiation of roles

and management of conflict.”¹⁵ The church should provide the best leadership, conflict resolution, and empowerment to those who are vulnerable and disenfranchised to include women, youth, and children. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” has often been spoken with the tongue of sarcasm in modern times, but biblically the answer to the question is a resounding “Yes.”

When vulnerable children do not receive the affirmation, comfort, nurturing, and care that they need, their unmet needs and desires can spring into regrettable actions, like the jealousy and potential murderous rage Cain had toward Abel. Roger Burggraeve explains:

Rage took such a hold on Cain, or rather Cain let rage take such a hold on him, that he did not succeed in keeping it under control, resulting in the murder of his brother. It is apparent from all this how evil does not flow forth from a lucid, abstract, intelligible act but finds its starting point in the affronted desire of Cain, of every human person. In our desire—in the flesh of our spirit—we are most vulnerable and assailable.¹⁶

In the case of Cain and Abel, with Cain being the firstborn, there was a cultural assumption that Cain was to care for his brother Abel. Cain’s rage overcame his responsibility, even as God warned Cain of that potential (Genesis 4:6-7).

The Body of Christ must ask some difficult questions when it comes to addressing the needs of vulnerable and difficult children. Churches can turn a blind eye to children in foster care at best and, at worse, join in the criminalization process of these children and youth. To do so would be synonymous to joining Cain in his sin. Contrary to Cain’s actions, churches must live out the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:5, which state, “And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” Since Christians believe

¹⁵ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 84.

¹⁶ Roger Burggraeve, “‘Am I My Brother’s Keeper?’: On the Meaning and Depth of Our Responsibility,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 84, no. 4 (December 2008): 342.

the words of Jesus to be truth, they are called to give children in today's society a special place. Matthew 18:3 goes so far as to say believers never will enter the Kingdom of God unless they become as little children. Being as "little children" helps Christ-followers to empathize with the plight of children and their lack of power in the face of sovereign authority. Matthew 18:6 also cautions believers not to cause a little one to stumble, for it would be better to have a millstone hung around the neck and be cast into the sea. For this reason, churches must take a proactive role in offering the most vulnerable a family where they can be protected and cared for, because Christians are indeed their "keepers."

Ruth 3:7-9

Another admonishment to care for the most vulnerable can be found in Ruth 3:7-9. Acts of redemption stem from the lineage of King David, specifically in the story of Ruth and Boaz, where Boaz is referred to as the "Family Redeemer" several different times in the Book of Ruth (Ruth 2:20; 3:9, 12; 4:1, 3, 6). Not only did Boaz redeem the family land and the name of the dead among his inheritance, Boaz also becomes a kinsman-redeemer to Ruth who was a foreigner among the Israelites.¹⁷ Through legal contracts in Israelite culture, the Book of Ruth tells readers that God can redeem whom He chooses. Redemption is not just for a select few, and God uses His people to redeem. Although Ruth was a foreign, widowed, and impoverished woman among the Israelites, she became the great-grandmother of Israel's greatest king, David.¹⁸ As a young woman, Ruth is given

¹⁷ Matthew J. Suriano, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 64.

¹⁸ Agnethe Siquans, "Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Foreign Woman to Be Integrated into Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (September 2009): 452.

another chance at life through the grace displayed by Boaz. Ruth shares a legacy of being an outcast just as an orphan does, yet God redeems the outcast through His people.

There is another example of spiritual adoption in Ruth 1:16, where Ruth declares to her mother-in-law, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” With Ruth’s refusal to leave Naomi, the older woman agrees and takes the younger woman in as family. As a result, Ruth comes under the kinship-redeemer status of Boaz. In essence, this relationship becomes one of protection and provision as both Naomi and Ruth have been systemically abandoned by the deaths of Naomi’s sons (one of whom was Ruth’s husband) and a culture where women had little in the way of providing for themselves. This relationship is similar to the cultural systemic abandonment in which children lack provision and protection. Boaz offers protection to Ruth (Ruth 2:8), invites her to eat with the harvesters (Ruth 2:14), and intentionally instructs his workers to provide grain for Ruth to glean (Ruth 2:16) in order to provide for herself and Naomi.

This biblical example foreshadows the kinsman-redeemer relationship that believers receive in Christ, where they are called children of God (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14) and co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). These scriptural proclamations show that God has taken in humanity, through Jesus Christ, as His children. In this way, Jesus becomes their kinsman-redeemer, provider, and protector all the while ushering them into the family of God. Jesus even speaks to the loving provision of God toward His children in Luke 11:11-13, “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give

the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Since the Church is called to be the imitation of Christ by conforming to the Spirit (Romans 8:9-14), believers are then called to become kinsman-redeemers of others through protection and provision. The local church is called not only to take the vulnerable in as family but to provide for them as well (James 2:14-17).

Mark 3:31-35

In extending the definition of family, Mark 3:31-35 offers the following:

Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

This key passage demonstrates that doing the will of God is what defines believers as the family of Christ. Jesus also redefines family in John 19:26 by developing a kinship-redeemer relationship between His mother Mary and His disciple John. Connecting to Matthew 3:31-35, John and Mary accept a new definition of family as both seem to agree to become a new family for each other with the impending death of Jesus. By obeying the “will of God,” this is the first affirmation of becoming a new family. The second affirmation of new family is that John and Mary are obedient to the will of God. In a sense, this “double affirmation” shows the intention of God to show believers that all human beings are a part of His family in the Kingdom. In the Kingdom, followers of God are called to expand their definition of family. Upon seeing Jesus about to die, Mary and John likely experienced a new and profound sense of brokenness. Jesus addresses this brokenness by offering new hope through a new family. It seems that “new families” can offer new hope for redemption and restore order, just as in the lives of Mary and John.

Thomas F. Torrance states it this way, “The whole movement of redemption adumbrated from the start is a movement of God coming to man in order to restore man to God, of God taking man’s place in order to give man God’s place—the principle of substitution and the principle of incarnation.”¹⁹ In other words, just as the church family would initiate a relationship with children and families in need, God initiates a relationship with humanity through His sacrifice. Just as Jesus’ agenda on the cross was to develop a new family of hope, God’s agenda is in the best interest of His children because it provides salvation and new life. Family is designed to meet the needs of children, not to meet the emotional needs of the parent. This provides a picture that is the antithesis of abandonment. God broke through human pain and suffering in order to bring hope and a future (cf. Jeremiah 29:11-12).

Bringing Mary and John together as a new family, Jesus paves a way for them to offer provision, protection, and family identity. These elements of provision, protection, family identity—as well as redemption, encouragement, and education—are all a part of what it means to welcome the most vulnerable into family through spiritual adoption. Along with a family to identify with, children and youth who are given stability and support in a “family” setting can begin a healthier process of identity formation. Support systems that go beyond an individual family and include the family of God contribute much in the way of healthy family dynamics. The local church can become a key component in the healing of wounded and hurting children and youth. It cannot be too emphatically stated that healthy youth and children who come from healthy environments

¹⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 40.

are less likely to be criminalized. Had Mary or John been abandoned beyond the cross, one could only speculate the increased difficulty of their life challenges.

Healthy families and their support systems are essential to curbing criminalization. The opposite of healthy families and support systems leads to the criminalization process. Homes where children have little parental involvement or homes where parents are overbearing can have disastrous results. Unsafe, unstructured, under-resourced, and hostile homes have a negative impact on child development. As a Bronfenbrenner expert, Larry K. Brendtro says that “children reared in disrupted ecologies experience a host of emotional and behavioral problems. But Bronfenbrenner opposed diagnosing such problems as pathology or disease in youth. Instead, he diagnosed DIS-EASE in the ecology.”²⁰ In this case, “disease” is used in the sense of uneasiness within the child caused by negative influencing factors, such as poor parenting skills, unsafe environments or other factors that are deleterious toward a child’s healthy development.

Bronfenbrenner is not alone in these conclusions. More recent research suggests that conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are more of a sociological issue as opposed to a biological or chemical imbalance within children needing medication.²¹ This reveals that the move toward delinquency can either be exacerbated or hindered, depending on healthy relationships and attachments that are formed within the family unit between parents and offspring. The Body of Christ can

²⁰ Larry K. Brendtro, “The Vision of Urie Bronfenbrenner: Adults Who Are Crazy about Kids,” *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 163.

²¹ Marilyn Wedge, “Suffer the Children: The Case against Labeling and Medicating Children, and Effective Alternatives for Treating Them,” *Suffer the Children Blog*, entry posted March 8, 2012, *Psychology Today*, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/suffer-the-children/201203/why-french-kids-dont-have-adhd> (accessed July 4, 2013).

become a place where healthy family attachments can be formed, whether these attachments are biological or spiritual or both.

The admonishment of Mark 3:31-35 for current families is an admonishment for churches to become a family that meets the needs of the most vulnerable in a society. When a congregation meets the needs of struggling families, much can be accomplished to provide for hope, encouragement, and healing—ultimately, curtailing the systemic abandonment and criminalization of at-risk children, youth, and families. While it would be completely speculative to ask the question, “What would have become of Mary or John had not Jesus given them a new family,” it is not hard to imagine that the futures of both Mary and John were more hopeful as they came to rely on and support each other in a culture that had little value for female widows (Mary) and youth (John).

Resources for Mentoring as “Spiritual Adoption”

While many churches love the idea of getting involved in helping those in need and mentoring, it can be a very daunting task. Children, youth, and families that are “at risk” due to dysfunction within the family offer even more challenges to overcome when it comes to a mentoring relationship. Further obstacles in pursuing mentoring as “spiritual adoption” come about when churches feel under-resourced to meet the emotional, fiscal, and spiritual challenges these families present. The reality is that it can cost little simply by offering limited support roles that can benefit at-risk children, youth, and families. To do this, clear boundaries can be set within the expectations of mentoring; and mentoring can occur in an atmosphere such as Sunday School, grow groups, or one-on-one discipleship and teaching.

In their article for the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Lance D. Erickson and James W. Phillips write: “The relationship between religious participation and youth outcomes has received considerable attention. Research confirms that religious behavior is beneficial for adolescents by decreasing participation in deviance through social control, providing a conventional socialization environment, and increasing access to social support.”²² This quote shows that the Body of Christ itself is a resource in and of itself for helping young people develop in healthy ways. Coupling church participation with caring adult relationships that are intentional about mentoring and spiritual adoption can help curtail the effects of systemic abandonment.

Often children who come from backgrounds of abuse and neglect have difficulty developing healthy relationships with adults and peers. Foster children who are put in healthy religious environments, such as churches, have the opportunity to engage in healthy youth activities, to see and participate in positive interactions with others. This means that churches placing a high importance on youth and children’s ministries and have healthy adults involved already have a significant resource for healing hurting children. Due to some of the emotional needs of abused and neglected children and youth, care should be taken to provide some specialized training when in ministry to these children, youth, foster families, and even biological families. A church pursuing ministry that meets the needs of these children and families can provide spiritual adoption through mentoring and building intentional and helpful relationships. Once again, this type of

²² Lance D. Erickson and James W. Phillips, “The Effect of Religious-based Mentoring on Educational Attainment: More Than Just a Spiritual High?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 3 (September 2012): 568.

spiritual adoption can be found in Galatians 6:2 where believers are encouraged to help carry one another's burdens and engage discipleship (Luke 11:46).

Churches can be challenged to consider different ways of "mentoring." For vulnerable children who come into foster care, mentoring can be as simple as a consistent and stable relationship with another caring adult outside the foster home. Mentoring also can take the form of tutoring and education. Erickson and Phillips go further to say, "When adolescents participate in organized religion, they gain access to older attendants who may offer care, attention, counsel, or otherwise positive encouragement. The relationships youth form with these religious adults offer opportunities for role modeling and interpersonal ties that can have important implications for educational attainment."²³ In other words, not only are significant mentoring relationships important in retaining young people in the life of the Church, it also can help students attain achievements in school. At-risk young people who have at least one significant relationship with a caring adult from the Body of Christ can overcome some of the challenges of systemic abandonment and criminalization.

Young people who face the many challenges that come from dysfunction and put them at risk of criminalization can overcome many of these obstacles through spiritual adoption. Spiritual adoption is when a caring adult takes a child, youth, or family into a spiritual mentoring relationship. In other words, the child, youth, or family become "like the mentor's own." With spiritual mentoring, the family, youth, and child's problems become the mentor's problems. While this can be challenging, a spiritual mentor's adoption of a family can provide the stability a dysfunctional family might need. When

²³ Ibid., 570.

families, communities, and cultural contexts are ever changing, children, youth, and adults have difficulty developing their own identities. Professionals who have worked with infants suggest that exploring cannot occur unless there is a secure home base from which an individual can investigate the external environment.²⁴ Spiritually adoptive mentors can assist struggling families by helping them develop a secure home base.

Along with mentoring, churches can provide volunteers for tutoring on both school and church campuses. According to Erickson and Phillips, churches have a variety of potential adult mentors already in attendance at the church:

Thus, a mentor can be almost anyone, regardless of the mechanism through which the relationship develops (e.g., being matched in a Big Brothers Big Sisters program or developing more naturally through interaction in a religious youth group). However, according to research findings, youth are most likely to identify adults as mentors who occupy social roles that expressly include interactions with them. Examples include teachers, relatives, employers, and ministers.²⁵

Since youth are most likely to identify with adult mentors who include ministers, it seems then that churches have more resources than they are aware of if they simply become creative in their ways to mentor. Involving oneself in the life of a child, youth, or family in ways that offer protection and provision is a form of spiritual adoption, as has been shown in the scriptural examples above. Mentoring a child in areas of academics, social, and work skills and simply providing a safe space for them to be nurtured in relationships is a significant way to spiritually adopt a child, youth, or family through intentional mentoring beyond simply Sunday School or small groups. In other words, spiritual adoption is mentoring that takes a holistic approach to developing a youth, child, or family.

²⁴ Ibid., 244.

²⁵ Ibid., 571.

In an approach to be more holistic in spiritual adoption, another resource development to be considered is a partnership between church and state welfare organizations. R. A. Koegelenberg asserts:

Within the broader context of civil society, religious welfare and development networks probably have the largest and best developed networks, but also on the fact that religious networks offer more than just administrative programme support: They are essential in the formation of values and value systems in our broader society. In many cases social programmes deal with the victims of family disintegration, family violence, lack of support for the vulnerable in our society (the elderly, children, women, etc.), which are symptoms of the moral crisis in our society.²⁶

Koegelenberg's whole thesis is that when state social agencies partner with local faith-based agencies, they can share resources through a variety of networks—and networking will accomplish better outcomes for the clients they serve. Koegelenberg also states that this “Church and State” cooperation is nothing new in Europe, where there has been great success.²⁷ When evaluating potential resources, it is clear that each local church can develop mentoring resources both inside and outside the congregation. When it comes to tackling such broad societal issues as systemic abandonment and criminalization of the young, a multi-church approach can have a significant impact on the problem.

To summarize, intentional intergenerational mentoring as spiritual adoption has a significant theological and biblical precedent. Mentoring that occurs between healthy caring adults of all ages who mentor children, youth, and families curtails systemic abandonment and criminalization, positively impacting the community in which the mentoring occurs. As the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of youth, children, and

²⁶ R. A. Koegelenberg, “Social Development Partnerships between Religious Communities and the State: Perspectives from the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD),” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 110 (July 2001): 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

families are met in spiritual environments, both the earthly communities and the Kingdom of God are impacted. In both arenas, relationships are made healthy; and youth, children, and families have the opportunity to be redeemed on many different levels.

Beyond Elizabeth and Mary, Naomi and Ruth, mentoring also occurs among men of the Bible and can happen across generations. In the New Testament, Barnabas mentors Paul (Acts 9:26-28; 11:25-26; 15:2), and then Paul mentors Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 5:11-14). In the Old Testament Jethro gives wisdom to Moses, and then Moses mentors those whom he tasks with judging (Exodus 3:1; 4:18; 18:13-24). The context of intergenerational mentoring is particularly strong between Moses and Jethro. Moses is an impetuous man who kills an Egyptian (Exodus 2:12) and then flees to Midian (Exodus 2:15), the land where Jethro lives. Jethro takes Moses in to tend his sheep but also allows Moses to marry one of his daughters (Exodus 2:21) and Moses becomes kin to Jethro. Not only did Moses become family to Jethro, Jethro take Moses under his wing through mentoring, as shown in Exodus 18:13-24. As Moses is leading the nation of Israel in the desert, it is Jethro who suggests a different model of leadership and judging. Moses heeds Jethro's advice and the entire nation of Israel benefits from Jethro's advice.

This intergenerational example of adoptive family and mentoring shows a clear trajectory of Kingdom impact. The people of God are saved and served in great part to the intergenerational familial mentoring relationship shared by Moses and Jethro. In correlation to this paper, it should be further noted that Moses was considered a criminal in the country of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:15) for having murdered an Egyptian. It was a redemptive act of Jethro taking Moses in as family that altered the course of Moses' life as well as the course of history for Israel. A church family can do the same through mentoring and spiritual adoption.

CHAPTER 6

A THEOLOGY OF CHURCH FAMILY AND MENTORING AS SPIRITUAL ADOPTION

This chapter carefully reflects theologically and organizationally on the structure of the United Methodist Church and how it is poised to develop “new family ministries” at its various levels. Organizational and theological sources will be considered as these new family ministries are considered. The intended outcome is the understanding of family at each level within the United Methodist structure, so ministry approaches can be implemented not only to protect young people effectively from being criminalized but to ensure healthy individuation. A sense of strong, stable, and cohesive family belonging is essential for healthy individuation and overall well-being.

New Testament Church Family

Current Western social trends have seen the decline of what has been known as a “nuclear family” toward a model called “permeable family.”¹ The traditional model of nuclear family was defined as a mother, father, and 2.5 children and provided rigid

¹ David Elkind, *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1.

boundaries where children and adolescents seemed to have thrived.² Permeable family is defined as making a family within whatever context best fits one's needs, placing priority on fulfilling those needs that are most beneficial to the parent and most detrimental to youth.³ If the assertions of Elkind are correct, this indeed is a prime example of systemic abandonment of children. Carolyn Osiek echoes Elkind's concern for the family. She writes: "But we know that all is not right with the world, least of all in families, with talk of orphanages instead of foster care and withdrawal of welfare to mothers and children, and with slogans of 'children having children' and 'children killing children' which have become familiar."⁴ Most striking is Osiek's comment regarding how Western society's communal and societal sense of family has similarities with the first-century Church.⁵ In other words, the first-century Church "placed the care of children firmly within a context of Christian theology and ethics."⁶ She also agrees with the earlier assertions of this paper that Jesus redefines family as those who do the will of God.⁷

While current Western society shares some similarities with first-century perspectives of family and society, it seems to have lost the ability to naturally build relationships with organizations that can support the family. For individuals seeking a "family," both the early Church and today's Body of Christ have an ability to provide a

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Carolyn Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity: 'Family Values' Revisited," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (January 1996): 1.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Nonna Verna Harrison, "Raising Them Right: Early Christian Approaches to Child Rearing." *Theology Today* 56, no. 4 (January 2000): 481-494.

⁷ Osiek. "The Family in Early Christianity," 3.

family of support. In today's modern times, families are frequently separated by distance, divorce, and other difficulties. For individuals who find themselves in difficult situations, and without family support systems, the current Church can take note from the early Church on how to become a family to those who need one most. Osiek further explains:

It would seem that the criticism of family and the urging to outside loyalties would have expressed better the experience of individual converts who had made the difficult decision to act alone in joining a Christian community. They most often have found it to be true that family members could not be relied upon for support, and that, ultimately, loyalties had to be chosen and sides taken, sometimes against family and friends.⁸

When Christians find children and youth who are lacking appropriate family support, it is imperative that the Church become the new family of support so that those children and youth can have their physical and spiritual needs met. The approach the early Church took to new converts who lost their families reflects the “spiritual adoption” already discussed in Chapter 5.

Even more important is that the modern Church can learn much from the early Church in how to become a family to those in non-traditional families. Considering that the Western modern nuclear family is a construct of the mid-twentieth century,⁹ and how Jesus redefined the concept of family, the Church today can certainly serve as a safe haven and become a new “family” to those in need of love and acceptance, much as the early Body of Christ did (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; Titus 1:4; Galatians 4:19). Jesus' definition of family as those who do His will (Matthew 12:46-50), as well as John and Mary becoming a new family (John 19:26), sets the stage for the New Testament Church to

⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

broaden the definition of family for a variety of reasons. In other words, family is given to believers in order to do ministry and support one another, especially those in need.

Churches that consider the nuclear family as the only family systems model while ignoring the reality of permeable families have the ability to unintentionally ostracize a good number of other family groupings. Nuclear family planning in the areas of worship and programmatic paradigm can ostracize non-traditional families unintentionally by providing little support for non-traditional (non-nuclear) families. For instance, while churches may provide marriage retreats and enrichment, churches also should consider planning for single parents who may not have the capability to provide childcare for a retreat designed for the single parent. This must be considered when attempting to reach out to a growing population of non-nuclear or non-traditional families.

Church as the New Family

Children cannot raise themselves. The Church has an opportunity to step up and share the love of Christ to a culture's most vulnerable youth and children. However, many church leaders should be concerned that six out of ten young people walk away from the Church and are not connected after high school graduation.¹⁰ There is an ironic parallel in both the Church and the foster care system, when eighteen-year-olds are "dropped from the system." This "dropping out of the system" has much to do with the inability of "institutional systems" to meet the real needs of young people. In many ways, the means the Church is struggling to follow up with youth, as many congregations may

¹⁰ Barna, "The Priorities, Challenges, and Trends in Youth Ministry," under "Research Releases in Leaders & Pastors: April 6, 2016), <https://www.barna.com/research/the-priorities-challenges-and-trends-in-youth-ministry/> (accessed December 1, 2018).

have a ministry that focuses on children and youth but not one that helps young people transition into healthy adulthood, which can lead to churches dropping youth from their ministry system once they go to college.

UMC leaders should take notice of a study that shows the reasons for youth dropout in the United Methodist Church. Roger L. Dudley notes how his study “found that among Wesleyan, United Methodist, and American Baptist young people, alienation from the church was best predicted by unpleasant experiences with the church, lack of involvement, uninteresting sermons, deficient devotional life, and religious restrictions on lifestyle.”¹¹ Almost every one of these indicators of dropout can be applied to children and youth who live in the realm of foster care. They too have been alienated, suffer unpleasant experiences, have little involvement in decisions that impact their lives, certainly get “sermonized,” and have many restrictions placed on their lives. For instance, the normal rituals of a child being able to spend the night at a friend’s house, participate in group sports, and simply go to one school consistently are all circumvented by being “in the system.” The approach of mentoring struggling families and youth can show that the Body of Christ is not simply concerned about these families attending church but rather that the Church can provide some normalcy of childhood through healthier families. Mentoring struggling families and youth can show that the Body of Christ is not simply concerned about these families attending church but rather that the Church wants to attend to them.

When the Body of Christ fully embraces its call to be “family,” a church will engage in the ministry of spiritual adoption. At its most basic form, adoption means taking

¹¹ Roger L. Dudley, “Indicators of Commitment to the Church: A Longitudinal Study of Church-Affiliated Youth,” *Adolescence* 28, no. 109 (Spring 1993): 21.

in another human being, typically a child, and accepting the responsibility to care for and nurture that person. An excellent description of spiritual adoption can be found in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*, edited by Clark. In it, he and fellow writers establish the following about adoptive ministry:

1. Adoption recognizes that in every church or organization there are insiders and outsiders. . . . “the inner circle of the gathering does whatever it needs to do to make sure that the adopted person experiences the family of God as a fully embraced and included participant”
2. I am adopted into God’s family as a child with other children. . . . “you have one Father, and you are all siblings.” (Based on Mark 10:15). . . .
3. Jesus has his eye especially on the vulnerable. “Adopting the vulnerable means that those who are mature must see it as their responsibility to ensure that those who are not are cared for, included, and empowered, and can grow into well-established life and faith”
4. Adoption is not limited to the gathered but includes the outsider as well. Adoptive ministry is vital because we are witnessing to the fact that in Christ God has invited those who “believed in his name” to “become children of God” (John 1:12). This is the message of the good news. Therefore our message—in our lifestyle, service, and word—is adoption.¹²

The message of inclusion and protection for the outsider as an act of adoptive ministry is prevalent throughout Scripture. In Genesis 21:14-19, Hagar and Ishmael were literally driven out of the family and left in the desert to die. God intervenes from heaven by providing water and a blessing for Ishmael, who is both outcast and illegitimate child. Genesis 21:17-20 states:

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

¹² Chap Clark, ed., “Introduction: Adoption—Reenvisioning Youth Ministry and the Family of God,” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 2.

Ishmael is not unlike those children, youth, or families who have been “cast out” and are in great need of intervention and care. The Church can become their adoptive family, Furthermore, with understanding and vision to engage in and apply Clark’s model of adoptive ministry, many churches could be well on their way to impede the process of systemic abandonment and criminalization of youth. In essence, the Church becomes a new family to those who are struggling to keep their families together.

Adoptive ministry also falls within the goal of the early Church, which was to proclaim the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in the context of their families, community, and culture. This Kingdom mission, to both Jews and Gentiles, was to share the good news with the poor and set prisoners free (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19), as modeled and fulfilled by Jesus.¹³ This outwardly focused mission became the unifying element of the early Church to usher in the Kingdom of God both now and in the future. For those without families, the good news is they have a new and eternal family that includes them in the life of the body by providing for their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. For those who have little to no means of providing for themselves emotionally or socioeconomically, the good news comes in the form of a broader and larger family where one another’s blessings and burdens are shared. For those without the support of loved ones, being set free means sharing in the freedom of a new life where believers share together and hold all things in common (Acts 2:42-47). Community and families were essential to the early Church. In the first-century Body of Christ, *ekklesia*

¹³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 31.

was a term used for meetings that occurred in a believer's homes.¹⁴ These "home groups" enjoyed an unusual degree of intimacy and cohesion distinct to outsiders and yet was probably very appealing to those who observed these communities.¹⁵ This is an example of healthy Christian families having an appeal to other families within the culture.

Ultimately, being a church that becomes a family to struggling families can be a missional effort. As Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk state, "Missional practices and formation are not a matter of learning new skills, rather recovering ways of life that once were at the heart of Christianity."¹⁶ At its core, the heart of Christianity is living and welcoming others as a part of the family of God. The Church does not need more seminars or techniques on evangelism. Rather, it needs to incorporate missions as a lifestyle and authentic spiritual practices that can strengthen believing families and draw non-believing families to Christ.

Family Ministry within United Methodist Structures

Family life can be messy and difficult to define. It is also challenging to determine just how difficult family life can become when dealing with family members engaged in destructive behaviors. This is a tension that can be found in any family, whether that family is a biological or a spiritual family. When it comes to family and faith, John Wesley struggled with the challenge of how to care for dysfunctional biological and spiritual families as well. He had an understanding that the "head of the household" was responsible

¹⁴ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006), 169.

for the faith development of all who served under the roof of the family and therefore, vicariously, involved others in the family life. The following is an example of his thinking from his sermon entitled “On Family Religion”:

Your servants, of whatever kind, you are to look upon as a kind of *secondary children*: These, likewise, God has committed to your charge, as one that must give account. For every one under your roof that has a soul to be saved is under your care; not only indented servants, who are legally engaged to remain with you for a term of years; not only hired servants, whether they voluntarily contract for a longer or shorter time; but also those who serve you by the week of day: For these too are, in a measure, delivered into your hands. And it is not the will of your Master who is in heaven, that any of these should go out of your hands before they have received from you something more valuable than gold or silver. Yea, and you are in a degree accountable even for “the stranger that is within your gates.” As you are particularly required to see that he does “no manner of work” on the Lord’s day, while he is within your gates; so, by parity of reason, you are required to do all that is in your power to prevent his sinning against God in any other instance [emphasis mine].¹⁷

Wesley understood the necessity of caring for all who were under his familial protection and provision, whether they were related by blood or by service. Wesley’s admonition was to take a deeper, more profound spiritual leadership role for the lives of all who claimed to be Christian.

On the flip side of this argument, however, Wesley seems to argue for the sanctity of the family so much to the point that if a laborer or servant refuses to turn from sinful behaviors, the head of the household was to dismiss the laborer. He writes:

If you find that, after repeated trials, they will not yield either to one or the other, it is your bounden duty to set ceremony aside, and to dismiss them from your house. Servants also, whether by the day, or for a longer space, if you cannot reclaim, either by reasoning added to your example, or by gentle or severe reproofs, though frequently repeated, you must, in anywise, dismiss from your family, though it should be ever so inconvenient.

¹⁷ John Wesley, “On Family Religion,” in *The Works of John Wesley*. 3rd ed. (1872; repr. United Methodist Church: Global Ministries, “On Family Religion,” <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-94-On-Family-Religion> [accessed July 27, 2016]).

While the initial paragraph might warrant the thought of expanding family to include servants, the latter paragraph would dissuade the thought since most would find it difficult to cast family members away.

In the time of Wesley, parents had the primary responsibility of nurturing the spiritual and academic development of their children. Wesley saw the reading of Scripture as formative rather than informative. In other words, it was the mother's primary duty to educate her children through a reading of Scripture that would shape the character of her children. "Wesley is not commonly known for his interest in educating children, yet history demonstrates his deep interest in religious education for the primary purpose of helping children (and all humankind) grow into the image of Christ."¹⁸ In this sense, Wesley understood the concept of ministering to all of God's children by including them in religious education, thereby improving their future as well as the future of society. Wesley's perspective of "spiritual adoption," understood as everyone who comes into a household, also entailed mentoring since the nuclear family was to model spiritual practices such as keeping the Sabbath.¹⁹

Elmer L. Towns asserts that Wesley was interested in the religious education of children from all socioeconomic levels.²⁰ Since believers are all God's children and in God's family, they are to care for one another by breaking down socioeconomic barriers in order to nurture all children in the faith. Due in part to Wesley's teachings on expanding

¹⁸ Philip McKinney II, "John Wesley on the Formative Reading of Scripture and Educating Children," *The Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 4, no. 1 (September 2013): 13.

¹⁹ Wesley, "On Family Religion."

²⁰ Elmer L. Towns, "John Wesley and Religious Education," *Religious Education* 65, no. 4 (July 1970): 318.

the family of God and educating all God's children, the United Methodists have a history of being involved not only in the education of children from all socioeconomic backgrounds but also in providing shelter and support for many families, children, and youth. Methodist theology on expanding the definition of God's family provides a foundation for caring and nurturing all of God's children. To this end, the United Methodist Church in the United States alone has over seventy-four connectional agencies that help support families and children in need.²¹

This support of families comes from a rich tradition of Methodist history that teaches the significant impact that both mother and father had on the lives of Wesley and his brother. The importance of parental impact is noted as Towns gives the reason for Wesley's interest in educating children, since it was a significant part of his upbringing. Many of Wesley's perspectives on education and spiritual adoption came from his childhood memories.²²

Continuing in Wesley's admonitions, religious and non-religious education of children for Methodists (and other churches) has been an essential part of the American landscape, and spiritual education was a primary concern in that the Bible was used as a significant part of public school curriculum.²³ Even until recently, the Bible has been a significant book in American intellectualism,²⁴ showing the significance of raising

²¹ United Methodist Church, "Child and Youth Services," <http://www.umc.org/directory/child-and-youth-services> (accessed February 16, 2017).

²² Towns, "John Wesley and Religious Education," 318.

²³ Mark A. Noll, "Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 3 (September 1987): 499.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 498.

children spiritually. Still seeing the necessity of spiritual education in the “Methodist family,” the United Methodist Church has 122 educational institutions in the United states alone.²⁵ All this comes from the legacy of Wesley’s teaching on the value of Christian education and nurture for all.

Built on the legacy of Wesley’s understanding of spiritual adoption, family responsibilities and providing for the needs of children, regardless of social barriers, the United Methodist Church has much to say about its commitment to youth, families, children, and education. The United Methodist Church has a strong history of social engagement in the issues in cultures where it is located, especially when it comes to children, youth, and families. It is for this reason that the United Methodist Church can be poised to make a significant difference in combatting the criminalization of young people. Whether at the local church level or raising awareness at the seminary level, the people of the United Methodist Church can confront the challenges facing those vulnerable families, children, and youth most susceptible to criminalization by understanding the need for spiritual adoption and education.

With the high regard in which the United Methodist Church holds families, it also recognizes the changing nature of families and the need to support non-traditional families. It also recognizes, however, that children thrive in a two-parent family where their emotional, social, and financial needs are met so that youth and children can become mature and responsible adults. Ministry in the United Methodist Church must be a ministry that provides a community where families can be supported in a way to help their

²⁵ United Methodist Church, “Schools and Seminaries,” <http://www.umc.org/directory/schools-seminaries> (accessed February 17, 2017).

marriages thrive. If all United Methodist churches took this social principle seriously, they would very well be on their way to helping curb the systemic abandonment and criminalization of youth.

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (2012)

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* reflects the laws of the United Methodist Church. It reads:

The *Discipline* as the instrument for setting forth the laws, plan, polity, and process by which United Methodists govern themselves remains constant. Each General Conference amends, perfects, clarifies, and adds its own contribution to the *Discipline*. We do not see the *Discipline* as sacrosanct or infallible, but we do consider it a document suitable to our heritage. It is the most current statement of how United Methodists agree to live their lives together.²⁶

Those who are in any ordained ministry of the United Methodist Church agree to uphold the *Book of Discipline*.²⁷ If they do not, those who are in ordained ministry within the United Methodist Church can find themselves facing censure or charges in front of an ecclesiastical court of peers. Social principles are an important part of guiding the ministry of the United Methodist Church. As such, the United Methodist Church must do more than simply provide youth, children, and family ministry programs. United Methodists, and especially ordained clergy, must look beyond programs and determine what are the most pressing challenges facing youth, children and families.

The intent of this paper has been to go beyond the concern of “keeping young people involved in church” to understand the challenges that might keep young people and families out of the Church in the first place. The *Discipline* gives the United

²⁶ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, v.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

Methodist Church great latitude in developing ministries that can help families targeted by criminalization. This latitude allows for great creativity at all levels of UMC structure. While many local churches can address the issue of criminalization in their own communities, greater education and support must take place at the district and conference levels.

The Local Church

At the grassroots level of the United Methodist Church is the local church. Each local church retains a great deal of autonomy in programming for ministries as long as those ministries do not conflict with the laws and polity of the *Book of Discipline*. The connectional nature of the United Methodist Church ensures that all local United Methodist congregations function with much similarity. While every United Methodist Church has some autonomy and a variety of clergy placement, each congregation agrees to subject themselves to the *Discipline*.

This tension between autonomy and interdependency brings both creativity and practicality. Ordained and non-ordained clergy can expect most United Methodist Churches to function with the same committees, polity, policies, and structures while specific ministry areas might look different. For instance, while every United Methodist Church will have Finance, Staff Parish Relations, Trustees, and Laity committees, one United Methodist Church might have a strong youth ministry while another has no youth ministry. For local churches that are too small to afford a full-time appointed elder and have few youth involved, the local grassroots nature gives several of those churches the freedom to come together to develop shared youth, children, and family ministries. This

is the beauty of a connectional ministry. This approach holds the benefits of both creativity and the stability offered by the United Methodist structure.

The District Structure

The next immediate level of structure above the local church is the District. Each District has a district superintendent who supervises a larger number of local churches. The district superintendent ministers to the local pastor and assists in local church administration as needed. The District Superintendent is “the bridge” between the local church and the bishop who resides over the Conference. The district superintendent works in close collaboration with each local church leadership. When it comes to specific ministry efforts, some Districts have individuals who volunteer to head up District work in the ministry areas of youth, men, women, children, and various others. Local church leadership is encouraged to provide either clergy or lay leadership to these ministry efforts.

However, ministry efforts are only as good as the leadership provided. While some Districts might have a strong youth focus, others may not. Smaller churches that struggle with providing finances for a full-time appointed elder are less likely to have the ability to provide paid staff for youth or children’s ministry. With this knowledge, most United Methodist Districts endeavor to provide some type of support system for churches that desire to provide youth, children, and family ministries. Unfortunately, not all Districts can afford to provide such support for youth, children, and family ministries. Fortunately, above the District is the Conference, which typically has at least one staff member to provide guidance for age-level ministries. In this sense, the United Methodist Church can represent a new family ministry in the connectional nature at the various

levels. Local churches can connect to the larger family at either the District or Conference in order to find ways for themselves to become a “family to families.”

The Conference Structure

Various denominations have different ways of resourcing their youth ministries at the various operating levels of their denomination. However, according to Kenda Creasy Dean, “Reacting to the hyper-institutionalism of postwar America (and responding to the World Council of Churches’ admonition that youth be integrated into the total mission of the church), mainline churches in the 1960s and 1970s dismantled denominational support systems for youth ministry and released adolescents from their destiny as “the church of tomorrow.” At the same time, youth began to vanish from the ecclesial radar screen like disappearing ink.”²⁸ Fortunately, the United Methodist Church continues to offer denominational support systems for children and youth. At every Conference level, there are resources for a variety of ministries to benefit children and youth and typically include a paid staff person who has a focus on age-related ministry areas or some combination of ministries that have a focus on youth (e.g., youth and young adults, children and youth or family ministry).

Currently, the UMC can be poised for success in the area of adoptive ministry due to the fact that the UMC offers youth ministry training for youth workers, whether volunteer or vocational, at both the Conference and District levels. This allows smaller churches who struggle to adequately resource a youth or family ministry quality training for volunteers. The Conference and District levels of the UMC also offers various

²⁸ Kenda Creasy Dean, “Proclaiming Salvation: Youth Ministry for the Twenty-First Century Church,” *Theology Today* 56, no. 4 (January 2000): 525.

retreats, conferences, and camps that are designed to make youth feel welcome in the larger family of the United Methodist Church beyond the local level and are open to small, local church participation. Many UMC Districts have “camp meetings” where multiple local United Methodist congregations come together as a “family of families” for a week of worship, preaching, teaching, and family activities. These “camp meetings” are intergenerational where families live together in “family owned tents” (cabins), eat meals together, and attend the various functions and activities of the camp meeting. It is also not uncommon for established families to invite other families, children, and youth to attend a camp meeting. Even if an “outside” family does not attend a camp meeting, their children are still welcome to attend with their friends who have “inside” families.²⁹

This structure and staffing allows for smaller local churches, as well as Districts, to participate in events, such as confirmation retreats, that the local church or District might not be able to provide on its own. These ministry focus efforts are supported by financial apportionments collected by each local church.

However, areas of polity that the United Methodist Church needs to improve is how the UMC views, empowers, and equips professional youth workers. The United Methodist Structure is not set up well when it comes to professional and degreed youth workers in the local church setting. For example, in the UMC tradition, the sacrament of communion represents a means of grace, even in the form of prevenient grace for one who may not even be aware of how God is at work in his or her life. Communion is a sacrament that welcomes all to the table of Christ. True of all nurturing families, all

²⁹ Loudsville Camp Meeting has been going on for 178 years as of 2016 and is one example of many of these type camp meetings. Loudsville United Methodist Campmeeting, <http://www.loudsvillecampmeeting.org> (accessed July 21, 2016).

family members are welcome to the table for nourishment. Also true of nurturing families is the invitation for the “outsider” to come in and join and become one of the family. Unfortunately, most youth workers are not allowed to serve communion due to the restriction of needing to be an ordained elder in order to serve communion and perform weddings. The struggles between being a “called youth worker” and an elder will be discussed briefly below.

However, youth workers who maintain lifelong relationships with their students may desire the ability to administer the sacraments in order to continue a process of discipleship and mentoring as their former youth grow to be adults. In this way, youth workers would engage in adoptive ministry by being the administrators of the sacraments that display grace and spiritual nurture to multiple generations. These acts of grace and continued discipleship represent the connectivity to the larger Body of Christ in a way that surpasses a limited ministry scope of time, location, and even a single generation of family.

Currently, the difficulty actually comes in the fact that if the youth worker becomes an ordained elder, he or she becomes part of the appointment system. In other words, the rare “elder youth worker” will be called upon to administer the church rather than work with youth and families—which ultimately would bring less stability to a family ministry, as he or she may be called upon at any time to move at the request of the United Methodist Conference in which he or she serves. Due to these requirements, many choose the path of ordained deacon due to the specialized nature of the deacon role (children, youth, music, elder-care, and the like) rather than become an ordained elder. While they are not appointed, their ordination allows them to serve where they feel called but deacons are not allowed to administer the sacraments. Similarly, professional youth workers are prohibited

when former students call upon them to perform a wedding or baptize their children. In these ways, the United Methodist Church structure hinders long-term sacramental and discipleship relationships in the United Methodist youth ministry arena.

Such requirements of polity and education can contribute to the palpable frustration of many Methodist youth ministry professionals. Interviews conducted with United Methodist professional youth and family workers attest to these frustrations.³⁰ Dean observes how systemic issues can lead many mentors of youth to “drop out of the system” due to constrictions. She writes:

Meanwhile, youth ministers practice disappearing acts of their own. The average tenure for a full-time youth minister is assumed to be between eighteen months and three years, a statistic that has remained disturbingly constant despite increased professionalization in the field. Over one-third stay in ministry one year or less.

Simply put, in light of Dean’s observations, the average youth worker barely has enough time to develop a sustainable and adoptive youth ministry practice before he or she leaves his or her place of ministry. Dean points out in the quote above in regards to the increased professionalization of youth ministry, few youth workers have the time pursue their denominational requirements for education and/or ordination as well as the time and resources needed to develop a sustainable youth ministry that addresses deeper societal issues that include curbing criminalization against vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Other stumbling blocks within the United Methodist structures to addressing real societal issues among young people are the structures themselves. In the current United

³⁰ Youth workers, interview by author, Sugar Hill, GA, 2007-2014. As a youth ministry professional, I have had various conversations with other UMC youth workers who have left the UMC due to systemic constraints on their ministry. Mark Manuel, founder of S.C.R.E.A.M. Ministries, Duluth, GA, Spring, 2014. Some have decided against any type of ordination within the UMC, because it would move them from the ministry they love by entering the appointment system. Mark Danzey, family pastor, Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church, Alpharetta, GA, Summer 2015.

Methodist structure, it seems the only professional youth minister who can become an elder is one who is appointed at the Conference level. It is this person, in collaboration with the Bishop's Cabinet, who sets the agenda for all churches at the Annual Conference. In other words, if systemic abandonment and criminalization are not on the radar of the Conference, it is unlikely to become a focus for United Methodist congregations. Even if the criminalization of young people is a major issue in a society as a whole, if the larger United Methodist structures are unaware of the issue, little will be done within the United Methodist structure to provide solutions. The only hope of addressing the issue is for multiple local church pastors and youth workers to develop a grassroots movement that draws the attention of Districts and Conferences. Due to their very structure of mentorship and connectional ministry, once Districts and Conferences embrace a theology of the UMC as a family that spiritually adopts and mentors those who are without family, the denomination is poised to make a significant impact on how it ministers to children, youth, and families who are in danger of being criminalized. Bringing attention to the issue, while not enough to make a significant difference alone without a course of action, can certainly begin to bring awareness and discussion for the need to pursue adoptive ministry.

PART THREE

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER 7

COLLABORATION OF CHURCH STRUCTURES

This chapter focuses on developing a ministry philosophy and approaches within the various United Methodist Church structures with the goal of enabling stronger spiritual growth and belonging for the denomination's young people. As much as the local church youth pastor might desire a sense of spiritual belonging for young people, the senior pastor must have the same vision. If not, the youth pastor's vision is in vain. With proper emphasis and support at the Conference level, ministry approaches can be put in place that will have a healthier trajectory for United Methodist youth development at the levels of Conference, District, and Local Church.

United Methodist Conference Commitment to Strategies and Implementation

While the Body of Christ is compelled to care for orphans, widows, and other oppressed peoples in both the Old and New Testament (Exodus 22:21-22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; Leviticus 19:10; James 1:27; Acts 6:1-4), thereby making it a universal command, every denomination may seek a different approach on how obedience to these directives are lived out in mission. For the United Methodist Church, the *Book of*

Discipline and its focus on social action lends guidance on how United Methodist congregations can engage in this missional call at a variety of levels. In ways that are both helpful and challenging, the hierarchical structure of the United Methodist Church can have significant impact on any given social issue. There is recognition that in any organization as large as the worldwide United Methodist Church, change and implementation in missional approaches can be difficult simply due to the complexity of the institution. It is with this recognition that the average pastor at the congregational level may have to be content with addressing any social issue at the local community level with the hopes that “best practices” eventually may be noted and adopted at the various tiers of hierarchy within the United Methodist structure. However, as it will be shown in a few paragraphs in regards to tackling a malaria epidemic, significant change can be accomplished.

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states the purpose of the connectional nature of the denomination:

Each annual conference is responsible to focus and guide the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church within its boundaries by:

1. envisioning the ministries necessary to live out the mission of the church in and through the annual conference;
2. creating and nurturing relationships and connections among the local, district, annual conference and general conference ministries;
3. providing encouragement, coordination, and support for the ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness in districts and congregations for . . . transformation;
4. ensuring the alignment of the total resources of the annual conference to its mission;
5. developing and strengthening ethnic ministries, including ethnic local churches and concerns;
6. providing advocacy and monitoring functions to ensure that the church is consistent with its stated values.¹

In the first point, each Annual Conference in collaboration with the local church determines the ministries in which it engages. As stated earlier in this discussion, children

¹ United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline*, 407.

and youth are among those foci of ministries.² The Annual Conference typically supplies a Conference coordinator to help provide direction and assistance in programming and resources for local churches. This coordinator may be a lay leader or hired staff. Most resources directed from the Conference to local churches are in the form of traditional supports in the way of program strategies, camps, confirmation, and the like. Strategies that tackle larger social issues typically come from the Conference and funnel down to the local churches. The “No More Malaria” campaign mentioned in Chapter 2 of this discussion is an example of such a strategy. With this in mind, similar approaches can be taken by the United Methodist Annual Conference(s) to tackle the problem of the growing issue of criminalization of at-risk children, youth, and families.

A good first step in addressing the issue is to acknowledge that it exists at the highest level of the organization. One way to do this is for the Annual Conference to be made aware of the problem through academic research that highlights the reality of the issue. This typically can be done by drafting a resolution to be presented to and considered by the bishop. Further action could be taken by a bishop presenting the resolution to the Council of Bishops that comprise the General Conference, a level above the Annual Conference.³ A resolution of awareness can be presented at any level without specific measures given to address the issue. In other words, this resolution may be adopted with initial intent to inform. The Bishop’s Cabinet then decides if action needs to be taken.

² See Chapter 2 of this project for further details.

³ For a more complete understanding of the United Methodist structure and function, visit United Methodist Church, “Who We Are,” <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/constitutional-structure> (accessed December 1, 2018).

If the resolution goes beyond informative to a call for action, the Bishop's Cabinet may decide to convene a committee that would draft proposals for addressing the issue. Solutions then would be recommended and voted upon for acceptance. The Annual Conference can then pass on this information to the Districts who would then pass on the information to the local congregations. Each local congregation can decide its own level of involvement. Within this structure to address systemic abandonment and criminalization of at-risk youth would require a resolution to be drafted to make local pastors, churches, and districts aware of the situation and encourage them to partner with organizations to explore how a congregation could make a difference. UMC experts on the issue could visit churches to help raise awareness and the NGUMC could raise money to put towards a more effective solution than simply a children's home. However, all of this would need to be brought before the Bishop's Cabinet. Since I am simply the pastor of the local congregation at Chapel Hill, my first step would be to bring the issue to the cabinet member who represents youth at the NGUMC.

Currently, the North Georgia Conference employs one full-time connectional youth ministry person, whose name is Sam Halverson. As the Conference youth ministry cabinet member, Halverson's role is to insure that the "North Georgia Conference Council on Youth Ministry (CCYM) wants to be (is) a resource and a source of encouragement for reaching out and equipping the youth and youth leaders in your community."⁴ In my first conversation with Halverson in August 2014, it was very apparent that he was aware of the issue of the cultural systemic abandonment of today's

⁴ The North Georgia Conference, "Youth: Stimulating, Helping and Equipping Disciples," <http://www.ngumc/youth> (accessed September 17, 2016).

youth and that young people now are being criminalized.⁵ Halverson spoke with others at the Conference level but returned a couple of months later to inform me that the denomination had too many initiatives presently going on. Therefore, an awareness program to deal with this issue would not happen for the next few years.

While there is not an official mission statement, the purpose of the North Georgia Conference Connectional ministries focusing on youth reads: “No matter what size, no matter how active, no matter how informed or experienced you are in youth ministry, the North Georgia Conference Council on Youth Ministry (CCYM) wants to be a resource and a source of encouragement for reaching out and equipping the youth and youth leaders in your community.”⁶ As such, various training and leadership opportunities are offered for youth and adults. The Conference also offers youth camps, confirmation retreats, and other youth ministry related projects. With this variety of resources, it would not be difficult to bring awareness of the criminalization process to the various levels of the United Methodist Church. Youth workers at the local level can be trained to be made aware of how to look for potential criminalization while the Conference youth director can make the Bishops Cabinet aware of the issue as well. For instance, at traditional confirmation camps for young adolescents, youth workers could attend a training during the confirmation camp weekend. There would be enough to do four or five sessions to include presentation of certain statistics, how to identify systemic abandonment and criminalization of youth, and

⁵ Sam Halverson, interview by author, Rome, GA, August 2014. Halverson acknowledged that it was refreshing to speak to someone involved in youth ministry who did not need an explanation of systemic abandonment of youth. The foster care and orphan crisis of Rome/Floyd County was also discussed with acknowledgment that these children more easily fall prey to the process of criminalization.

⁶ The North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, “Youth: Stimulating, Helping and Equipping Disciples.”

brainstorming potential ways to respond within the community of the local church and any new denominational programs. Further collaboration also include churches sharing with one another the results of their engagement, both success stories and struggling attempts that did not bear fruit.

Additionally, youth can be trained in advocacy for their peers as they are encouraged to participate in all levels of United Methodist connectional ministry settings—that is, from the local church all the way up to the General Conference level. Each local church is encouraged to have a youth representative as part of the local church council, and each District sends a number of youth delegates to Annual Conference. There are also a variety of service and mission opportunities for youth and local church youth ministries to participate in at the Conference level.⁷ These opportunities for connection show that there is a great deal of interest in involving youth in relationships with one another and with Christ. Now, the next step would be to make a concerted effort to include at-risk and families within the broader Methodist family. This would require awareness of the issue at the various levels of the hierarchy, concerted ministry efforts directed toward training and equipping youth workers and churches to spot and intervene against criminalization, and social and political involvement both in the Church and in the political realm.

Like youth pastors in a church who must follow the vision and leadership of the lead pastor, the connectional ministers (such as Halverson) must follow the lead of the United Methodist Conference in which they serve. As an example previously mentioned in this paper, the “No More Malaria” emphasis was one that trickled down from the highest United

⁷ The North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, “Mission Experiences,” accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.ngumc.org/missionexperiences>.

Methodist Church Office all the way to the local church. The highest legislative body in the United Methodist Church, that is the General Conference,⁸ must come to see the need and value of tackling the issue of criminalizing at-risk children, youth, and families.

The District Commitment to Strategies and Implementation

On the District level, pastors, youth workers, and lay leaders can be informed of the reality of systemic abandonment and criminalization of youth through engagement in what is known as the “sub-district group.” Many districts offer district collaborative and training opportunities through these church clusters. Conference clergy and directors, such as Halverson, frequently make themselves available for such meetings. Once local churches are trained to know what to look for, greater collaboration and brainstorming can be engaged to address the issue. Approaches and best practices that gain the most promising results can be shared throughout the various levels of the United Methodist Church. The Rome-Carrollton District has no UMC coordinator for youth. Consequently, there no District events for youth and no adult advocating for adolescent issues.

An awareness of the current criminalization of children and youth can be brought to the attention of the Conference bishop and District superintendents, but this is much harder when there is no District coordinator. From this awareness, a Conference Task Force can be assigned to develop strategies for community and political engagement that would help address the issue. In turn, church leaders can then offer awareness and training seminars for local pastors, youth workers, and congregations. Furthermore,

⁸ United Methodist Church, “General Conference 2016, ” <http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2016> (accessed November 29, 2018).

resolutions for awareness and strategies for engagement can be offered at the Conference level, which would further bring awareness to all local United Methodist congregations. The Task Force, Conference, and District can offer suggestions and tools to help local churches engage with at-risk families. However, none of this is happening, and my efforts to bring such engagement within the denomination were denied.

The Local Church Commitment to Strategies and Implementation

It is at the local church level, especially in partnership with other local churches and child welfare agencies, where perhaps the most effective steps can be taken to address the issue of criminalized at-risk youth. Within my local ministry context in the Rome-Carrollton District, this has entailed thinking outside the box and limitation of denominational structures. It has involved inviting partnership with like-minded churches from other denominations as well the local Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). This partnership gave birth to what is now known as Restoration Rome.

Fall 2014 (August – December)

Since there was an inability to move forward with a resolution at the Conference level, I decided to focus my efforts at the congregational level. Since Chapel Hill UMC was generally comprised of senior citizens with limited energy, the church alone could not make a significant impact. However, prayer and a willingness to move forward can be mighty. With this in mind, my first step was to cast vision and make the congregation aware of the corresponding issues of systemic abandonment, criminalization, foster care, and the foster care crisis facing Rome/Floyd County through Sunday morning messages. These messages asked this question: “How can we at Chapel Hill make a difference?” This

question was asked and engaged beyond Sunday mornings and through leadership meetings, where we also conversed with Lindsey Howerton, the local DFCS worker, and Mary Margaret Mauer, a community activist and volunteer with DFCS.

The following suggestions were given: host a respite evening for foster parents, host training events for foster parents, have congregants sign up to become foster parents. Due to most of the congregation being of “grandparent age,” none were willing to become foster parents. However, they were willing to share the load for respite care by joining other churches who engaged in this endeavor. They were also willing to host training events. In addition, Chapel Hill supported my involvement as their representative to attend the Foster and Adoptive Parent Association meetings. These steps allowed Chapel Hill to become more involved and more aware of the needs of foster children and foster parents in the community. The church’s involvement also facilitated a network of relationships with other likeminded churches and community organizations.

Winter 2015 (December 2014 – February 2015)

Another step in making an impact on the foster care crisis came after being involved with the Foster Parent Association. It was evident that additional leadership was needed, since the current interim president also presided at a neighboring Foster Parent Association group in Bartow County. She had been asked to help start the Foster Parent Association for Floyd County and was clearly overwhelmed. After three months of involvement, I was asked to consider becoming the president of the Floyd County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (FCFAPA). Concurrently, Chapel Hill UMC was becoming more involved in a variety of events with the FCFAPA and DFCS. As I said yes to the new post, the church

decided to host the monthly FCFAPA meeting. Chapel Hill hosted two respite care evenings for foster parents. A respite care evening basically is a “night out” for foster parents, where churches provide child care for the foster and biological children of the foster parents, thus allowing the foster parents a much needed break. While the parents are gone, the church provides a meal, snacks, movies, and other activities for all the children. The evening typically lasts from 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Some participants from other churches also volunteered to supervise and care for the children.

The congregation of Chapel Hill UMC also supported my involvement through prayer for me and the foster care crisis. They provided continual encouragement through notes and words as well as meals and a place to meet monthly for the FCFAPA. These ways of supporting the mission were especially helpful as I considered becoming the FCFAPA president. Once I started serving, other networking relationships came to fruition that would become vital to the starting of Restoration Rome.

Spring 2015 (April – June)

As involvement in the mission grew, so did the network of relationships with other churches, DFCS, and other community leaders—especially M. Mauer and her husband, Jeff Mauer. From seeing the need of the foster care crisis by being involved with so many others, Chapel Hill UMC expressed a desire to utilize their abundant space in the underutilized “Mission Center” (gym) to become a resource center for foster families. In conversations with Howerton and M. Mauer and J. Mauer, Chapel Hill UMC began to dream of the possibility of becoming a “clearing house” for foster family needs to include baby and children’s clothing, continuing to facilitate Foster Parent Association

meetings, and even providing spiritual guidance for foster families. Part of the vision also was the development of a worship service that would minister specifically to foster families. As a pastor who has become a father by receiving and adopting two boys from the foster care system, I found it easy to have empathy for spiritually, economically, and emotionally struggling families. Seeing my process, the church engaged in this as well.

As conversations and dreaming continued, Chapel Hill developed relationships with Three Rivers Church and Greater Refuge.⁹ Three Rivers is a more affluent church that already had a significant number of adoptive and foster families. Greater Refuge ministers to individuals who often are in need of DFCS services. Both churches easily shared the vision and decided to collaborate with Chapel Hill. Global Impact, a ministry partner birthed out of Three Rivers, also decided to join in partnership.¹⁰ Global Impact hosted the “Empowered To Connect” conference, aimed at helping foster parents better understand how to discipline traumatized children. Chapel Hill and other churches were sponsors of the event. Eventually, due to the cohesiveness of mission based around foster care, Three Rivers began a second church campus on the campus of Chapel Hill UMC. This partnership allowed both Chapel Hill UMC and Three Rivers to thrive in ways that were beneficial to both congregations. Three Rivers rented the Mission Center (gym), and Chapel Hill provided Three Rivers much needed space. Three Rivers contributed much energy, while Chapel Hill provided much needed resources. Both Three Rivers and Chapel Hill continued to engage in the common bond of the foster care mission.

⁹ Three Rivers Church. <http://threeriversc.org/> (accessed April 18, 2016); Greater Refuge Ministries, “Ministries,” <http://www.greaterrefuge.org/Ministries.html> (accessed December 1, 2018).

¹⁰ Global Impact International. “Restoration Rome: Restoring Our Community One Family at a Time.” <http://www.restorationrome.org> (accessed April 18, 2016).

Summer through Fall 2015 (July – October)

Chapel Hill, Three Rivers, Greater Refuge, together with Global Impact and DFCS continued to partner. Community relationships began to solidify around the mission of helping at-risk families. As a part of budding relationships and networking, Chapel Hill wanted to host the Asante African Children's Choir.

The Asante Choir is a children's gospel performing arts group. Its members consist of children from East Africa who have grown up in the devastating aftermath of genocide, civil war, poverty and the AIDS epidemic. Since its conception in 2004, nearly 200 members have gone through the program and have traveled around the globe spreading the good news of Jesus while promoting the culture and ongoing needs of East Africa.¹¹

The event offered was another way to rally around orphans and bring community awareness to Rome/Floyd County's own situation. However, just like the foster care crisis, the task would require partnerships since Chapel Hill could not achieve the goal alone.

The scope of hosting nearly thirty children and adults was too much for Chapel Hill to handle alone. Through partnerships involved in the event, not only was Chapel Hill able to host Asante, due to their foster care mission partnerships, a new partnership with Metropolitan United Methodist Church developed as a result.¹² Relationships with previous partnerships also were strengthened, through a mutually shared heart to care for orphans. Partnering church members and Greater Refuge raised enough funding to send the whole choir to Disney World.

This partnership experience also began to foster deeper relationships. The pastors began inviting one another to preach at their churches. The Asante project allowed all the

¹¹ Asante Children's Choir, accessed October 10, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/pg/asantechoir/about/?ref=page_internal.

¹² Metropolitan United Methodist Church, <http://metropolitanromeumc.org/> (accessed December 1, 2018).

partnering agencies to see the significant impact of working together. As for community relationships, Chapel Hill began an internship program that would not have been possible if J. Mauer and M. Mauer had not been willing to provide housing for the interns. This internship later paved the way for young adults to work at Restoration Rome, since these hosts were so crucial to both internships and the launch of Restoration Rome.

As FCFAPA president, I collaborated with DFCS to create the training for foster parent Continuing Education Units (CEUs), with all monthly meetings to be held at Chapel Hill UMC. The meetings and trainings are open to the community of all foster and adoptive parents, and several other churches and child welfare agencies collaborate on the agenda and training. This also fills a vital role for helping foster parents receive the CEUs they need to maintain their certification for foster parenting.

As a result of partnership with DFCS and the FCFAPA, Chapel Hill was able to host a “town hall meeting” between the Rome Georgia foster parent community and Bobby Cagle, director of Georgia’s Division of Family and Children Services. This was the first time a state official held such a town hall meeting to hear complaints and concerns from the community. These meetings were so effective that Cagle was able to improve much of the dysfunction within the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services in Georgia . Cagle was so successful that he is (unfortunately) moving to handle a similar yet, much larger system in Los Angeles County, California.¹³

¹³ Craig Schneider, “Another Child Welfare Leader Likely Leaving,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 20, 2017, <http://www.myajc.com/news/breaking-news/another-child-welfare-leader-likely-leaving/mugqpMvWmoUYFsEWB6wYsJ/> (accessed November 29, 2018).

Winter 2016 (November 2015 – March 2016)

The next step in helping at-risk families was to develop a way to be more proactive in the lives of potential and current foster families. Seeing how great the need was for improving services related to intervention with at-risk families, in order to reduce the number of families potentially coming into (foster) care as well as services needed for current foster families, the coalition formed among Three Rivers, Chapel Hill, Greater Refuge, Global Impact, DFCS, FCFAPA, and community leaders began to dream about developing a “clearing house” for all things foster care. The dream was to have a place where at-risk families could find resources ranging from clothing to health care and counseling. The clearing house also would be available for families that were already fostering. The hope of this approach would be to lessen the number of families coming into care while providing assistance for current foster families.

What Chapel Hill lacked in younger families, human capital, and finances, the church made up for in facilities that were underutilized. Chapel Hill considered using their Missions Building as the location for the clearing house, but it soon became apparent that the building and location were not suitable. After an exploratory trip to Restoration Atlanta, we realized our location would be too far away from where the people who needed the services most would be able to access them. One of the keys to intervention would be to provide easiest access to those families who had limited resources, like transportation. With this in mind, M. Mauer headed up a team consisting of members of the partnering groups to search for a suitable location to house the “clearing house.”

While the search for a suitable property ensued, the FCFAPA was in the process of completing its bylaws in order to become a recognized non-profit organization that could

work with foster and adoptive families in Rome/Floyd County. Now that Restoration Rome was beginning to become a full-fledged and separate organization, my hands-on involvement began to diminish and others in the community coalition stepped forward to lead the process of searching for a suitable location and facility. M. Mauer and Global Impact Ministries approached the City of Rome and began conversations about Southeast Elementary School becoming the location for Restoration Rome. Through many conversations in 2016, “the City of Rome awarded Global Impact the option for a Lease to Own purchase of the former Southeast Elementary School building to be repurposed as a local center for foster care services. While the buildout of the center is in progress, the building is currently being used to provide community and foster care services, and houses on-site offices for multiple public and private children’s service agencies.”¹⁴

Once a location was secured, a plan was developed to make the community-at-large more aware of the foster care crisis. With a place to now call home, an awareness campaign called, “No More Hotels” was held at Restoration Rome. This campaign was created due to the number of children being placed in care who had nowhere else to go. Due to the lack of foster homes, DFCS had to pay workers to stay with older children in hotel rooms until another solution could be found.

Also, at this step in the process, the newly forming organization named itself “Restoration Rome” and declared its mission as “bringing public, private, and faith-based partners together to strengthen and restore our children and families in Christ’s name”¹⁵ A copy of the completed FCFAPA bylaws was sent to M. Mauer and Global Impact

¹⁴ Restoration Rome, “Who We Are,” <http://restorationrome.org/who-we-are/> (accessed July 5, 2018).

¹⁵ Restoration Rome, accessed November 5, 2018, <http://restorationrome.org/>.

Ministries as a potential template for Restoration Rome. Churches who had already been part of the process were asked to support the “No More Hotels” campaign, which became part of the opening of Restoration Rome. Churches contributed remodeling labor for Southeast Elementary, donated finances, served as hosts during the event or simply encouraged fellow congregants and community contacts to attend. This event was used as a way to bring public awareness to the foster care crisis and the purpose of Restoration Rome. Chapel Hill participated by becoming a \$500 sponsor of the event. Many congregants participated. As the lead pastor of Chapel Hill UMC and an adoptive parent, I participated with my sons and gave the invocation at “No More Hotels.” Congregants who could not attend the event pledged to pray for Restoration Rome and the event itself. The FCFAPA was also made aware of the event and encouraged its members to participate in any way feasible.

Analysis of Restoration Rome

Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal highlight how churches and other organizations can frame their vision to gather support. In *Reframing Organizations* they write: “Though leadership is essential, it need not come from only one person. A single leader focuses responsibility and clarifies accountability. But the same individual may not be equally effective in all situations. Groups sometimes do better with a shared and fluid approach, regularly asking, ‘Who can best take charge in *this* situation?’”¹⁶ As the lead pastor, I felt it within my purview to “take charge” in seeking a way to bring a variety of like-minded organizations together. There are pros and cons to individual or group

¹⁶ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 186.

leadership. However, the practical reality is this: whatever missional approach a church takes to tackle the issue of criminalization of at-risk youth, all who are involved must share the vision for that approach. This is pointed out in *Reframing Organizations*: “Leadership helps groups develop a shared sense of direction and commitment. Otherwise, a group becomes rudderless or moves in directions that no one supports.”¹⁷

When it comes to meeting the deeper needs of children, youth, and families that are being systemically criminalized, the mission of the entire church must be shared with other churches and organizations and clarified. If these families come to feel like projects for evangelism, it can become another type of systemic abandonment where at-risk youth feel like another project rather than being youth and children who are worthy to be loved because they bear the image of God.

At-risk families must be nurtured and cared for. This means sharing the love of Jesus without expectations and without a sense of other church or organizations being competitive, whether or not these families ever step foot into “my” church. Ministry and mission are about sharing the good news, not gauging success by how many attend church programs. With these considerations in mind, churches must evaluate how they define success in a changing culture, where community is highly valued. Craig Van Gelder writes:

The church in North America for the most part has developed expectations of success and cultural status, either directly through participation in our culture, or through standing in the shadow of those who led the way. We are in need of adjusting this self-concept of the church to one which is able to accept a minority status and face cultural indifference. We will need to shake off the remaining vestiges of a Christendom perspective which expects the world to take the church seriously, and to refocus our attention to how we should now seek out the world.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Craig Van Gelder, “Defining the Center—Finding the Boundaries: The Challenge of Re-Visioning the Church in North America for the Twenty-First Century,” *Missiology* 22, no. 3 (July 1994): 331.

Seeking out those at-risk children, youth, and families who are most at risk for criminalization is just one way to “seek out the world.” Van Gelder’s assessment of the North American Church may bring to the issue whether or not the Church is relevant in a society that already has shaken off the vestiges of Christendom. Christ called the body of believers to serve at the risk of losing one’s very life, not to gain popularity or make a church prosperous (Matthew 10:39). Instead, followers of Christ are called to seek the lost (Luke 19:10) in order to spread the new about His salvation, hope, and redemption. Ultimately, it is a collaborative labor of love with and in Christ (John 17:11).

Sharing the love of Christ with those who are marginalized and at risk can occur with partnerships at the congregational level. One need only look on the fringes of a community to find groups and individuals who are “at risk” in some form or fashion. Regardless what level of missional engagement is undertaken—whether at the level of Local Church, District, or Conference—help and hope can start with individual families and grow from there. In fact, Bolman and Deal cite that grassroots movements are often the impetus to change, initiated by those who are not a part of a closed-to-change institution.¹⁹ It is with this understanding that larger units with an established structure may be slow to change and even unwilling to transform, no matter how real and urgent the need is. This indicates that groundwork for a paradigm shift work within the NGUMC may have to be engaged first and foremost at the congregation level. In light of this realization, Chapter 8 evaluates the local church partnership with Restoration Rome and suggests potential actions that congregations can take to engage in strengthening intergenerational efforts to mentor and love youth.

¹⁹ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 233.

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION AND STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRIES AND MENTORING

This chapter evaluates the collaborative efforts of Chapel Hill and its partners to help stem the tide of systematic abandonment of youth who are at risk of being criminalized in the Rome/Floyd County area. It also offers holistic, ecclesiastical approaches to mentoring models that encourage spiritual formation for families at the local church level as well as the family of Christ as experienced in the United Methodist Church. The evaluation and assessment measures the effectiveness of communications throughout the various levels of the United Methodist church structures as well as measuring the effectiveness of programming offered at District and Conference levels, which encourage mentoring as adoption models.

Evaluation and Assessment Tools

As mentioned in Chapter 7, this project was not able to move forward within the UMC denomination as originally intended. For this reason, efforts were made to make this project a reality by reaching across denominational lines and mobilizing fellow members of the Body of Christ in churches throughout the Rome area in order to address

the foster care crisis and the systemic criminalization that comes as a result. This Christian network solidified to establish a relationship with DFCS to create Restoration Rome. The evaluation of this project seeks to determine if the partnership among churches in collaboration, with willing government workers, was successful in contributing to the decriminalization of at-risk children, youth, and families—particularly those in the foster system.

There were three forms of qualitative evaluation used in this project: observation, first-hand interviews, and a survey. Qualitative research is particularly best suited for project evaluation where there are limited numbers of participants in a specific research project. Qualitative research generally relies more on text data, observation, interviews, and surveys and is recognized as a legitimate form of academic evaluation.¹ Therefore, for the purposes of evaluating the effectiveness of Restoration Rome, observation, interviews and surveys were used. Since Restoration Rome is a new movement and organization, it will continue to readjust programs, approaches, and modes of operation in order to accomplish the originally determined goals but might need unforeseen additional steps in order to accomplish pre-determined and more complex goals. For this reason, the combined assessment tools of observation, interviews, and surveys are particularly useful.

M. Koro-Ljungberg and S. Hayes validate this perspective:

Crafting meaningful research questions is a skill that extends beyond the mechanics of question construction toward a more holistic understanding of qualitative research questions. Therefore, rather than viewing the process of creating and constructing research questions as a mechanical task, we argue that it is a craft to be learned in specific contexts and requires ongoing study and

¹ S. M. Carter and M. Little, “Justifying Knowledge, Justifying Method, Taking Action: Epistemologies, Methodologies, and Methods in Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Health Research* 17, no. 10 (December 2007): 1316–28.

continuous reflection. It builds on researchers' understandings of the histories and traditions of qualitative research, as well as their knowledge about existing approaches. Furthermore, it implies that scholars can adjust their approaches based on the circumstances and contexts of their research design.²

Steinar Kvale agrees that qualitative research is especially helpful when doing research where numbers of participants may be limited due to a smaller pool of participants and yet the research and interviews are necessary.³

Evaluation Through Observation

Initially, it was thought that the best way to address an issue was to bring awareness of the issue to a larger community. While awareness is a factor in addressing an issue, I discovered that awareness of a problem was simply not enough. Ownership of the issue must come first. In other words, Chapel Hill had to take on an “adoptive” mentality and move from “those kids,” “those families,” “the issue,” and “the community” to “our kids, our families, our issue, and our community.” No one person (me), church (Chapel Hill) or organization (DFCS) was able to address the crisis on its own by simply having information. All parties needed to come together and own the problem in a collaborative way in order to bring about change. When Chapel Hill and I came together with DFCS, local churches, ministries, and community leaders to own the crisis, we were able to make tremendous strides.

For Chapel Hill UMC, rather than having a “grandiose” approach to tackling the foster care issue on a larger scale by incorporating the North Georgia Conference of the

² M. Koro-Ljungberg and S. Hayes, “Proposing an Argument for Research Questions that Could Create Permeable Boundaries within Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research* 4, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 115.

³ Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 127.

United Methodist, we needed to start in a simpler way. Chapel Hill engaged in the ministry of what Jake Stratman would call “hospitality,”⁴ by offering respite care for foster parents and hosting FCFAPA meetings. This approach of hospitality fostered a sense of empathy with foster families. As these type of partnerships grew, the community of support for foster and biological families also grew. Eventually, this led to the development of Restoration Rome. The primary lessons learned through observation were that it is acceptable to think smaller when it comes to larger problems. Local ownership became a grassroots movement that might have been missed at a Conference (or regional) level.

With the development of Restoration Rome through ownership of the foster care crisis by multiple entities, not only was awareness developed but programs began to be developed to train biological, foster parents, and educators on how to deal with traumatized children. To address the problem of criminalization, Restoration Rome began to incorporate Trust-Based Relationship Intervention (TBRI) for foster parents and educators as well as mentoring for struggling biological families. TBRI is a therapeutic model that trains caregivers to provide effective support and treatment for at-risk children.⁵ The effectiveness of these approaches was next evaluated through the interview process.

Evaluation Through Interviews

Interviews were conducted by email and sent during Winter 2018 and received in March 2018. The first person interviewed was M. Mauer, who, along with her husband J. Mauer, heads Restoration Rome. When asked if there have been any especially effective and

⁴ Jake Stratman, “Toward a Pedagogy of Hospitality: Empathy, Literature, and Community Engagement,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 27.

⁵ Karyn B. Purvis et al., “Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI): A Systemic Approach to Complex Developmental Trauma,” *Child & Youth Services* 34, no. 4 (December 2013): 360-386.

helpful strategies to bringing more awareness to the foster care crisis and criminalization of at-risk youth, M. Mauer responded, “By partnering [churches and other organizations], education and information flow to our churches and community have dramatically improved. Many folks did not know that we have a crisis and others had no idea how to help. Working together has changed this.” This response reveals that the key to tackling the foster care crisis is not only bringing about awareness, but bringing awareness through collaboration. Awareness and collaboration can spawn a movement that addresses an issue.

She then responded to this question: “Have you found the partnerships between Churches, Non-profits and DFCS to be helpful in addressing and supporting the needs of foster care/at-risk children and families in crisis in Rome/Floyd County?” M. Mauer reported the following:

[Restoration Rome] is not just helpful, but absolutely necessary to addressing the crisis! Churches are full of folks who want (and are mandated by God) to help by giving time or assistance with tangible needs. Locally, churches have provided locations, manpower, and meals for foster/adoptive/kinship care night outs and for foster parent association meetings and other training events. Further, working with DFCS folks has also helped people in the community better understand that the crisis is the community’s, NOT the State’s, and see DFCS as fellow strugglers rather than the cause of the problem. As a result, there is better support for our overworked DFCS caseworkers through appreciation events and advocacy on their behalf with those who are not aware of the 3 times the recommended caseloads they are carrying!

M. Mauer’s response shows that Restoration Rome has become a central focal point for connecting churches and DFCS, thereby allowing the Body of Christ to help lighten the load of overworked caseworkers.

The second person interviewed was Mitch Jolly, who is a pastor and represents the umbrella organization for churches that collaborated in the effort. When answering the question about awareness of the issue, Jolly responded: “They [the partnerships] have

been effective regarding awareness. More people know about the challenge [of the foster care crisis] than ever before.” This statement shows the effectiveness addressing the foster care crisis by different organizations collaborating under the umbrella of Restoration Rome. This response echoed the effectiveness of collaborating with churches in meeting foster family needs. Jolly stated, “Direct communication with DFCS allows ministries and churches to respond quickly and in a more targeted way to the needs of our families and children. Ex. Twin beds needed in order for reunification to happen; crib for a foster mom to be able to take in infant; Cheerful Givers.” Jolly’s response reveals that collaboration with local churches has helped with awareness as well as resources.

The third person interviewed was Howerton, DFCS supervisor for Floyd County. Of particular interest was determining what preventative measures were successful in helping address criminalization of foster families. I asked, “Have you seen an impact on foster care in Floyd/Rome because of Restoration Rome? In other words, how is Restoration Rome keeping kids out of the system?” Howerton reported significant improvements in Foster Care and preventative measures due to the Supporting Adoption and Foster Families Together (SAFFT)⁶ organization providing parent coaching and supervised visitation services to at-risk families in Floyd County. SAFFT’s mission states: “We understand that children in foster care are not looking for a new family, but their own family to be healthier and more stable. We offer numerous services and programs that support and heal these broken families while in this transition.”⁷ In other words, mentoring at-risk families to prevent children from entering the system is a

⁶ SAFFT, “About Us,” <https://safft.org/About-Us/> (accessed September 29, 2018).

⁷ Ibid.

significant role engaged by both Restoration Rome and SAFFT. Many of these volunteers come from local churches. Not only is awareness of the foster care crisis being raised, but awareness on how to help these families and children also is increasing.

Howerton also pointed out that another significant contribution of Restoration Rome is its hosting of TBRI seminars in an effort to educate all who are involved in childcare about the devastating effects of trauma. She states how these seminars also help to meet the needs of traumatized children. Taking these steps to offer these programs has had a significant impact on the foster care crisis in Rome.

The final interviewee was John Ford, who currently presides over the Floyd County Foster and Adoptive Family Association. When answering the question of whether Restoration Rome has brought about more awareness to the issue of the foster care crisis in the community, Ford stated, "At this point it is very early in the process. I am starting to see the community coming together around this issue though. The biggest difference that I see at this point is awareness of the problem throughout the community. People are talking and thinking about our foster children." Perhaps being on the frontline of foster care work makes Ford cautiously optimistic, but there is no doubt that awareness is being raised. As to the question of church involvement, Ford would like to see congregations do more than just provide support. He asserts, "The local churches need to be more effective at recruiting foster families. All of the support services can be in place but if we don't have families willing to take the kids it is all for nothing." Although awareness and church involvement have increased, there is more that the Body of Christ can do for foster families.

Evaluation Through Survey

With approval from Howerton and cooperation from Ford, a survey was given to local foster parents who have been participating in the services offered by Restoration Rome.⁸ A series of open-ended questions asked participants about their involvement with foster care (Questions #1 through #5). These questions were asked in order to establish the involvement and experiences of each foster parent as well as how they were recruited. The next series of open-ended questions (Questions #6 through #9) were designed to determine what foster parents felt are the most challenging aspects of being a foster family. In the third part of the survey, foster parents were asked to indicate which services provided by Restoration Rome they had taken part in and which of those services they found most helpful. Finally, respondents also were asked about services that might be helpful in the future but were not currently being offered at Restoration Rome. A total of thirteen foster parents responded to the survey, in part or in full.

Respondents indicated that the top three most helpful resources provided by Restoration Rome to them were (in order of significance) the “Resource Closet,” “Hosting Foster Parent Association Meetings,” and “Ongoing Education” (including TBRI training). The least helpful resources were “Family Events,” “Foster Parent Night Out,” and “Counseling.” Services that equally scored middle ratings were “Visitation Support,” “Space for Meetings,” and “IMPACT Training.”⁹

⁸ See Appendix 2 for survey questions.

⁹ IMPACT stands for Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing development and Teamwork. State of Georgia: Division of Family and Children Services, “IMPACT Continuum of Services,” <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/impact-continuum-services> (accessed November 29, 2018).

An analysis of the responses reiterated that the most important and impactful resources taken advantage of by foster families are those that meet their immediate needs. Practical resources, such as clothing and baby items, help foster parents retain their own financial resources. The Foster Parent Association and Ongoing Education gives foster families emotional support and encouragement. It was surprising to see that the Foster Parent Night out was one of the lower ranked support services.

In some ways, the early premise of this paper highlighting the need for awareness has many implications. Training on how to deal with children who come from traumatic backgrounds is found to be a significant source of help for foster parents. When foster parents have an understanding of how trauma affects a child and, when foster parents are given tools such as TBRI, they feel better equipped to maintain their foster homes. TBRI has become so successful in this endeavor that Restoration Rome just received a \$15,000 scholarship to bring TBRI practitioner training to local schools, DFCS, YMCA and residential care, family and child counseling, and youth ministry.¹⁰ This, once again, helps stem multiple disrupted placements and indicates that this is one way to lessen criminalization of children who have stable home placements.

Finally, respondents were also asked about services that might be helpful in the future but were not currently being offered at Restoration Rome. Those services mentioned were “CPR/First Aid Classes,” “Fingerprinting” (as a part of their certification process), “Access to an On-site DFCS worker,” “Lice Treatment,” “Medical Exams” (for foster children), “Dental Exams,” “Physicals,” “Spiritual Support,” “Adoptive Parent

¹⁰ Restoration Rome, “News & Notes: \$15,000 in Scholarships Awarded to TBRI® Georgia Collaborative,” June 17, 2018, <http://restorationrome.org/news-notes/newsroom.html/article/2018/06/17/-15-000-in-scholarships-awarded-to-tbri-georgia-collaborative> (accessed November 29, 2018).

Support,” “Establishing a Care Community,” “Mentors” (for children), “Partnerships and “Food Pantry.” It should be noted that Partnerships was not clearly defined and could attribute to having received a lower rating.

Of the potential future services offered, four responses received the most enthusiasm by a show of hands. Surprisingly, Lice Treatment was the most highly sought future resource. The three evenly ranked responses after Lice Treatment were CPR/First Aid Training, Medical Exams, and Dental Exams. Also, surprisingly, Spiritual Support was the lowest valued service. Overall, these responses seem to indicate that foster parents need the most support in the basic everyday needs of their foster children and continued training. Meeting these needs through fundamental resources ironically are some of the very basic needs biological families also have. Another consideration was the need to keep foster children in contact with their friends.

Final Analysis on Restoration Rome

The methods of evaluating the effectiveness of addressing awareness and developing a process of curtailing criminalization of at risk youth (and families) were affirmed—at least in the short term—through observation, interviews, and surveys. Although many approaches were engaged, one of the most impactful approaches has been Restoration Rome providing mentoring families to at-risk families. While the perception that there is little need for spiritual support, a mentoring relationship is truly adoptive ministry in that it must forego one’s own personal (spiritual) agenda in order to meet the needs of the mentored family. The hope is that these mentoring relationships might lead

the mentored family to a spiritual path in order to be embraced by a new family, that is the Family of God.

There were some expected and unexpected responses as to the needs of both biological and foster families. The development of Restoration Rome has been a nearly five-year process of ownership, raising awareness, and addressing the needs of biological and foster families associated with the foster care crisis in Floyd County. To determine the true effectiveness of Restoration Rome in reducing the number of foster homes needed in Floyd County and to measure the effectiveness of training for biological and foster families in order to curtail criminalization will require a long-term study. Another entity that needs ownership of the crisis, as well as training to know how to assist at-risk families, is public school personnel. These individuals spend an extraordinary amount of time with children and youth and are on the frontline of working with at-risk youth and also could benefit from partnering with Restoration Rome.

On a final note, completing this project has been a humbling experience. What started out as wanting to “change the world” turned into the realization of what Jesus declared as part of the great commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27b). This means that believers cannot change the world until they start in their own neighborhood. Family camps based around TBRI may be in the future for Restoration Rome, but more immediate and practical helps, such as TBRI training for caregivers and meeting everyday needs, are the priority. In these ways, Chapel Hill and Restoration Rome are fulfilling the Great Commandment in the most beneficial and practical ways to curb criminalization of at-risk families and positively impact the foster care crisis.

A Focus on Spiritual Adoption

Discussing the UMC might seem anti-climactic, given the ongoing excitement and success of Restoration Rome. However, much has been learned that can be applied at the Local Church level. The hope of the larger United Methodist structures embracing the need to missionally engage in the fight against criminalization of at-risk families and youth might be a lofty one, but successful missional engagement and programs at the Local Church level can provide a roadmap for other United Methodist congregations and structures to engage in the mission. Every time a local church successfully engages in intentional mission to at-risk youth and families, it is possible the District and even Conference levels will feel the impact due to their connectional nature to local congregations. With this in mind, strategies that attempt to educate and engage the whole family can move a church toward successfully engaging at-risk families with positive outcomes.

Confirmation Retreats with a Focus on Mentoring as Spiritual Adoption

A significant part of youth ministry is the ministry of camping. “Camp ministry is a unique setting for interventions with children, especially vulnerable children.”¹¹ It is in the camp setting where youth leaders can get to know students on a much more personal and meaningful level. Getting to know a student, his or her family, and spiritual background can help a youth or church worker assess the specific needs or challenges of a young person and start developing relationship without the usual whirlwind of distractions. Camp experiences give uninterrupted days of relationship building between caring adults and

¹¹ Jon E. Singletary and Lacey Murphy, “Seeking Transformation in the Lives of Vulnerable Children through Christian Camp Ministry: Case Study of Africa Renewal Ministries/Ggaba Community Church Camp in Uganda, Africa,” *Family and Community Ministries* 28 (2015): 1. 1- 18.

youth. “Among vulnerable populations, camp can also be shown to have positive outcomes. Among youth who have demonstrated delinquent behavior, camps with intense activities that youth might not experience in their daily routines, such as a ropes course or a rigorous daily schedule, have shown a reduction in delinquent behaviors.”¹² The camp experience allows an at-risk young person to experience new challenges while also having consistency and structure often missing in their home environment. In some cases, “additional positive camp outcomes in showing how a summer camp for youth in foster care contributes to a desire to attend college by emphasizing peer support, role modeling, and mentoring.”¹³

A fascinating study was undertaken by Jana Strukova,¹⁴ which proposed confirmation as vocation in building relationships with young people who had experienced and exhibited a pronounced rate of delinquent behaviors (e.g., drug abuse, familial discord). In this approach, Strukova writes:

The vocational model addresses this need by calling youth to a life of discernment during which they continuously think about and test their spiritual gifts and the ways to implement them throughout the various stages of life. It calls youth to embrace their biological communities, communities of faith or other mentoring communities as the sources of vision, guidance and direction for the life of vocation.¹⁵

Since both confirmation and camping can have a significant impact on the life of an at-risk youth, both can sow the seeds of developing a lifelong faith journey of young people.

Combining the concepts of camping, vocational confirmation, and reaching out to at-risk youth and families, youth leaders can be intentional in spiritually adopting at-risk

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jana Strukova, “The Vocational Model of Confirmation,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 69-84.

¹⁵ Ibid., 83.

youth and taking them through a confirmation process as described by Strukova. Church youth leaders who adopt at-risk youth from their church and community can join in the spiritual journey of youth. An additional approach a church can take is to attempt an intergenerational family camp that focuses on confirmation and bringing families together in a way that supports all families, including at-risk families. Churches that intentionally build relationships with at-risk families can provide the resources necessary for a family to attend such confirmation camps. With this approach, church workers build relationships with youth and families that are in their community, thereby allowing for follow up that models adoption.

Intergenerational “All Church” Camps

Another approach to helping build stronger families both within and outside the local church is the concept of family camps. While providing scholarships for youth to attend camp is not a novel concept for most churches, the concept of providing scholarships for entire at-risk families may be new and unconsidered expressions of abundant hospitality. By providing scholarships for at-risk families and youth, the church has an opportunity to help families truly develop a larger sense of family as they interact with multiple other families. Bobbie Neilson writes about camp experiences for underprivileged children and families. She shares how “an older boy, ‘Mark,’ said the camp was his family and that he would live for the following year when he hoped to come back. As he struggled to survive with an emotionally unstable welfare mother, the pure joy of being in the camp environment filled with stability, friends, and intellectual

stimulation was what kept him going.”¹⁶ In this way, a local church becomes family and helps fill relational gaps by providing encouragement and support.

Not only does the United Methodist denomination have numerous official camps and campgrounds (approximately 210 camps),¹⁷ local churches have their own “campgrounds” where family-camping experiences are held for a week every year during the summer. As an example of an official United Methodist camp of the North Georgia Conference, Camp Glisson is available for any church groups to use year round. Compared to local campgrounds, such as “Loudsville Campground” in the Gainesville District, these types of campgrounds typically serve the families of local churches for a week during the summer and are an intergenerational endeavor.¹⁸

A unique concept may be to encourage families at local churches and campgrounds to open up their cabins (known as “tents”) in order to facilitate a family camp that would incorporate an affordable family camp strategy for at-risk families. Not only would this provide the benefits of family camps to at-risk families, this approach also would make family camp affordable to low-income families. Ultimately, this approach would be a great way to incorporate a missional approach to reaching other families with the gospel and inviting them to join in congregational life.

¹⁶ Bobbie Nielson, “An Attempt to Make a Difference: Overlooked Disadvantaged Gifted Appalachian Children,” *Roeper Review* 16, no. 1 (September 1, 1993): 63.

¹⁷ United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries Association. UMC CRM National Map,” <http://batchgeo.com/map/umcrm?target=blank> (accessed April 28, 2016).

¹⁸ Loudsville United Methodist Campmeeting, “178th Campmeeting: Schedule of Events,” <http://www.loudsvillecampmeeting.org/schedule/> (accessed April 28, 2016). The schedule indicates activities for all ages; pictures of the campground shows a variety of ages participating in activities and meetings.

Local Church Training

True of any endeavor, there is a level of education that must take place in order for the endeavor to move forward. It is not enough to present facts and statistics related to the issue of criminalization of at-risk children, youth, and families. Churches also must understand why there is a need for intergenerational ministries and approaches that can help curtail the criminalization process. Local church training can inform congregations and communities to comprehend how failing to address a crisis will impact them as individuals and the community in which they live. In other words, churches need to feel a sense urgency, so they can use their power to make changes. “Power in organizations is basically the capacity to make things happen,”¹⁹ and power is “the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance and to get people to do things they would not otherwise do.”²⁰ Through proper training local churches can become aware of how to use the power that Christ has given to them.

When considering how best to educate a local congregation as to why it should engage in reaching out to at-risk families, Bolman and Deal say that “social scientists often emphasize a tight linkage between power and dependency: if A has something B wants, A has leverage. In much of organizational life, individuals and groups are interdependent; then need things from one another, and power relationships are multidirectional.”²¹ The links between education and training to having power and being empowered are inextricable but necessary when training a congregation how to minister to at-risk families.

¹⁹ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 196.

²⁰ Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Managing Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992).

²¹ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 197.

Most congregations will want to know how their efforts might benefit them, when they participate in such ministry efforts. The reasons are legion and beyond simply trying to get new families to join the church. For starters, members who learn to serve others develop a sense of being involved in something bigger than themselves, contribute to the betterment of humanity, learn to live out the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-40), and improve their own communities. Along this line of thinking, better-educated and supported families help to form better communities in which to live.

Assessment Tools for Local Churches Interested in Adoptive Family Ministry

Tackling an issue as large as meeting the needs of at-risk families is full of intense, time-consuming, and difficult tasks. With these difficulties in mind, a local congregation not only must be aware of the facts and the needs of the foster care system; it must evaluate which needs it can meet the most effectively. No local church will be able to meet all of the needs of the foster care crisis and at-risk families in its county alone.

For this reason, any strategy essentially begins with evaluation. Each local church will have to evaluate if it should be involved in preventative or responsive strategies or possibly a combination of both. Preventative strategies might include intervention counseling with families referred to DFCS, adopting at-risk families in order to meet financial or other resource needs, and working in collaboration with the local schools. Responsive strategies could entail congregants who are certified for emergency foster care needs, working with DFCS caseworkers, and following up with families in crisis by providing mentoring and counseling to at-risk families. Much of this decision will be based on the human and capital resources each church has available in order to engage in a

particular strategy. Once a church decides how to engage, it will be easier to evaluate the effectiveness of that engagement. For instance, for the preventative strategy, success can be measured by seeing a reduction in the number of children and families in need of foster care placement services. These preventative initiatives—such as educating, mentoring, and resourcing at-risk families—can help decrease the number child removals from the homes of at-risk families as these gain additional support systems outside the home.

Another initiative a church can pursue would be to see an increase in numbers of homes available to provide foster care services. This initiative is less preventative and more responsive to raise awareness for the need for additional foster homes. This initiative would be more involved with recruitment of additional foster families through cooperation with Child Protective Services and assist in training, educating, and supporting potential and foster parents. Furthermore, a local church can help raise community awareness of the need for additional foster homes. This can happen both in the pulpit to the local church as well as within the community by mobilizing members of the local church into the community.

Equipping, supporting, and educating current and potential foster families is essential in retaining current foster families while bringing new foster families into the DFCS fold. Basically, it evaluates and prepares possible foster families and informs them of what to expect. There are some legitimate concerns and fears potential foster families might have. For instance, some families rightly struggle with a fear for their safety when taking a troubled child into their home.²² Other families are afraid of becoming attached

²² Timothy R. Broady et al., “The Experiment of Foster Care,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 19, no. 5 (November 17, 2009): 562.

to a child and then losing the new “member of the family,” if the child is reunified with the family or there is a disrupted placement.²³ Still other foster families are frustrated by what they feel is intrusion in their lives by foster care agencies while obtaining little support from the same agencies.²⁴ While these fears may still exist for current and potential foster families, having a support group, such as a Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, and a local church can help navigate and alleviate some of these concerns. In essence, the church spiritually adopts the foster family, so it can function and offer at-risk children what they most need.

This approach to churches partnering with child welfare agencies has been shown effective in providing for the needs of both foster children and their foster families. Along with partnering with other community agencies, child welfare agencies have begun to recognize that there are two more key factors in retaining foster families. Those factors are quality training and candid discussions about the challenges of foster parenting.²⁵ Fulfilling this need is exactly what Chapel Hill United Methodist Church did as a result of starting the Floyd County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association meetings on a monthly basis.

²³ Susan B. Edelstein, Dorli Burge, and Jill Waterman, “Helping Foster Parents Cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief,” *Child Welfare* 80, no. 1 (January 2001): 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Sandra Bass, Margie K. Shields, and Richard E. Behrman. “Children, Families, and Foster Care: Analysis and Recommendations.” *The Future of Children* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 16.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the perspective that criminalization is a growing process resulting from systemic abandonment of youth in North American society. At-risk youth, children, and families are especially prone to criminalization. Youth of color, youth who come from difficult environments, and youth in foster care are even more susceptible to being criminalized. As Clark states, “With so many people feeling so deeply isolated and disconnected, now is the time for the body of Christ to reimagine biblical community and to reinvigorate family life together.”¹ Adoptive ministry challenges the local church to reconsider how it does ministry to and with families, both inside and outside the congregation in order to become more holistic and intergenerational. When we become more connected relationally to families inside the church, we develop a place where caring families can find a necessary support system in daily living. When we build relational connections to families outside the church, we engage in a missional approach that provides another family atmosphere. When we engage in relational adoptive ministry, we develop a place where young people who desperately need a family discover one, thus inhibiting both systemic abandonment and criminalization.

From his expert perspective, Clark says that “the goal and practices of youth ministry and all ministry need to be thoroughly re-envisioned so as to become God’s visible family on earth.”² When we engage in adoptive ministry, we can begin to function like a family where everyone’s needs can be met. Adoptive youth ministry that seeks to

¹ Chap Clark, ed., “The Strategy of Adoptive Youth Ministry,” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

meet the needs of families of varying types of backgrounds is very reminiscent of the Church as found in Acts 2:42-47. This passage of Scripture offers a view of spiritual growth, sacrificial giving in order to provide for the needs of others, and a community of vibrant growth and miraculous acts—all coming about as a result of relationships that resemble family life.

While traditional congregations could bemoan society's move away from traditional nuclear families toward permeable families, they must admit that the New Testament Church was an ecclesiastical body that very much became a permeable family. Before the closeness of family happens in Acts 2:42-47, Acts 2:5-13 reveals that there were “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” as well as converts to Judaism (Acts 2:11). The Church in Jerusalem had to take in, or “adopt” into the family, believers who were different from them culturally. This adoption would stretch even further when Philip shared the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), when Peter shared the gospel with a gentile and Roman Centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10) and again in Acts 15:22-29. What is particularly interesting in this last passage of Scripture as it relates to adoption of permeable family, the gentile believers were not forced to take on Jewish customs. Likewise, it must be this way when it comes to the Church adopting those who differ from their sociodemographic background.

A connected “family feel” is even more important for families who struggle with brokenness. “God brings groups of families together in this thing we call church in order to allow us—in community—to worship him and to journey through life in this fallen

world.”³ In an effort to connect diverse human families into a larger family known as the Church, we must re-evaluate everything from worship services, outreach, missions, camps and retreats, intergenerational ministries, and how we intentionally reach out to “non-traditional families.” This effort can help curb both systemic abandonment and criminalization of our young. Young people who have a family that will mentor and advocate for them are youth who will be less likely to be criminalized.

Since organizations and churches can be resistant to change because of the perception of a change in power structures,⁴ most of the work to move churches toward more adoptive, holistic, and ecclesiastical families must be engaged at the local church level. This would seem to be the most natural approach since adoptive ministry can occur more easily at a local level rather than an institutional organization. Once there is evidence that adoptive ministry contributes to the curtailing of systemic abandonment and criminalization of youth, the larger organizations can take note and seek to equip more churches in adoptive ministry. What is certain is the need for the United Methodists Church to be more concerned about meeting the needs of at-risk families, in the name of Jesus Christ, than simply being concerned about the number of youth falling away from the denomination. Young people who do not receive care and nurture is in survival mode and cannot help but see the Church as irrelevant.

On the flipside, youth and families who view the church as a place of hope, help, healing and family restoration may not only see the church as relevant, it is possible that

³ Allen Jackson, “Thinking Critically about Families and Youth Ministry,” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 152.

⁴ Noora Jansson, “Organizational Change as Practice: A Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 26, no. 6 (September 2013): 1010.

they may become disciples of Jesus Christ. David J. Feddes writes: “The household was the key structure and setting for early Christian expansion. By forming in the pattern of a household rather than a society of peers at the same age, Christianity did not open a generation gap in families.”⁵ In other words, the approach to evangelism and meeting the needs of households looks very much like an adoptive model with caring relationships and where life takes on significant meaning.

“Finding the proper relationship between church and household is important for Christian life and witness in any community, whether living in one’s culture of origin or engaged in mission across cultural boundaries.”⁶ Whatever the context—whether local, district, conference, or worldwide churches—the interaction between church, households, families, and communities will always need to be viewed through a missional lens. In the case of ministering to any at-risk or disadvantaged family, a missional approach of building friendships can change the perception of the church being irrelevant, for meaningful friendships are never irrelevant or without reward. These “missional friendships” not only empower an at-risk family and avoid criminalization, churches become empowered once again by engaging in a ministry of loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

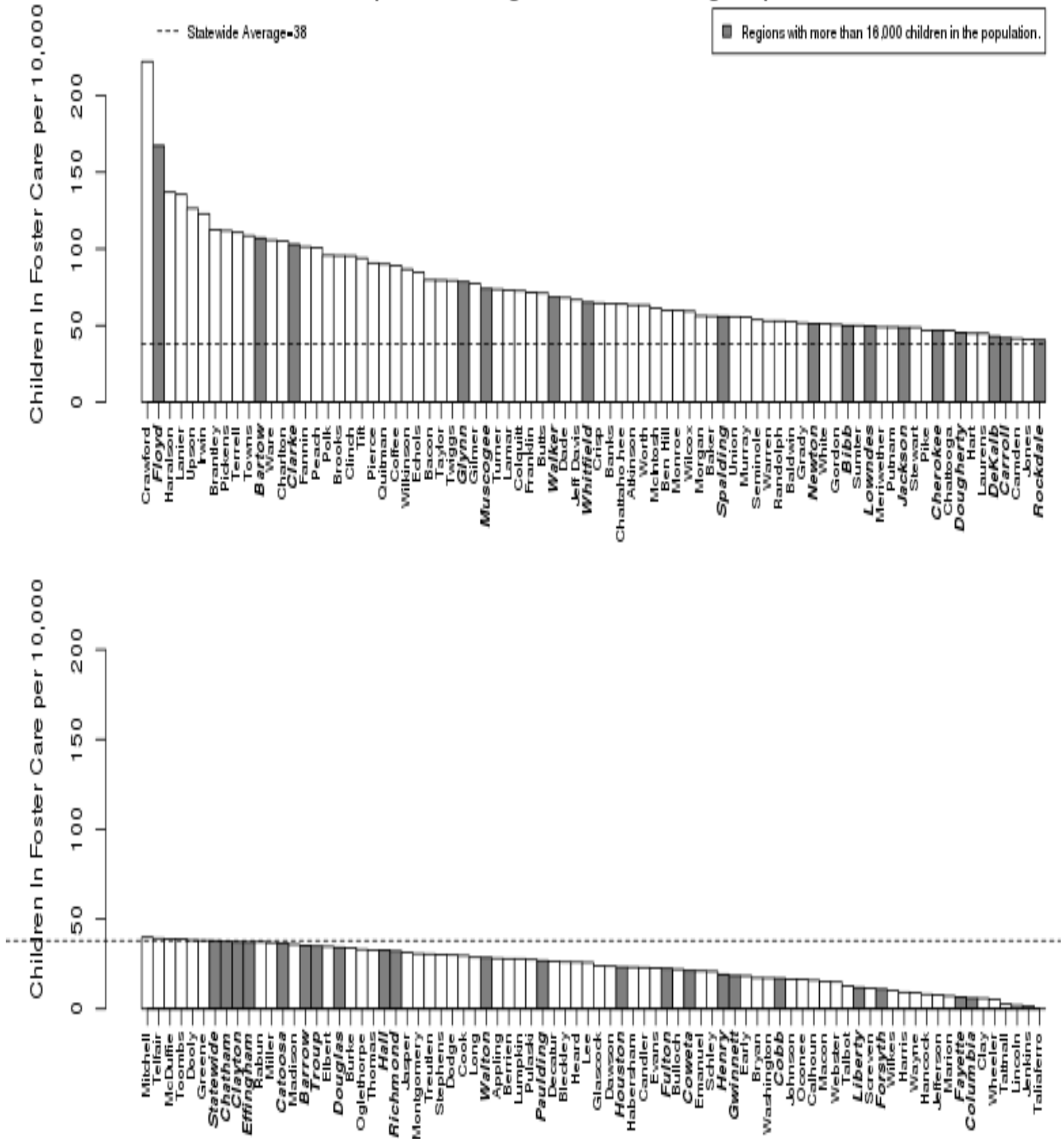
⁵ David J. Feddes, “Caring for God’s Household: A Leadership Paradigm among New Testament Christians and Its Relevance for Church and Mission Today,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 43, no. 2 (November 2008): 276.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

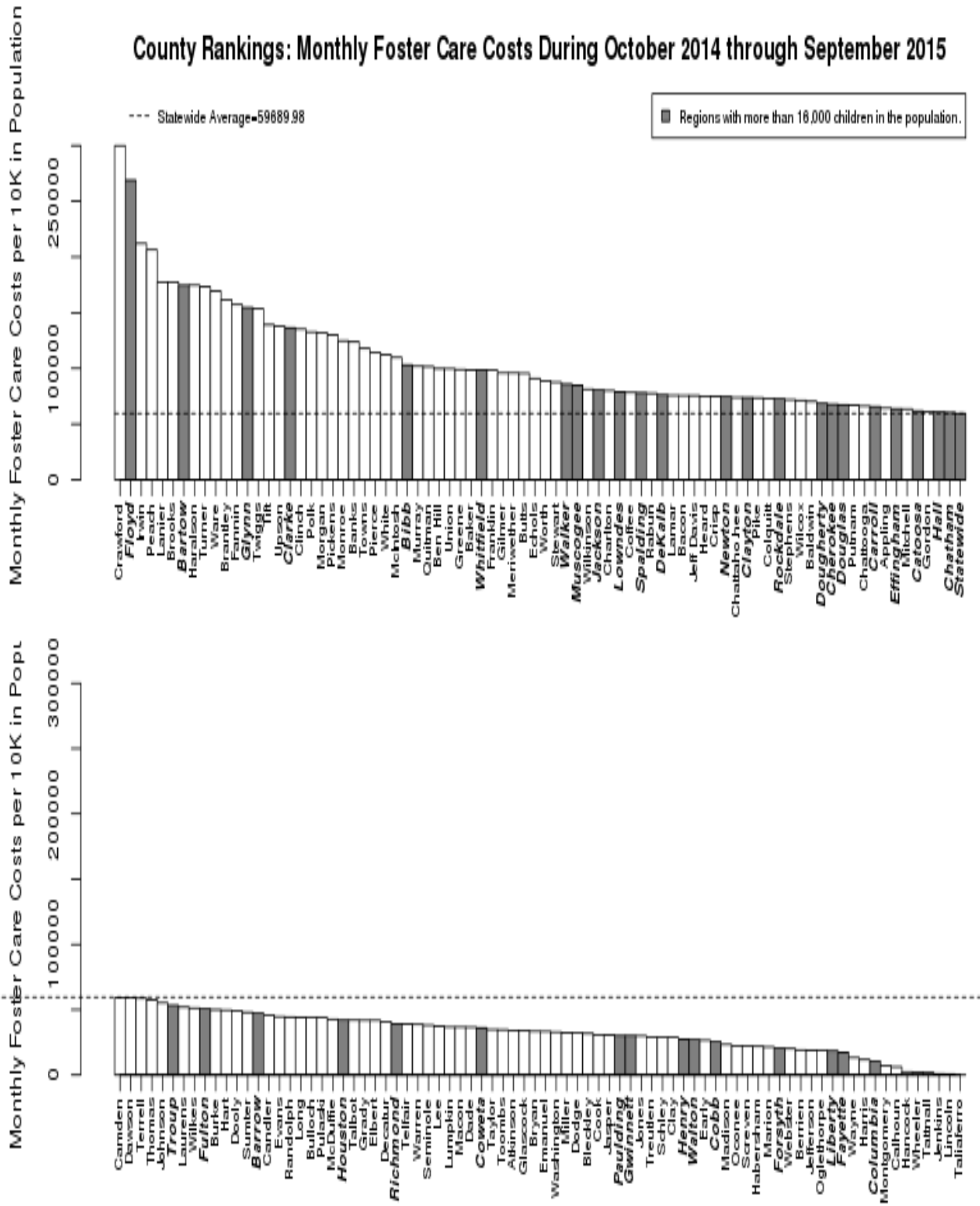
APPENDIX 1

FOSTERING COURT IMPROVEMENT: FLOYD COUNTY RANKINGS

County Rankings: Average Daily Children In Care per 10,000
in the Population During October 2014 through September 2015



County Rankings: Monthly Foster Care Costs During October 2014 through September 2015



APPENDIX 2

FOSTER PARENT SURVEY

GENERAL INFO

1. How long have you been a foster parent? _____ Agency? _____
2. How many children have you fostered? _____ Males _____ Females _____
3. What age range have you served? ___ to ___yrs old What ages do you prefer to serve?
4. Have you adopted any of your foster children or do you have plans to adopt? Y or N
5. How were you recruited? (*ex. family or friend, church, specific recruitment event*)
6. What was most difficult about becoming an approved foster parent?
7. How could the process be made easier (recognizing policy constraints)?
8. What is your biggest challenge or frustration as a foster parent? What would help?
9. What is most rewarding about being a foster parent?

RESTORATION ROME (RR) SERVICES

A) What services that RR currently provides or helps organize, have you used? (Check all that apply). Circle a number to indicate how important that service is. (scale of 1=not very to 10=very helpful).

	<i>not helpful</i> <i>very helpful</i>									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
____ Foster Parent Association Hosting										
____ IMPACT Training										
____ Ongoing Education for Foster Parents (ex. TBRI 2-day)										
____ Clothing or Resource Closet										
____ Foster Parent Night/Day Outs										
____ Family Events (e.g., Fall Festival, Christmas Celebration)										
____ Supervised Visitation for children in your care										
____ Family/Child Counseling/Psychiatry (Bethany Christian Svcs)										
____ Space for child welfare-related meetings										

For any unchecked service, is there a specific reason why you have not used it? If so, please indicate in the space provided below each service.

B) Would provision of the following services at RR help you? (Check all that apply) Indicate level of importance by circling the appropriate number (scale of 1=not needed to 10=would be very helpful)

	<i>not helpful</i> <i>very helpful</i>									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
____ CPR/First Aid Classes										
____ Fingerprinting/Background Checks										
____ Access to onsite DFCS staff person										
____ Lice Treatment										
____ Medical Exams for children entering care										
____ Dental/Orthodontic Services for foster children										
____ Physical for Foster Parent approval										
____ Foster Parent Spiritual Support Group										
____ Adoptive Parent Support Group										
____ Care Communities (volunteer care team for a foster family)										
____ Mentors for children in your care										
____ Partnership Parenting Facilitation										
____ Food Pantry (inc. frozen meals)										

C) Please list any additional services would you like to see offered at Restoration Rome...

For Foster Parents?

For Children in your care?

For Birth Parents?

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