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Helping Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church connect to a gentrified community

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Project Thesis

**HELPING MORRIS BROWN AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CONNECT TO A GENTRIFIED COMMUNITY**

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Dedication Page

The work on this thesis is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Leslie. She is a continuous source of encouragement and support in my life and ministry. I am tremendously blessed to have you in my life. This thesis is also dedicated to my sons, Tyson and Jeston. It is their watchful eyes that hopefully make me a better man, husband, and father.

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ABSTRACT

Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church is in a gentrifying community on the Peninsula of Charleston, South Carolina. This congregation is a historic black church that has been very involved in the surrounding community. Until about 20 years ago, most of the church members lived within walking distance of the church. Now that gentrification is occurring on the Peninsula, many church members have been displaced, and Morris Brown AME Church does not have the connection to the community it has traditionally embraced. As a historic black church, this project will address ways that this congregation can connect to a constantly evolving community.

In this effort, I will examine distinctive elements of black church ecclesiology that are formative for the ministry of Morris Brown AME Church. Prominent among these are the theology of Richard Allen, the founder and first bishop of the AME Church, and the scholarship of Raphael Warnock and Walter Fluker. The black church is so much more complex than just black people sitting in a church building. The development of the black church is a distinctive Christian movement born out of adversity that included slavery, segregation, and sharecropping. These challenges uniquely position the black church to

minister to those on the margins of society. From this tradition, Morris Brown AME Church can connect with a gentrifying community in Charleston to minister both to the new neighbors and with the new neighbors on behalf of the marginalized people in our community.

This will hopefully be realized by developing a racial reconciliation group that will have a Christian foundation and embraces the tenets of Ubuntu. Out of this relationship that will be formed between the congregation and neighborhood, side door ministries will be designed to address many of the present challenges in our community. Among these will be the development of the Morris Brown Development Corporation that will address housing challenges—establishing a STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and math) Program that will address discrepancies in formal education. Finally, Morris Brown AME Church will expand its relationship with the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) to address health concerns that disproportionately affect people of the margins.

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List of Abbreviations

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
CAJM	Charleston Area Justice Ministry
CCSD	Charleston County School District
MUSC	Medical University of South Carolina
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

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Chapter One: The Introduction

The Challenge of Gentrification for Urban Black Churches

In cities across the United States, many urban black churches are experiencing challenges due to gentrification. Generally speaking, “gentrification describes a process in which a neighborhood gains wealth and sees its population become more affluent, whiter, and younger. The term was coined back in the early 1960s by Ruth Glass, who used it to describe the transformation of working-class London neighborhoods by the middle-and upper-class gentry.”¹ Gentrification is an economic reality that exposes financial disparities that continues to exist between whites and blacks in the United States. Many of those displaced from urban neighborhoods are black because of an economic system that has been discriminatory primarily to blacks.

Gentrification, in and of itself, is not racialized but financial. Nevertheless, it does highlight the continued economic disparities that exist between the races. In *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson says, “Layers of accumulated assets built up by the better-paid dominant caste, generation after generation, would factor into a wealth disparity of white Americans having an average net worth ten times that of black Americans by the turn of the twenty-first century, dampening the economic prospects of

¹ Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class—and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 59. Kindle.

the children and grandchildren of both Jim Crow and the Great Migration before they were even born.”²

In other words, it is the wealth and economic advantages of white America that allow many black people to be negatively affected by the realities of gentrification.

Glass says, “this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district... it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working-class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed.”³ A primary challenge of gentrification is not only does it displace citizens, but it also diminishes culture. Cultures that have made communities and neighborhoods distinctive and given them character are sacrificed for profit. Gentrification is the unavoidable result of a political system that is focused more on expanding business opportunities than on the common good. Gentrification is challenging because it places finances over fairness and cash over compassion.

This reality reinforces the fact that displacement is one of the most visible results of gentrification. The most pressing concern with gentrification is who it displaces. Residents that have spent their lives in urban neighborhoods are being forced out to more suburban areas. Gentrification presents unique challenges to the black community. Florida says, “Urban settings are especially attractive to middle-class blacks, who are less likely to suburbanize, largely as a result of discrimination. Long denied equal housing options in the suburbs, middle-and upper-class black families are far more

² Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 105-106. Kindle.

³ Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 59.

concentrated in urban centers than their white peers. When they are priced out, they are more likely to move to and thus gentrify less advantaged black neighborhoods.”⁴

Consequently, blacks are displaced because of gentrification, but they are more likely to find themselves in more disadvantaged neighborhoods than the ones that they leave.

Blacks face challenges because of a financial disadvantage but also because of racial discrimination.

To truly grasp the significance of gentrification on the black community and the black church, it is essential to understand the residential history of black people in the United States. In the earliest parts of this country, most black people lived in rural areas. This was primarily the result of most black people being enslaved and forced to work on plantations in the fields or in domestic capacities. After the Civil War, this reality begins to change for blacks. Fullilove says, “Though African Americans were 90 percent rural at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were 90 percent urban one hundred years later.”⁵ Urban areas brought increased opportunities for blacks in the United States. The first thing that cities provided was increased opportunities for employment. There were industries in the town that needed laborers, and the economy of the South was left in shambles after the Civil War. This resulted in an urban migration for most blacks as they moved from rural areas to urban centers.

⁴ Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 59.

⁵ Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: New Village Press, 2016), 27. Kindle.

Isabel Wilkerson says, “From the early years of the twentieth century to well past its middle age, nearly every black family in the American South, which meant nearly every black family in America, had a decision to make.”⁶ No longer were the majority of black people in America relegated to rural areas. This great migration created significant effects for the American workforce. In a period of 60 years, over six million black southerners left the American South and relocated to every other corner of the country. A primary reason for the migration was the Jim Crow system in the southern part of the country. This repressive system affected every aspect of the lives of black people. In fact, “Their every step was controlled by the meticulous laws of Jim Crow, a nineteenth-century minstrel figure that would become shorthand for the violently enforced codes of the southern caste system.

The scrupulous laws of Jim Crow controlled every aspect of the lives of black people. This name became synonymous with the highly racialized American southern that violently enforced repressive laws. The Jim Crow regime persisted from the 1880s to the 1960s, some eighty years, the average life span of a fairly healthy man. It afflicted the lives of at least four generations and would not die without bloodshed, as the people who left the South foresaw.”⁷ These conditions were a primary factor in the migration of black people to cities across the country. It was not until the 1970s that the Great Migration ended. The overt racism that was expressed by the segregation ended. There

⁶ Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 20.

⁷ Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 22.

was an increased effort to allow black people to vote in elections. Nevertheless, most black people had moved to other areas of the country. Forty-seven percent of black people lived outside of the south compared to only ten percent before the Great Migration.

Urban life gave black Americans a new sense of reality. In a country where they had been consigned to a second-class existence, the migration to cities gave blacks a different experience. They were able to find gainful employment in various industries. Blacks were no longer relegated to largely sharecropping and agricultural work, but they had new opportunities in cities. They were also able to build strong communities within cities throughout the country. A foundational part of these newly formed black communities was the black church. The black church was not only a place that ministered to the spiritual needs of the congregants, but it also was an institution that provided advocacy and advancement for the black community. Eddie Glaude says, “Traditional mainline black churches also experienced unprecedented growth in their membership due to the migration of black southerners.”⁸

Internally, this growth significantly increased the size of black congregations in urban areas. Furthermore, the style of worship began to change in some of the churches as southern blacks moved into the churches. Externally, the movement of blacks into the city gave the black churches more political influence as suffrage was indeed extended to black voters. Many blacks left the Republican Party and joined the Democratic Party. The

⁸ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60-61. Kindle.

passage by the Johnson Administration of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 expanded this transition. The movement of blacks to the Democratic Party coincided with their migration to the northern cities that enlarged their political influence. The result was a significant increase in the black electorate as black activism exploded throughout the nation. These black churches became primary targets of political candidates to secure the votes of black people.

This newfound reality created challenges in the urban black church. Some advocated for a more institutional church that was primarily concerned with the internal affairs of the local congregation. Others argued for a more concerned church advocating for the black community. The Great Migration created enormous challenges that placed tremendous pressure on the resources and abilities of the black religious institutions. Glaude says, “Well-established black churches found themselves in rapidly changing economic and social environments. Industrialization and modernization, just as they affected the expression of American Christianity generally, now pressed in on black communities and changed the nature of their experience with markets, with work, and with God.”⁹ The black church gave an intentional space for people who had been relegated to lowly places in the larger society to feel dignity when coming to church. Black people who worked as custodians, secretaries, and other professions were allowed to provide both clergy and lay leadership in the church.

Throughout the years, the black church was one of the preeminent institutions for the advancement of black people. It was the black church that developed educational

⁹ Glaude, *African American Religion*, 61-62.

institutions, black-owned businesses, and civil rights. In major cities throughout the country, black churches have been instrumental in building strong black neighborhoods. Even in the northern part of the country, many neighborhoods were not receptive to blacks moving into them. Interestingly enough, this segregation strengthens these black neighborhoods in some ways. Although they were not always afforded the same opportunities with municipal governments, they built vital areas that produced young people who took great pride in their communities.

On the other hand, other urban neighborhoods were predominantly white that began to have black residents. In many instances, as these neighborhoods became integrated, there was a “white flight.” This concept of “White flight usually used to refer to a migration phenomenon in the post-World War II era. As people of color moved into predominantly white neighborhoods in cities from which they had previously been excluded, many white residents of those neighborhoods picked up and left. They resettled in newly built, overwhelmingly white suburbs.”¹⁰ A significant result of white flight is that it took valuable financial resources from those neighborhoods. Many of the houses are dilapidated, the schools are often lower-performing academically, and the crime is usually higher than in other areas in the city and the suburbs. Often these neighborhoods are associated with black and brown people instead of recognizing that financial resources have been intentionally redirected to other communities.

¹⁰Greta Kaul “White flight didn’t disappear — it just moved to the suburbs,” MINNPOST, March 21, 2018, <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2018/03/white-flight-didn-t-disappear-it-just-moved-suburbs/>

In revisiting the 1968 report of the Kerner Commission,¹¹ Alice George says it is "Bad policing practices, a flawed justice system, unscrupulous consumer credit practices, poor or inadequate housing, high unemployment, voter suppression, and other culturally embedded forms of racial discrimination all converged to propel violent upheaval on the streets of African American neighborhoods in American cities, north and south, east and west. And as black unrest arose, inadequately trained police officers and National Guard troops entered affected neighborhoods, often worsening the violence."¹² These developments of black ghettos were often a breeding ground that led to acts of violence and intense criminal activity. The majority of crimes committed in these majority-minority neighborhoods result from high unemployment, a lack of quality formal education, and optimism that the future would be better than the current conditions.

It is against this backdrop of urban inequality that we witness the realities of gentrification. A common misunderstanding of gentrification is that it is a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, "Gentrification has been happening for decades, and, for just as long, people have been worrying about the harm it can do to neighborhoods and cities."¹³ The increased cost-of-living, specifically relating to the housing market, often price people out of their neighborhoods. When finances become the primary factor for

¹¹ The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder was better known as the Kerner Commission after its chairperson, Otto Kerner, Jr., the former governor of Illinois. It was established in Executive Order 11365 by President Lyndon Johnson. The 11-person committee was given the responsibility to cause riots in the summer of 1967 and gave recommendations for the future.

¹² George, Alice. "The 1968 Kerner Commission Got It Right, But Nobody Listened." *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 1, 2018.

¹³ Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 60.

living in urban neighborhoods, this creates challenges for diversity. Florida says, “Gentrification is shaped by much bigger and broader forces, among them the large-scale public and private investments that structure the choices individuals make, and in doing so, alter the trajectories of neighborhoods and cities.”¹⁴ The financial investments that make gentrification possible come from private sources and public ones. The political influence within governmental agencies contributes to the challenges of gentrification.

The results of gentrification cannot affect the black community without having an impact on the black church. Although I will discuss, in later chapters, that the black church is much more than a church with black people in it, it has been shaped by the struggle and salvation of the black experience in America. Therefore, as the neighborhoods are changing, the mission and ministry of the church have to be readdressed to meet the changing demographics. It is important to understand that

Most churches located in the poor black neighborhoods minister to a wide cross-section of the black community, including the poor, and fulfill the inherited image of the vibrant, multifaceted, socially relevant institution that serves as a sorely needed anchor for both the geographic neighborhood and the black community.¹⁵

Traditionally, the black church has experienced the geographic neighborhood and the black community being the same. However, gentrification is changing this reality. For the black church, the community and the neighborhood are now mutually exclusive.

¹⁴ Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 65.

¹⁵ Lowell Livezey, ed., *Public Religion and Urban Transformation: Faith in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 91. Kindle.

One way that gentrification affects the black church is that many church members can no longer afford to live near the church. This often separates them from the center of the black community that has been so instrumental in the past. Young people who would normally participate in the youth groups and activities cannot easily get to the church. Parking is extremely difficult, especially during the week. The parking lot has been outgrown and many church attendees have been relegated to finding street parking. As the neighborhoods change parking is limited especially with the inclusion of resident permits. Many urban churches became prominent as neighborhood churches. Church members walked to church because they were located close to their homes. Even as times have changed, many people in cities continued to live in the geographic neighborhood where their church was located. Gentrification is changing this reality for many people. Often, as there becomes a geographical distance between church members and the church building, it is challenging to fully participate in the mission and ministries of the congregation.

Additionally, gentrification affects the youth ministry in many black churches. Transportation is always an issue with young people because they depend on others to get them where they need to go. The church is not different in this regard. When the young people lived within walking distance to the church, it was much easier for them to participate in the churches' ministries. However, when their families have been displaced because of gentrification, the geographic distance impacts their participation. This is the reality not just for structured ministry opportunities but also for fellowship that helps them develop relationships with others in the congregation.

Parking is a significant challenge in gentrified communities. If churches do not have sufficient parking, they often struggle to provide parking for their members to even come to church on Sundays. To have ministry offerings on weekdays is even more difficult. It also becomes a challenge with parking for funerals and weddings. Street parking can be challenging to find. Metered parking can become expensive and inconvenient, and some neighborhoods have restricted parking only for residents. If churches are not landlocked and have parking available, some of them can supplement their income with additional revenue from parking. These churches can provide a needed asset to gentrified communities by providing places for businesses and individuals to park. While these are not the only challenges that urban churches face because of gentrification, they provide tangible examples.

Changing Demographics of Charleston

Originally located on the banks of the Ashley River, the City of Charleston was founded in 1670. It is named in honor of King Charles II of England. Although initially known as Charles Town, it adopted its current name in 1783 when it was incorporated. Due mainly to its location as a port city, Charleston has played a significant role throughout the country's history as a center of trade and commerce. Bernard Powers says, in "the early nineteenth-century South, Charleston was second only to Baltimore in population and commercial prominence."¹⁶ With this being said, the city is intricately

¹⁶ Bernard Powers, *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), Kindle.

linked to its historic role with slavery in the United States. It is estimated that more than 40 percent of enslaved Africans who entered this country came through the ports of Charleston. However, the city issued a formal apology for its role in slavery in 2018, the bitter seeds of a highly racialized society continue to be present. Powers says, "No comprehensive view of black urban life in the South would be complete without giving proper consideration to the pivotal city of Charleston, South Carolina."¹⁷

Unlike many other cities in the southern parts of the country, Charleston has a history of diversity. No other location in the south contained as large of a black population. In fact, in 1830 enslaved people outnumbered white people by three to one in Charleston County.¹⁸ Not all black people in Charleston were enslaved, but some free black people lived in antebellum Charleston. Many of these free blacks were very skilled and were able to provide significantly to the city. A distinctive feature in antebellum Charleston was its sizable and dispersed black population. Powers says, "The black population reached a high point of 22,973 in 1850, and blacks had outnumbered whites in seven of the eight decades from 1790 to 1860."¹⁹ The lower part of the Charleston Peninsula has historically been the place where blacks have lived. They often lived in tiny houses behind the more prominent places where white people lived. Nevertheless, until Jim Crow became restrictive in the 1900s, black people lived throughout the Peninsula.

¹⁷ Powers, *Black Charlestonians*.

¹⁸ Powers, *Black Charlestonians*.

¹⁹ Powers, *Black Charlestonians*.

It was at this time the “Peninsula was a much more diverse place economically than it is today. During Jim Crow, blacks and whites managed to both live and made livings on the Peninsula.”²⁰ It was during the Jim Crow era that the neighborhoods became more racially segregated. Until the 1970s, the City of Charleston consisted primarily of the Peninsula. However, it was then that they made an intentional effort to enlarge its tax base by encompassing other areas such as West Ashley, James Island, Johns Island, and Daniels Island. The idea of having more property and larger yards became attractive to many white people who were living on the densely populated Peninsula. As a result, many white citizens left downtown in the 1970s and 1980s to move to these other areas. This white flight in Charleston was vastly different from white flights in other parts of the country. In places like Detroit and Camden, some riots led to whites moving out of the city. However, in Charleston, the expanded tax base of the city led to this reality. As many white people left the Peninsula, it drastically changed the dynamics in downtown Charleston.

This reality of diversity that has been such a significant fixture in the city is now being challenged. Over the past three decades, there has been a substantial change in the Charleston community due mainly to gentrification. Gentrification is defined as "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class

²⁰ J. Emory Parker, Brooks Brunson, Kelly Poe and Adam Parker, “The History of Gentrification in Charleston,” June 3, 2019, in Understand SC, podcast, MP3 audio, 30:54, https://www.postandcourier.com/understandsc/understand-sc-the-history-of-gentrification-in-charleston/article_ef115754-8628-11e9-940d-1bee31a5d376.html.

residential and/or commercial use...”²¹ In other words, gentrification is primarily an economic occurrence. Nevertheless, gentrification underscores the disparaging economic differences between the races. This is becoming more visible on the Peninsula of Charleston. For example, in 1980, the city was about two-thirds black, but by 2010 it was approximately two-thirds white.²² This disparity is increasing because blacks make up less than 27 percent of the population in downtown Charleston. During this period, the cost of living on the Peninsula has risen dramatically, including the property value.

This increased property value is forcing many residents away from the Peninsula. Some of them have lived in Charleston for their entire lives. Some residents who have inherited property from their family are having to make difficult decisions. Will they continue to live in the same neighborhoods and struggle with the increased cost of living, or will they sell the houses and property that have been in their families for many years? An example is that the typical family home in the Hampton Park area of the city 15 years ago was about \$175,000, but now with the increased property value, it is around \$325,000.²³ This kind of drastic change continues to contribute to challenges on the Peninsula. There are real estate developers, buyers, and investors searching for opportunities on the Peninsula to purchase property and renovate older structures or tear them down and construct something new.

²¹ Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly. *Gentrification*. (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), Kindle.

²² Parker, Brunson, and Poe “The History of Gentrification in Charleston.”

²³ Parker, Brunson, and Poe “The History of Gentrification in Charleston.”

There are some factors that are contributing to this new gentrified reality in Charleston. The first is the expansion of the College of Charleston. The college is continuing to grow, resulting in many more students living downtown than used to be the case. However, this increase in student population also has an impact on the economics of the Peninsula. As a state college, the College of Charleston has a cap on the number of out-of-state students admitted. However, the tuition for out-of-state students is three times higher than that of in-state students. This means that the out-of-state students attending the College of Charleston usually come from families with more economic security. This has resulted in these students looking for a different kind of housing accommodation downtown, which has impacted the cost of living downtown.

Being a tourist destination is nothing new for the City of Charleston. Even after the Civil War, the planters would have their summer homes there because it would be too hot on the plantation. They would leave the hot summers in rural areas to find refuge on the Peninsula. So, they would stay downtown where there would be cultural activities and other ways for them to spend their time. Often these would not be their primary residences but a summer home for leisure and enjoyment. Many of those properties were built by enslaved people. However, many of these southern white people became "land rich, but cash poor after the Civil War."²⁴ In other words, they had beautiful homes but did not necessarily have the cash to maintain them. This led to both an economic and physical decline in Charleston. This changed in the 1920s and 1930s when Charleston experienced a renaissance.

²⁴ Parker, Brunson, and Poe "The History of Gentrification in Charleston."

Interestingly enough, this resurgence was mainly due to local artists painting pictures of the Charleston area. The beautiful area combined with lower property values due to economic decline made Charleston an attractive location for those looking for additional properties, including those who wanted to escape brutally cold winters. This revival intensified at the end of World War II when improvements and expansions were made of the Peninsula, especially around King Street.

Even now, Charleston continues to be a popular tourist destination. The city averages about 20,000 visitors per day, and annually more than seven million people visit Charleston. Being such a popular tourist destination makes Charleston an ideal place for both leisure and investment opportunities. There are some houses, for instance, in the Hampton Park neighborhood that are empty because people have them as a second or third house. These are not local people but wealthy people from different parts of the country who use the house in Charleston as a vacation home. When they are not vacationing, some use the properties to rent them out to other tourists visiting the city. Most of the new people moving onto the Charleston Peninsula are from different places in the southern part of the United States. Many of them are from South Carolina. There is not a significant influx of people moving to Charleston from the northern part of the country. Much of the increase is due to people moving from rural areas to more urban areas. The city experienced another renaissance in 1975 when Joseph Riley became the mayor and served for over four decades. Riley was a democrat who advanced a "New South" agenda. Not only did he contribute to expanding the tax base, but he made

improvements throughout the Peninsula that made Charleston much more attractive to investors and developers.

One of the lasting fixtures that have endured from early in his mayoral tenure is the Spoleto Festival. The annual festival was “founded in 1977 by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who sought to create an American counterpart to the annual Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, that he founded in 1958.”²⁵ Menotti selected Charleston to host the festival because of its many theaters, churches, and performance spaces. It provided southern hospitality, but it was also large enough to accommodate the people drawn to the artistic event. The Spoleto Festival in Charleston gave the city more international exposure and made it even more attractive. Since its inception, the Spoleto Festival USA has established itself as one of the nation's foremost performing arts festivals. The festival lasts for 17 days and nights from the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. Charleston is swarming with world renowned artist and emerging performers from a wide range of music including theater, dance, jazz, symphonic and chamber choral, and folk music. Like many other things, the Spoleto Festival was canceled in 2020 because of concerns related to COVID-19. However, in most years, the festival has 150 performances in more than ten venues.

There were at least three intentional efforts on the Peninsula used to dismantle predominantly black neighborhoods. One of these events occurred in the Ansboro neighborhood in downtown Charleston. In 1968, the homes and properties of black

²⁵ “Spoleto Festival, USA,” History, accessed August 12, 2021, <https://spoletousa.org/about/program-history-2/>.

residents were taken so that the city could construct the Charleston Gaillard Center.²⁶

This intentional removal of black residents destroyed an entire black neighborhood, but it left the white residents with their houses and property in the same part of the city. The construction of the Gaillard Center started the momentum to have this neighborhood more segregated along racial lines.

The second effort to dismantle a predominantly black neighborhood was the building of the road in the 1960s known as the "Crosstown Expressway." This effort was one of the dimensions in a more significant urban renewal effort that was used not only in Charleston but in many cities throughout the United States. Just as in other places, "The Crosstown bisected historic black mixed-income neighborhoods in the city, severing longstanding community connections and creating a highway too dangerous for pedestrians."²⁷ Ironically, the Crosstown Expressway was renamed after a local Civil Rights activist, Septima P. Clark. The City of Charleston and the South Carolina Department of Transportation erected a marker along the expressway to rename it after Clark in 1978. This action left two drastically different responses because "At best, this marker was a gesture of inclusion; at worst, it was an insult to both Clark and residents in the community who had been dislocated by its creation."²⁸ It was not until April 2010, at

²⁶ It was then known as the Gaillard City Auditorium.

²⁷ "The Septima P. Clark Expressway and Park," Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, accessed July 20, 2021, https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/septima_clark/virtual-tour/expressway-and-park.

²⁸ "The Septima P. Clark Expressway and Park," Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, accessed July 20, 2021, https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/septima_clark/virtual-tour/expressway-and-park.

the request of Mayor Joseph Riley and City Councilman William Dudley Gregorie, that the name was officially changed "Septima P. Clark Parkway."

The third effort involved the construction of Interstate 526, an ancillary route of Interstate 26 that provides transportation around Charleston. When the road was built downtown, it was systematically placed in a predominantly black neighborhood on the Peninsula. When you go under the overpass downtown, many disjointed routes have been divided to construct the interstate. Many of the roads lead to dead ends because the construction has made them impassable. These three efforts provide primary examples of how the government has been instrumental in dislocating black residents and dismantled black neighborhoods in addition to many residents being priced off of the Peninsula. The east side of the Peninsula is the only place with a larger black population. However, many building projects are beginning to occur, and it is becoming too expensive for many of the residents to continue to live there. The City of Charleston will have to decide whether or not to protect the cost of living on the east side or turn it over to the developers for a more significant influence on gentrification.

Taking this into consideration, a nonprofit group is trying to develop something called the "Low Line." It is proposed to be a space along some of the old railway tracks, owned by the city, that is no longer used to provide a green space in the city through the building of a linear park. The nonprofit hopes that this development will connect some of the corridors in the city and provide relief from some of the traffic on the Peninsula by offering a bicycle route. The group also hopes to beautify an area affected by the city put in Interstate 526 and the Crosstown on the Peninsula.

Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church has not gone unaffected by all of the changes on the Peninsula of Charleston. Pada says, "Churches are faced with an identity crisis as gentrification transforms the urban landscape."²⁹ Many of the church's neighbors who have grown accustomed to providing ministry are no longer in the neighborhood. As recently as 1998, 80 percent of the church membership at Morris Brown AME Church lived within walking distance of the church. The drastic increases in cost-of-living have forced them to move away from downtown into other municipalities.³⁰ Currently over 90 percent of church members live off the Peninsula in other places such as North Charleston, Goose Creek, Ladson, and Summerville. As Rothstein states, "Most low-income families forced out of gentrifying neighborhoods have nowhere else to go, except to a few segregated suburbs where they soon become concentrated because other locales prohibit or excessively restrict the construction of affordable units."³¹ Although not all of these people are low-income, the drastic economic changes in Charleston are contributing to mass relocation.

Additionally, gentrification is affecting the schools on the Peninsula. One example of this new reality is Burke High School. Burke is a historic high school in Charleston, and it was one of the prominent institutions for black students during the time

²⁹ Pada Orvis, "Demographic Changes, Gentrification, and Religious Preference." In *Vespas Cafes, Singlespeed Bikes, and Urban Hipsters: Gentrification, Urban Mission, and Church Planting* edited by Sean Benesh, 145, Portland: Urban Loft Publishers, 2014.

³⁰ Many of the families that use to live in downtown Charleston can no longer afford to do so. They had to move out to Ladson, Goose Creek, and Summerville because they have been priced out.

³¹Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation), 2017.

of segregation. As the community is gentrifying, the enrollment of Burke High School is greatly affected. The facility at Burke is state-of-the-art. The new building was constructed about ten years ago. However, the building that can accommodate about 2,000 students has declining enrollment. Currently, there are less than 300 students in the entire school. As the neighborhoods in Charleston are changing, many of the students that used to attend the school are now displaced, and the new neighbors in large are continuing to allow their students to go to other schools either through school choice or by sending them to private schools. Some of the longstanding residents in the community are concerned that eventually, the enrollment at Burke High School will not reflect much diversity.

As gentrification continues to be a reality, Morris Brown AME Church must discern what the Lord is calling it to do amid the changes on the Charleston Peninsula. In this discernment process, it is imperative to examine the ecclesiology of Bishop Richard Allen, the founder and first Bishop of the AME Church. Allen established a black Christian denomination in the late 18th century, plagued by slavery and segregation. Through his writings, leadership, and Christian experience, he offers a theological framework for dealing with many of the complexities that are currently unfolding in Charleston and many urban areas around the country. I will begin to examine Allen's impact on Morris Brown AME Church in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Morris Brown AME Church: Ecclesiology and Gentrification

Morris Brown AME Church and the Theology of Richard Allen

After the conclusion of the United States Civil War, Reverend Richard Harvey Cain, the pastor of the African Church in Charleston, later known as Mother Emanuel AME Church, bought a Lutheran church building whose congregation disbanded because of a diminishing population in 1866. It was then that Morris Brown AME Church was established. As a historic black church located on Charleston's Peninsula, this congregation has played a significant role in developing the surrounding community. Being a black church is substantial to the mission and ministry of the congregation. Warnock says, "...When I refer to the black church, I speak of the varied ecclesial groupings of Christians of African descent, inside and outside black and white denominations, imbued with the memory of a suffering Jesus and informed by the legacy of slavery and segregation in America."³² This congregation in Charleston is named after Bishop Morris Brown, a native Charlestonian. He was the first pastor of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston and later elected as the second bishop of the AME Church. From its inception, Morris Brown AME Church has been a community church—a church that places the welfare of the community and its neighbors' needs at the heart of how the church expresses God's love. Morris Brown's identity as a community church is reflective of the biblical mandate found in the Lord's command to the prophet Jeremiah, "But seek

³² Raphael Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 9. Kindle.

the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7, NRSV).

To truly understand the ecclesiology of Morris Brown AME Church, it is imperative to examine the theology of Richard Allen. Spending the first part of his life in slavery, Allen was able to purchase his freedom and ultimately founded the AME Church, being elected its first bishop. Christian moralism and liberation theology were the two primary components that provided the foundation for Allen’s theology. Richard Newman says, “As a devout evangelical, Allen believed that the Christian religion defined the essential elements of daily life for every American, black or white: piety, sobriety, cleanliness, humility, and charity.”³³

His Christian faith was the most significant aspect of his life, and he understood everything else in his life through the lens of his relationship with Jesus Christ. Allen believed that a Christian should never lose sight of the personal dimensions of his or her faith when dealing with social concerns. Similarly, it was also important for Allen that a Christian believer should not avoid the problems in society because he or she is preoccupied with personal immorality. In other words, for one to live out the Christian faith, it is essential to have a personal dimension of faith and address the various social problems present in the community.

Allen was clear that neither one of these could be overemphasized to the exclusion of the other. Allen and his people's “participation in social and political events

³³ Richard Newman. *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Father* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). Kindle.

provide an outstanding illustration of a church's struggle with the fundamental crises involved in the relating Christian faith to constructive social policy."³⁴ The theology of Allen is consistent with a black church theology that has been formed and fashioned mainly in response to discriminatory treatment in this country. This dichotomy between faith and social engagement continues to be at the center of black Christianity. Warnock says, "...The double-consciousness of black Christianity—that is, a faith profoundly shaped by white evangelicalism's focus on individual salvation (piety) yet conscious of the contradictions of slavery and therefore focused also on sociopolitical freedom (protest)—provides a meaningful angle and a conceptual framework through which to inquire into the black church's sense of vocation and a basis for teasing out the nuances of a meaningful theology of the church."³⁵ This double-consciousness of the black church has provided a model for the way that Morris Brown AME Church has lived out its Christian vocation in the Charleston community.

This commitment led to Morris Brown AME Church being the Charleston headquarters for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the 1960s. Under the leadership of Bishop Zedekiah Grady,³⁶ Morris Brown AME Church was very active in the Civil Rights Movement. This became evident in the pivotal role that Bishop Grady and the congregation played in the Nursing Strike at the Medical University of

³⁴ William DeVeaux, "Christian Faith and Social Policy in the Thought of Richard Allen," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 10, no. 1-2 (Fall – Spring 1982-1983): 86.

³⁵ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 3.

³⁶ The Reverend Zedekiah Grady pastored Morris Brown AME Church from 1963-1982. He was later elected the 111th Bishop of the AME Church.

South Carolina (MUSC) Hospital in 1969. Black nurses and healthcare workers initiated this strike to receive the same compensation as their white coworkers. Bishop Grady played an essential role in the negotiations that led to the black employees receiving a more equitable payment and both sides reaching a compromise. The strike gained national attention, and Mrs. Coretta Scott King came to Charleston to assist with the efforts of the black workers. Amid a national effort to achieve Civil Rights, Morris Brown AME Church understood that it could not be silent concerning the mistreatment of black people. The involvement of Morris Brown AME Church is directly linked to the theology of Allen. The effect that the religious experience of Richard Allen had on social policy are tangible examples of the way that black religious leaders put their Christian faith into action. This is true for both political and social concerns as with personal salvation. This connection between salvation and social action continues to provide a model for ministry at Morris Brown AME Church.

Another significant element in the theology of Allen was ministry to people on the margins. William DeVeaux says, “For Allen, to be a Christian meant being concerned for all people but especially those who are in need. To be one with any hope of eternal salvation meant that one also has to show charity and mercy.”³⁷ Allen understands that the way to display our relationship with Jesus Christ is how we love and be merciful to those on the margins of society. A fundamental belief in the theology of Allen is looking at the needy as the representatives of Jesus Christ in our neighborhoods and communities. In the life of Allen, just like in our contemporary society, black people find themselves

³⁷ William DeVeaux, “Christian Faith and Social Policy in the Thought of Richard Allen,” 91.

on the margins of society. As a whole, blacks continue to find themselves disadvantaged in the areas of economics, education, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, blacks find themselves disproportionately incarcerated and unarmed victims at the hands of law enforcement. For these reasons, Warnock says, it "undermines the black church's distinctive legacy and peculiar vocation as the conscience of the American churches, speaking to their failure to address clearly and prophetically the nation's original sin and its most intractable social problem—racism."³⁸ It is this original sin of racism that continues to plague so much of American society.

A primary belief of Allen was that not only was it essential to speak out against the evils of slavery and racism to slave owners, but it was just as important to minister to the marginalized black community to make sure that they would be able to embrace their God-given potential. Allen advocated that the black community had to be organized to responsibly address the American realities of prejudice and racism that contribute to the perpetuation of the color line. Additionally, he believed that an independent black church would make the challenges of marginalized black people its scopes of Christian witness. This was the most widely embraced and effective instrument to pursue the dual goals of civil freedom and spiritual holiness. This has been a formative belief employed at Morris Brown AME Church. Entrepreneurship has been important in the life of Morris Brown AME Church. Currently, there are three black-owned local businesses that service the church that Morris Brown pastors were influential in their founding.

³⁸Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 141.

The first business was a heating and air-conditioning business that John Frazier started after being encouraged to do so by Bishop Grady, the pastor. Frazier went on to have a very successful business before retiring, and he continues to speak about the influence of Bishop Grady. The congregation played a role not just in his spiritual life but also in his professional life. Donald Bennett was another entrepreneur influenced by a pastor of Morris Brown, the Reverend Dr. James Blake, to open a florist shop. He worked for another florist, and Dr. Blake was instrumental in encouraging him to step out on his own and start his own business. When I first arrived in Charleston and met Bennett, he told me the gratitude he had for Morris Brown AME Church to support his business and make a difference in his life. After the influence of the then pastor, Reverend Dr. Allen Parrot, Gerald Sanders was encouraged to start his own landscaping business. The business has grown to be one of the premier landscaping businesses in the Charleston area, and to this day, his company continues to service all five of the properties of Morris Brown AME Church. Additionally, he continues to service all of the former pastors of Morris Brown AME Church who continue to live in the Charleston area. These influences assist blacks in embracing entrepreneurship that displays a holistic ministry in the life of the black church.

Furthermore, Allen understood the importance of building a meaningful relationship outside of the black community. Newman says, "Equally important—and somewhat contrary to Allen's iconic status as a promoter of black autonomy—he articulated a mantra of interracial harmony and black civic participation."³⁹ Allen

³⁹ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*.

understood the importance of being able to build Christian relationships with people outside of the black community. It was because of his advocacy of black autonomy that some people perceived him as being an isolationist. Nothing could have been further from the truth. From the beginning, Allen experienced racial inclusiveness among the Methodists. He led many white people in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States to Christian faith. It was through the ministry of white Methodists that Allen was converted to Christianity. At the beginning of his Christian ministry, Allen preached to many more white people than black.

Even after leaving St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia because of racial division, Allen advocated for Methodism's benefit to black Christians. Allen says, "the Methodists were the first people that brought glad tidings to the colored people. I feel thankful that ever I heard a Methodist preach. We are beholden to the Methodists, under God, for the light of the Gospel we enjoy; for all other denominations preached so high-flown that we were not able to comprehend their doctrine."⁴⁰ This straightforward preaching was vital for black people who were intentionally prevented from reading and receiving formal education. Therefore, this model for ministry was embraced by Allen to be able to spread the Gospel effectively. Having been mistreated based upon race, he saw the necessity of having a church open to everyone free from the evils of inequality. Allen says, "We told him we had no place of worship; and we did not mean to go to St. George's church anymore, as we were so scandalously treated in the

⁴⁰ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Philadelphia: Martin & Boden Printers), 1833. Kindle.

presence of all the congregation present; and if you deny us your name, you cannot seal up the scriptures from us, and deny us a name in heaven. We believe heaven is free for all who worship in spirit and truth.”⁴¹

This belief that a heaven is a place that is free from bigotry and bias is a hallmark of African Methodism and is visible through the relationships made by Allen. Allen wanted the names of Dr. Benjamin Rush and Mr. Robert Ralston to be kept alive throughout the generations of members of the AME Church. These two white men were the first two to embrace the cause of the racially oppressed, and they assisted in building a house of worship for the black Methodists to worship. These relationships with people outside of the black community were essential to the founding of the AME Church. The relationship went both ways. Allen saw his vocation as a Christian minister as a compellation to serve the entire community.

Dickerson says that perhaps "Allen's energetic application of Wesleyan social holiness lay in his larger role in bringing aid to victims of the 1793 yellow fever epidemic. When affluent Philadelphians fled the city, the poor and middling classes, both white and black, remained behind to confront the ravages of the disease."⁴² It was the willingness that Allen and Absalom Jones had to serve the community as a whole that led to his friendship with Dr. Rush. Amid the people with financial means leaving the city, Allen and Jones answered the call to go outside of the church's walls and serve those in

⁴¹ Allen. *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*.

⁴² Dennis Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 34. Kindle.

need. While contracting the fever themselves, they were willing to make a difference in the lives of others. Dickerson says, “In response to pleas from physician Benjamin Rush, who taught Richard Allen and Absalom Jones how to bleed [those with yellow fever,] and Philadelphia Mayor Matthew Clarkson, Allen and Jones volunteered to take care of the sick and bury the dead.”⁴³ Community service like this led to relationships outside of the black community and made the establishment of the AME Church possible in a racialized society.

As a black congregation in Charleston, Morris Brown AME Church has made relationships outside of the black community. Seven years ago, Morris Brown AME Church was one of the Charleston Area Justice Ministry (CAJM). This is a justice ministry composed of different faith traditions (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) to work together to make a difference in the Charleston community. Every year, the group identifies concerns in the community that we will research and work on, leading to the annual Nehemiah Action. At the Nehemiah Action, we seek public commitments from public officials that will improve the lives, especially the marginalized, of the residents of our city. Since coming to Morris Brown AME Church, we have worked collectively on issues such as equality in school discipline, affordable housing, improving public transportation, and racial equality in policing practices. This year Morris Brown had over 120 members to participate in the Nehemiah Action. We have some very dedicated church members who are committed to the work of doing justice and making a difference in the community at large.

⁴³ Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 34.

Several years ago, Morris Brown AME Church had an intentional partnership with the Circular Congregation. This is a predominantly white church that is a part of the United Church of Christ. The congregations were able to worship together and enjoy both fellowship and community service opportunities. We recently enjoyed this cross-cultural relationship with the River Church, a new Southern Baptist congregation that was started in Charleston within the last three years. I had an opportunity to meet with the ministerial staff of the River Church and one of the ministerial staff members at Morris Brown AME Church. We can read together and have meaningful conversations about working across racial lines. We even had one opportunity where we were able to eat together after our Sunday morning worship experience. There have also been times when Morris Brown AME Church has served as a warming shelter on cold winter nights. Even though the temperatures are relatively moderate in Charleston, there are some nights when the temperatures drop. On these occasions, both the homeless and those who may not have adequate heating in their homes need somewhere to stay warm during the cold weather. There have been times that Morris Brown provide a warm place to stay and food to show hospitality to the Charleston community. Additionally, the church has used the church buses to give rides to the polls to vote and take seniors to the grocery store to do their weekly shopping.

In collaboration with Mother Emanuel AME Church and Ebenezer AME Church, Morris Brown AME Church owns three apartment complexes around South Carolina to provide affordable housing. The Emanuel-Morris Brown-Ebenezer Apartments, Inc., or EME Apartments, started in 1968 with one apartment complex in Charleston on James

Island. Receiving a loan from the newly developed United States Housing and Urban Development, the congregations did not have to put down any money from the congregations. Today, EME Apartments have added complexes in the South Carolina cities of Conway and Darlington, and the organization has a net worth of about \$15 million. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion.”⁴⁴

One hundred ninety years after the death of Allen, his theology continues to be just as relevant today as it was during his lifetime. As one of the most prominent black ministers of his time, Allen helped to articulate a moral critique of the institution of slavery that contributed to abolitionism for decades to come. Through the publication of his pamphlets, he advocated not only for the ending of slavery but also for the equality of black people. Although slavery has legally ended, equality for blacks in America continues to be a primary concern. Therefore, it has to be the vocation of the black to advocate on behalf of the people on the margins. Warnock says, “Black theology, since its emergence in the 1960s, has endeavored to give substance and systematic expression to a theological perspective that sees the work of salvation in the broadest of terms, both underscoring and explicating the theme of liberation as the central message of the gospel

⁴⁴ Martin L. King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), 33

and the essential mission of the church.”⁴⁵ The black church must continue to speak to the systemic racism that continues to challenge our communities. It is the unique experiences that have been experienced by the black church that puts it in a unique position to minister to the people on the margins of society.

Warnock says, “...Historically, the faith of the black church has been shaped and characterized by two complementary yet competing sensibilities: revivalistic piety and radical protest.”⁴⁶ In a world that continues to be so fragmented, it continues to take both revivalistic piety and radical protest to make a difference in our communities.

Nevertheless, there continue to be questions raised about the necessity of the black church and its vitality in the 21st century. Fluker says, “thus, positing race as a tool in the creation of religious and political meaning recognizes that race is not a biologically or historically fixed reality; rather, it encourages us to be aware that race exists nevertheless in mutable social forms that constantly adapt and blend into new sociopolitical situations.”⁴⁷ The social and political constructs of race continue to create great divisions in our society. The ministry of the black church is just as much needed now as it has ever been. Warnock says, “...Black churches, at their best, evinced, through their actions, an alternative ecclesiology, that is, a radical understanding of the church and of its salvific work, that brought together issues that a so-called Christian slavocracy had endeavored so hard to keep apart—baptism and freedom; bodies and souls; social deliverance and

⁴⁵Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 19.

⁴⁶Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 13.

⁴⁷ Walter Earl Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted: The Future of the Black Church in Post Racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), Kindle.

personal salvation; the slavery of sin and the sin of slavery.”⁴⁸ As a valuable contributor to the black church, Allen's theology continues to offer valuable insight to the larger Christian Church. It continues to be needed in communities that are so fractured.

To truly understand the church, it is essential to examine ecclesiology critically. Etymologically, "*Ekklesia* is derived from the Greek verb *Kaleo*, ‘call,’ in its compound form *ekkaleo*, ‘to summon’ or ‘to call out.’ This signifies that an *ekklesia* is a gathering of people who have been duly summoned or called out or an officially summoned body.”⁴⁹ This was an official term for the citizens' assembly of the Athenian democracy. In other words, ecclesiology is the study of the believers in Jesus Christ who have been "called out" and "set apart" for the work of mission and ministry. At its core, ecclesiology asks the questions: "What does it mean to be the church?" What must essential characteristics be present for us to be the church of Jesus Christ indeed? We have some qualities in common in the Christian Church, such as the four marks of the church.

It is in the Nicene Creed that we profess, “We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church:’ these are the four marks of the church. They are inseparable and intrinsically linked to each other. Our Lord Himself, in founding the church, marked it with these characteristics, which reflect its essential features and mission. Through the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church fulfills these marks.”⁵⁰ While churches

⁴⁸Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 28-29.

⁴⁹ R. Zolawma, “Development of Ecclesiology during the First Four Centuries AD” *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 47 no. June 1, 2015: 76-105.

⁵⁰ William Saunders, “The Four Marks of the Church,” Catholic Education Resource Center, accessed June 27, 2021, <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-four-marks-of-the-church.html>.

that confess the historical creeds of faith agree that the four marks are indispensable to ecclesiology, there are other elements that each local congregation embraces as a part of their vocational identity.

The biblical foundation for the ecclesiology for Morris Brown AME Church can be found in the familiar response that a lawyer gives Jesus concerning what he must do to gain eternal life in Mark 10. When Jesus asks him what is written in the law, he simplifies the commandments by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27, NRSV). This love of God and neighbor provides the foundation of what it means to be the church at Morris Brown AME Church. In the traditional order of worship in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the summary of the decalogue was a permanent fixture every Sunday morning. The continual repetition was provided a foundation for the ecclesiology at Morris Brown AME Church.

The first primary tenet of Morris Brown AME Church's ecclesiology is a Christ-centered congregation. The most formidable relationship that we have is our relationship with God. Everything that we do both outside and inside the church must reflect our commitment to Jesus Christ. Christ is the lens through which we can see everything else. Morris Brown AME Church historically has a very high christology. This continues to be the reality because when I assembled a committee three years ago to rearticulate the vision of the congregation, the first clause in the statement is "Morris Brown AME Church is a Christ-centered congregation." The second primary tenet that forms our Christian identity is based upon the first. It is our relationship with Jesus Christ that

informs our mission and ministry in the surrounding community. This is not unique to Morris Brown AME Church, but it is a reality for many churches, especially in the black church tradition.

Like many other churches in the black church tradition, Morris Brown understands that salvation must be expansive. Salvation is much larger than what happens at the end of our physical lives. Still, salvation includes having adequate healthcare, proper places to live, quality formal education, and the opportunity to have a career to support our families. It is the relationship with Christ that compels us to be actively engaged in the surrounding community. These two principles have provided a foundation for Morris Brown's ecclesiology from its inception. As we experience gentrification on the Charleston peninsula, the ecclesiology of Morris Brown AME Church is affected. While our love for God is indirectly affected by our gentrifying neighborhood, our involvement in the community is directly affected. Charleston is experiencing changes on multiple fronts that are shared by many metropolitan areas in the United States.

A distinguishing characteristic of Charleston is the number of post-secondary institutions in the immediate vicinity. Among them are the College of Charleston, the Citadel, Charleston Southern University, Trident Technical College, and the Medical University of South Carolina. As it relates to Morris Brown AME Church, is very close proximity to the College of Charleston. Sharing the neighborhood with this institution is contributing to the disruption of gentrification that affects the church. "The College," as it is referred to in Charleston, is expanding throughout the Peninsula as it increasingly caters to a growing number of out-of-state students. Florida says,

Universities and colleges and their affiliated medical centers—so-called eds and meds—are another channel through which public investment attracts educated, affluent residents back to cities. Both public universities and private research universities receive substantial federal support, and many offer housing or housing subsidies to university faculty and staff, who often live in and spur gentrification in adjacent neighborhoods.⁵¹

Morris Brown AME Church is close enough to the College of Charleston that there are numerous faculty members, staff, and students that rent parking spaces in the church lot. Throughout the neighborhood, the College of Charleston is purchasing vast amounts of property, causing the property value to drastically increase for many people who have spent their lives in this neighborhood. This increase in property value is pricing some people out of their homes because they can no longer afford to pay property taxes or afford the increases in living costs.

The irony of this reality is that the College of Charleston is a public institution. Therefore, it receives public funds that enable it to intensify the effects of gentrification that are creating challenges for the church and the surrounding community. The paradox is that people in this neighborhood are indirectly financing an institution through their property taxes, which are pricing them out of their own homes. Gentrification is formed by much larger forces including large-scale investments, both public and private, that affect the choices that individuals make. Consequently, they alter the paths of neighborhoods and communities.

The proximity of this neighborhood to the College of Charleston makes the property attractive to the institution to secure these houses for their expanding

⁵¹ Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 66.

enrollment. Many of the large old homes close to the church have been renovated to provide lodging for students at the College of Charleston. Houses that once belonged to black people on the Peninsula of Charleston have now become a reminder of a gentrifying neighborhood that has caused many former residents to be priced out and exiled from their communities.

This affects the church in multiple ways. First, many of the longstanding church members who lived in this neighborhood have been displaced. Even though many of them continue to travel to the Peninsula to attend church activities, the distance continues to affect participation in congregational life. Secondly, with the inclusion of the college students living next to the church, there has been an increase in the number of alcohol bottles and debris deposited on the church property, including the parking lot. Less than a year ago, some college students had a party next door to the church where they are renting a living space. During the party, some of the attendees began to throw beer bottles on the roof of the church's educational building. The occurrence damaged the roof, causing it to leak. The cameras at the church were able to capture the incident. Situations like this create resentment for some of the church members and the new neighbors around the church. Incidents like this can affect the ecclesiology of Morris Brown AME Church that has been so community-related.⁵² In a congregation that has traditionally consisted of people from the neighborhood, it is essential not to allow

⁵² After the racialized massacre occurred at Mother Emanuel AME Church in 2015, which is located only about five minutes from Morris Brown AME Church, many cameras were added to the church to assist with the security of the building.

differences with the new neighbors to prevent us from being more intentional about reengaging with the community.

The members of Morris Brown AME Church are divided with their reactions to gentrification. Some are willing to embrace the new neighbors moving into the community. These members seek out opportunities to evangelize the new neighbors spiritually and engage them socially. These members are optimistic about making a difference in the lives of others living around the church. Even when these people have differences in race and ethnicity, other members are not as optimistic about engaging and evangelizing the new neighbors in the community. Baum-Snow and Hartley say, "While by definition, it improves neighborhood quality by some measures, gentrification may also be onerous for incumbent residents. Rising rents may more than offset any potential increases in local amenities as valued by low-income incumbents; such incumbents may thus be strictly worse in the presence of moving costs."⁵³

Many of these more pessimistic people have been displaced or negatively impacted by the gentrifying of the neighborhood. These members see a direct correlation between the dismantling of the familiar community and the new people who are moving into it. A reality of gentrification is that the gentrifiers, those coming into the neighborhood, and the residents, those being pushed out of the neighborhood, have very different perceptions of the changes that are taking place. These negative perceptions

⁵³ Nathaniel Baum-Snow and Daniel Hartley, "Accounting for Central Neighborhood Change 1980-2010," *Journal of Urban Economics*, volume 117, May 2020.

may impact Morris Brown AME Church's ecclesiology with being a church that is actively involved in the surrounding community.

Nevertheless, in recent days, the ecclesiology of Morris Brown AME Church has been most visible through the inclusion of a Blessing Box, hosting a gospel rap concert, and co-sponsoring a COVID-19 vaccination clinic. Three months ago, Morris Brown placed a Blessing Box in the parking lot in the rear of the church. This a part of the Lowcountry Blessing Box Project that is a community collaboration to address the lack of food security in our community. The premise behind the project is “Blessing Boxes are anonymous donations sites stocked with non-perishable food items, basic toiletries, baby supplies, and anything else that might be considered a blessing to someone who finds themselves in need.”⁵⁴ The simple rule of the blessing box is “Leave what you can, take what you need.” They are patterned after Little Free Libraries that began in 2017 where people can donate books in boxes for their neighbors to have and read. The free libraries have become a movement that covers the Lowcountry of South Carolina and beyond. The inclusion of the Blessing Box has allowed the generosity of the church members to come to the forefront.

There is never a time that I come to the church without seeing church members bring non-perishable items in the box to bless our neighbors in need. There are also many times that I can see to our neighbors, from the monitor in my office, be able to secure

⁵⁴ “Who We Are,” Lowcountry Blessing Box Project. Accessed May 7, 2021. <https://www.chsblessingbox.org/>.

much-needed items for their family. One afternoon as I was leaving the church, one of the neighbors stopped me to express the blessings that the Blessing Box is having on their family. It was listening to their story that I was able to see the impact that gentrification is having on their lives and how the Blessing Box is an effort to alleviate some of the challenges in the community.

The inclusion of the Blessing Box at Morris Brown AME Church highlights the challenges in a gentrifying community. As the neighborhood continues to change, it is apparent that several neighbors are continuing to struggle financially with the rising cost of living and housing market.



Figure 1. This is the Blessing Box that is located at Morris Brown AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Another opportunity that we had that expressed the ecclesiology of Morris Brown AME Church was the gospel rap concert that we hosted on March 27, 2021. The event

was planned to correspond to the spring break in the Charleston County School District. Amid a pandemic, there were specific protocols that we had to follow to have a great time and to keep everyone as safe as possible. The event was held outside in the church's parking lot, where everyone was able to maintain social distancing. Increased precautions were taken with food preparation, with the food being individually packaged. The media ministry was given separate microphones to remain at a safe distance from each other. The concert was especially catered to the young people who were able to bring a friend with them. One of the exciting things is that people in the neighborhood came to the church parking lot to enjoy the ministry that was being provided. The name of the gospel rap group is Gr8ful, and all the songs are based on the Gospel. The concert gave an excellent opportunity to minister to the surrounding community.

The third way that I have been able to see the ecclesiology of Morris Brown AME Church recently was through co-sponsoring a vaccination clinic with the City of Charleston and the Fetter Health Care Network on April 21, 2021. The original plan of the clinic was to use the Johnson and Johnson Vaccine so the participants would not have to try to come back for a second dose of the vaccine. However, about a week before the clinic, Johnson and Johnson was discontinued over concerns with clotting, and so we had to use the Pfizer vaccine. I was encouraged that 17 members of Morris Brown AME Church volunteered to serve at the clinic. Members of Morris Brown provided the following services: parking assistance, registration, exterior, and interior crowd control, monitoring those who received the vaccine, and the church provides the lunch for both the staff and volunteers.

Although I am encouraged by our participation in these three ministry opportunities, I am concerned that we may be so focused on treating symptoms that we may be missing the more significant opportunities to address the systemic sources of the illness. Morris Brown AME Church has a history of participating in movements that led to making a difference on the surface and leading to systemic changes in the community. The foundation of our ecclesiology has been rooted in relationships with both God and our neighbors. The three ministry opportunities that I mentioned are the result of our relationship with God. However, someone does not necessarily have to have meaningful relationships with neighbors to provide items for the Blessing Box, have a gospel rap concert in the church parking lot, or provide vaccines amid a global pandemic. Nevertheless, to challenge and change systemic injustices, our relationship with God must provide a foundation for intentional relationships with our neighbors.

Chapter Three: A Renewed Vision of Black Church Ecclesiology

With contemporary challenges relating to gentrification, the black church must articulate a renewed ecclesiology. The historical way that the black church has existed primarily within black communities is no longer the case. Walter Fluker echoes the assertion of Eddie Glaude, "The Black Church Is Dead."⁵⁵ Glaude writes, "The Black Church, as we've known it or imagined it, is dead. Of course, many African Americans still go to church... But the idea of this venerable institution as central to black life and as a repository for the social and moral conscience of the nation has all but disappeared."⁵⁶ This does not mean that the black church is no longer relevant, but it means that the black church has to be able to take its indispensable experience and reach a broader audience.

The traditional black church ecclesiology that has existed from the beginning of the country needs to be rearticulated to address new challenges. Fluker says,

The black church, as we have known, loved, and imagined it, is haunted by an old ghost that has shape-shifted into the language of post-racialism; by extension, perhaps the God whom African Americans have come to know, love, imagine, and worship in wonderfully creative and ecstatic styles is in conspiracy with the ghost; and thus this idea of God reinforces the ghost's racial haunting and possession of many of the church leaders and scholars who are its loyal defenders.⁵⁷

The black church has a unique way of being able to address people on the margins of life.

Three specific areas that the black church can address are those on the margins

⁵⁵ Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

⁵⁶Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

⁵⁷ Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

concerning hospitality, healthcare, and housing. Even though communities and neighborhoods are changing, the black church can be as relevant now if it is willing to rearticulate its ecclesiology.

Hospitality

Throughout its history, the black church has embraced a racially inclusive ecclesiology that promoted hospitality. Historically, this is a remarkable reality; many churches did not permit black people to become church members. Some churches even swayed the scriptures to reduce black people to a subservient place in the larger society. Even though blacks were excluded in many churches, hospitality has been a primary tenet in the black church ecclesiology. As we articulate the renewed ecclesiology of the black church, hospitality must remain a tenet of black ecclesiology. The black church cannot permit some of the social and political challenges to cause it to retreat in being inhospitable. The hospitality of the black church will be a valuable component to confront some of the difficulties associated with gentrification. Throughout the history of the black church, its theology of hospitality and addressing the unique needs of the black community have not been mutually exclusive.

Many early black church leaders understood that if they were going to truly be able to minister to the needs of the black community that there had to be a certain amount of religious autonomy for black churches. The specific needs of black people would not be addressed when white church members set the agenda for the church. Warnock says, "For reasons of history and theology, the burden [of the black church] carries with it an

extraordinary freight, and the question has itself a distinctive resonance when the church is one built by slaves and formed, from its beginning, at the center of an oppressed community's fight for personhood and freedom."⁵⁸ Yet even with being mistreated, the black church valued hospitality. At its core, hospitality through creating a place of belonging has been a fundamental vocation of the black church tradition. This has been realized from the secret prayer meetings held by enslaved persons on plantations to the organization during the Civil Rights Movement. The black church has played a significant role for marginalized people to understand belonging and what it means to be in community. Hospitality has been so essential to the black church because black people have not historically been shown hospitality or found a place of belonging in this country.

Many blacks were brought to this country through the Middle Passage and entered through the bonds of chattel slavery. In his lecture, Molefi Kete Asante says, "One might claim that the leading opinion-makers, philosophers, and theologians of the European enslavers organized the category of blackness as property value. We Africans were, in effect, without soul, spirit, emotions, desires, and rights. Chattel could have neither mind nor spirit."⁵⁹ The bitter reality of chattel slavery is the personhood was sacrificed for the acquisition of property. There was no hospitality extended to black people who entered the United States, and there was no sense of belonging. There was nothing but hostility

⁵⁸ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church* 1.

⁵⁹ Molefi Kete Asante, "Slavery Remembrance Day Memorial Lecture 2007" (lecture, Liverpool Town Hall, 21 August 2007).

and hatred that confronted black people; therefore, the black church embraced a theology of hospitality and belonging.

This concept of hospitality was a central theme in the Hebrew bible's recapitulation of the religious journey of the Children of Israel. Leviticus 19:33-34 (NRSV) says, "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." Although black people were not shown hospitality when they entered this country, they used their experience to show hospitality through the black church. These congregations were not exclusionary, but they went to great lengths to extend hospitality to everyone who entered the sanctuary's doors and resided in the surrounding neighborhood. In other words, the black church offered an opportunity for black people that most of the country did not.

Over the years, the hospitality that was such a vital tenet of the black church has been diminished. Moreover, the lack of hospitality has contributed to the disconnect of many congregations from the surrounding community. In his book, *New Wine New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations*, F. Douglas Powe, Jr. says, "Some congregations will take offence and argue, 'We are still missional focused. We feed the hungry and provide services for those in need.' This is true. The challenge, however, is in valuing the identity of those being helped and not

marginalizing them.”⁶⁰ Powe makes the argument that some congregations have used evangelism to the exclusion of hospitality. While the hungry may be getting fed and those who are homeless are getting their necessities met, however, hospitality is missing. In recent years, there has been a recommitment within the Christian church to regenerate the church’s focus on mission and outreach. Nevertheless, there continues to be many local churches that fail to intentionally evaluate and enhance their ministries and systems for hospitality and belonging within their houses of worship.

Too many congregations contribute to the marginalization of the most vulnerable in society by not valuing them enough to extend hospitality and giving them a place to belong. The church cannot perpetuate the age-old distinction between the haves and the have-nots. Moreover, the critical tenet of hospitality has contributed to the decline in church membership and participation. It "seems to be the case that churches, including black congregations, often struggle to embrace those who are different than the members who worship there every week. This takes different forms based on the ministry context of a local congregation. There may be a difference in social class, economic status, political affiliation, and even race and ethnicity."⁶¹ When hospitality seems to be the strongest in the church, it seems to have been when the demographics in the congregation and community had many things in common. Even congregations with people of the same race but different socio-political levels have struggled to show hospitality. In

⁶⁰ F. Douglas Powe, Jr., *New Wine New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 35.

⁶¹ Detric Cowser, “Plenty Good Room: Reclaiming Hospitality in the Black Church” (D.Min. thesis, Emory University, 2017).

addition, there have been times that the changing of the neighbor has resulted in a lack of hospitality that leads to a disconnect with the neighborhood.

The realities of gentrification expose a problem that churches, including black churches, have with showing hospitality in changing neighborhoods. Letty M. Russell, in her book entitled *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, says, "Most people are comfortable with hospitality when limited to the familiar, but when we begin to explore the true dimensions of Christian hospitality, we tend to compartmentalize our responsibility as Christians."⁶² In other words, it seems that the decrease in hospitality is not as visible when the congregation and community are made up of the same racial and ethnic groups. It is more visible when new white neighbors in a higher socio-economic class move into gentrify black neighborhoods. Detric Cowser says, "Hospitality has everything to do with how people feel—do people feel comfortable and 'at home' physically, psychologically, and spiritually? Creating a welcoming and hospitable home involves everything from the appearance of the space to the very heart of the people in the congregation."⁶³ Many urban black churches across the country are experiencing the challenges of gentrification that are greatly intensified by the lack of hospitality.

Even with its recent struggles, the Black Church continues to possess within its history the values necessary to recapture a vivacious spirit of Christian hospitality. The black church must get back to some of the basics to reconnect to a gentrifying

⁶² Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 80.

⁶³ Detric Cowser, "Plenty Good Room: Reclaiming Hospitality in the Black Church" (D.Min. thesis, Emory University, 2017).

community. The concept of Christian hospitality divorces hospitality from being shown only to certain people from certain places. However, it calls the members of the black church to recapture the spirit of hospitality that their ancestors were willing to show to each other and others, even those who mistreated them based on racial discrimination and prejudice. If the black church reconnects with changing communities, it must rededicate itself to showing hospitality. Cowser says, “Some would argue that we live in an extremely individualistic society, and often we do not seek or recognize opportunities to engage others by sharing the love of God. Overall, 'A Practice of Reclaiming Hospitality' helps to blur the barriers and dividing lines that often exist between us and those whom we encounter.”⁶⁴ The black community has become much less communal throughout the generations. There was a time in American history when black people were mainly in the same socio-political class. This is no longer the case, and the black church, just like the larger community, has become more individualistic. As a result, contemporary members are less likely to share their faith through hospitality.

Hospitality is an essential component for the black church to share the valuable gifts that it has to offer to the larger church. Christine D. Pohl, in her book entitled *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, asks the question, “If we use hospitality as a lens through which to examine our homes, churches, jobs, schools, health care, and politics, might we see them differently?”⁶⁵ The hospitality of the black

⁶⁴Dedric Cowser, “Plenty Good Room: Reclaiming Hospitality in the Black Church” (Doctor of Ministry thesis, Emory University, 2017).

⁶⁵ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 150.

church provides an indispensable lens through which we cannot only understand Christianity but also see so many of the social injustices. Warnock says, “The black church, born in radical protest and shaped by revivalistic piety, has had, even at its best, a divided mind, that is, an ambiguous relationship with the radical theological implications of its long witness against the sins of the social order.”⁶⁶ For this reason, the hospitality of the black church is essential because it has a perspective unmatched by any other institution. The black church had to embrace a unique hypostatic union between piety and protest. It is interesting that innovative witness of enslaved blacks was influenced by both the politics of the American Revolution and the piety of the Great American Revivals. The revivals emphasized an individual conversion experience as a conduit to internal freedom. The political revelation which was based on the Declaration of Independence gave birth to external liberation.

This unique experience has much to offer to the larger community, but it will not come to the forefront without hospitality. The reason that hospitality is so important is that, according to Walter Fluker, America will eventually become a post-racial society. The "term 'post-racial America' is presented here as a postulate that is subject to argument and investigation: that the United States is or will be at some time in the future free from preferences, bigotry, discrimination, and prejudices that are based on race."⁶⁷ In other words, while America will continue to be a racialized society, there will come a time when race will not be the most determining factor in society. However, even at that point,

⁶⁶ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 22.

⁶⁷ Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

the black church continues to have outstanding contributions that only it can contribute. This perspective of Fluker is becoming more applicable as urban communities continue to gentrify. Nevertheless, the experience of the black church has so much to offer the larger church and community. Fluker says, "The black church, however problematic that term may be for some people, must be clear about its mission because its soul and the nation's salvation depend on it."⁶⁸ The history of the black church has much to contribute to understanding the new sociopolitical situations that are being formed. This is especially significant to those who find themselves on the margins of society.

Ministry on the Margins

A second significant element of articulating a renewed vision of black church theology is ministering to those on the margins. From the earliest existence of the black presence in America, black people have been on the margins of society. Blacks have found themselves on the margins related to economics, healthcare, formal education, and many other areas in American society. Warnock says, "Black Christians saw the contradiction between their status and worth in the divine economy and their social status in a so-called Christian nation."⁶⁹ The black church has always lived within a dual reality. First, it had to reconcile its identity through Jesus Christ that incorporates them in the Family of God. Still, it also had to understand their status in a society founded on

⁶⁸ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 188.

⁶⁹Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 24.

"Christian principles." Consequently, the black church has a unique experience with ministering to those on the margins of society.

In this endeavor, Warnock speaks of what he calls the Threefold Task of the Church, which is realized explicitly through the black church:

1. "First, it proclaimed the reality of divine liberation."
2. "Second, the black church of the nineteenth century actively participated in the struggle for liberation."
3. "Third, even with the nineteenth-century black church's contradictions, particularly with respect to issues of gender, it did provide 'a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality.'"⁷⁰

This Threefold Task of the Church begins with the black church proclaiming the reality of divine liberation. Amid black people being oppressed in the United States, the black church proclaimed a divine freedom that directly contradicts being enslaved in America and the Western world. The black church gave the larger Christian church a glimpse that freedom was a divine theological reality. Unlike slaveowners who often manipulated scripture to keep enslaved people content with their condition, the black church provided a hermeneutic that freedom and liberation give the foundation of the gospel.

Secondly, in the nineteenth century, the black church actively participated in the struggles for liberation. The battle was not just for the civil rights of black people, but it also included the human rights of all people. The black church was fighting to abolish the evil institution of slavery by using such vehicles as the Underground Railroad. The

⁷⁰ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 27-28.

Underground Railroad was a network people, both black and white, that offered hospitality and resources to escaped enslaved people to move from the south to places that did not legalize the evil institution of slavery. While the exact dates of the existence of the Underground Railroad are not known, it was in operation from the late eighteenth century to the United States Civil War. There were several stops on the railroad that were inside of black church buildings. The black church often gave resources for enslaved people to be able to escape to freedom. These opportunities would place hands and feet on the faith of black church parishioners. The black church was a tangible example that liberation was not just something preached about in the pulpit, but it was something that the church should engage in so that those held in bondage could be liberated.

Thirdly, the black church did have some missteps in terms of gender. Even though the black church was very critical of racial injustices, it was largely silent regarding gender inequality. In fact, in many ways, the black church perpetuated gender inequality when it came to recognizing women being called to preach, getting ordained, or holding leadership positions within the congregation. Warnock points out that even with this gender bias, in the nineteenth century, the black church provided a visible example of how the liberating message of the gospel could be lived out. The black church established vibrant denominations and local congregations that were free from racial and ethnic bias. This was quite an accomplishment considering that in the same century, both the Methodist and Baptist denomination had split over slavery. Interestingly, these were two of the most progressive denominations when preaching to enslaved people and

advocating for more racial justice. Nevertheless, the black church gave a real example of what racial equality could look like inside the Christian church.

These connections to liberation influenced the black church's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century. The Civil Rights Movement was an organized response for social justice primarily during the 1950s and 1960s for black Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. Even though the 13th Amendment, following the Civil War, officially abolished slavery, it did not end discrimination against black people. These people continued to endure the devastating effects of racism and discrimination, especially in the southern part of the country. Nevertheless, by the middle of the twentieth century, black Americans had endured more than enough racialized prejudice and attacks against them. Along with some white Americans, they organized and began an unparalleled fight for justice and equality that lasted for more than two decades. The black church played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement that led to legislation being passed, the inclusion of affirmative action, and other measures that tried to improve the lives of the people on the margins.

As a result, the black church has over two centuries of experience with ministering to people on the margins. Warnock says the black church historically provided “A distinctive voice on behalf of other voiceless peoples around the world, even while black people were negotiating overwhelming odds stacked against their own lives within the American empire.”⁷¹ This reality equips the contemporary black church to be able to make significant contributions in gentrified communities. Even when so many black

⁷¹Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 28.

people are priced out of their homes in the city, the urban black church continues to have opportunities to provide a distinctive voice on behalf of voiceless people. This is a tremendous opportunity for the black church to continue to be present in a neighborhood where many of the original residents have been relegated to places outside the city. The black church can provide a consistent voice to speak for those who have been forced out.

At its core, gentrification exposes the continued economic and social discrepancies that continue to be present in a racialized society. Consequently, racism has a direct correlation in its relation to gentrification. Fluker says,

There are legions of issues and challenges that threaten the future of our churches and communities, like veritable Goliaths standing on the mountainsides shouting profanities and mocking the powerlessness of the poor, but none is more important than attending to the habitation of the old ghost that is always present, even when it appears to have left, because it is an integral part of our national and cultural imaginaries.⁷²

Although many people are affected by the economic realities of gentrification, black people and other minorities are disproportionately affected.

This continues to place the black church in an ideal position to minister to those on the margins. Warnock says, “If mission is tied fundamentally to being, and the mission of the church is liberation, then the church is called to assume a posture of ontological over-againstness as the mark of an authentic Christian witness in every moment of its existence in a sinful and unjust world.”⁷³ The black church understands that the true mission of the church has a foundation in liberation. Therefore, even though communities

⁷² Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

⁷³ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 182-183.

and neighborhoods may change, the mission of the Christian church remains the same. No section of the Christian church is more equipped than the black church to seek liberation for the people on the margins.

With this reality, Fluker says, “If healing is to come to America and the world, it will not come from the children of the builders of the American Tower of Babel (the children of the fathers who have eaten sour grapes and whose teeth are decayed); rather, it must come from ‘stones that the builders rejected.’”⁷⁴ This is an interesting reality considering the intentional biases that have been intentionally shown to the communities of poor in this country. However, Fluker is suggesting that God specializes in using the marginalized to build new worlds and create new realities.

Fluker points out that the black church is essential to help facilitate the healing and wholeness that our country needs. As the stone that others have rejected, the black church possesses valuable insight on how to minister to, and on behalf, of those on the margins of society. White theologians are at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding black theology and ecclesiology. They do not have the experience of being marginalized by slavery and segregation because of their color. Even with the United States being the wealthiest country globally, there continue to be challenges with providing quality healthcare to every citizen.

⁷⁴ Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

According to a National Health Interview Survey, approximately 30 million residents in the United States lacked health insurance in the first half of 2020.⁷⁵ This is a significant realization considering there is a direct correlation between having health insurance and obtaining adequate healthcare. Healthcare that treats illness and disease and extends the preventative measure to keep individuals from getting sick. Similarly, there are other people on the margins who are underinsured. While these people have some form of health insurance, they have difficulty affording co-pays to go to the doctor, getting prescription medications, and accessing medical testing and procedures.

The black church has a history of ministering to people who have been uninsured and underinsured. During slavery, it was difficult for enslaved people to get any kind of quality healthcare if they received healthcare at all. Most black people were considered property, so the medical care they received mainly depended on how that would affect the slaveowner financially. Then during the days of sharecropping and segregation, black people, especially in the South, were denied the same healthcare that white people were provided. There were even times that black bodies were used as experiments and infected with certain diseases. The most familiar of these instances was the Tuskegee Experiment. This occurred in 1932 when the United States Public Health Service began working with the Tuskegee Institute to research the history of syphilis.

The Tuskegee Experiment involves a “Study initially involved 600 Black men – 399 with syphilis, 201 who did not have the disease. Participants’ informed consent was not

⁷⁵ “Trends in the U. S. Uninsured Population, 2010-2020,” Office of Health Policy, Issue Brief, February 11, 2021, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/private/pdf/265041/trends-in-the-us-uninsured.pdf>.

collected. Researchers told the men they were being treated for ‘bad blood,’ a local term used to describe several ailments, including syphilis, anemia, and fatigue.”⁷⁶ Although 11 years later, penicillin became the primary medicine for treating syphilis, and it became widely available, it was not offered to the black men who had been infected with the disease. Furthermore, the study was not officially concluded until the 1970s. This kind of treatment and abuse continues to make many black people distrustful of the healthcare community. Sadly, this distrust is a contributing factor to the lack of vaccinations in the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the black church ministered to these black people who were not offered access to quality healthcare and then victimized by the industry that should have provided care. This gives the black church a unique perspective to minister to those on the margin and lack healthcare.

Similarly, the black church has experience working with those on the margins who have been denied access to quality formal education. A primary way that enslaved persons in this country were mistreated was the denial of formal education. To manipulate enslaved people, it was even against the law to learn how to read and write. Not only was this a social handicap, but it also limited enslaved people from being able to read and study the bible. This made it much easier for the scripture to be manipulated so that enslaved people would try to be contained within the system that was in place. Even after slavery was ended after the United States Civil War, there continued to be

⁷⁶ “The Tuskegee Timeline,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm>.

significant disparities in education for black people. The Plessy Decision incredibly defined this part of American history.

This 1896 decision by the United States Supreme Court upheld racial segregation. The case concerned an 1892 incident where Homer Plessy, an African American train passenger, refused to sit in a segregated car for black people. When the Supreme Court rejected Plessy's argument that his constitutional rights were violated, it legitimized a legal distinction between black people and white people in the United States. Consequently, the restrictions of separate public accommodations, including the Jim Crow legislation, became a routine. These distinctions were made in all parts of life, including education.

Growing up in South Georgia, I often heard the accounts of my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents talk about growing up in the segregated South. They would talk about what it was like having to go to separate waiting rooms in the doctors' offices and hospitals, sit upstairs in the movie theater, and go to segregated schools. My family would speak about the dedication of their teachers that were very innovative because they had to use the "hand-me-down" books from the white schools. Even when the state of Georgia sent funds to build a new black school in Cairo, the local school board mismanaged those funds to build a new football stadium at the all-white Cairo High School.

There was not a high school for my maternal grandmother to attend in Cairo, and so after eighth grade, black students had to move to a larger place to complete their secondary education. In my grandmother's case, she moved 250 miles away to finish high

school at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia. Nevertheless, her perseverance led to her becoming an educator.

Throughout the history of the black church, formal education has been a primary concern for the people on the margins. The black church established some of the oldest Historically Black Colleges, and Universities (HBCUs) founded to provide education for black students. In the case of the AME Church, there continue to be HBCUs such as Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina, Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia, and Edward Waters University in Jacksonville, Florida are named for the first three bishops of the AME Church. The black church has a history of advocating for equality in formal education and creating opportunities for students to attain college degrees. Now in gentrifying communities, there are specific neighborhoods where the schools are performing very well academically. However, there are other schools in the same school districts in different areas that are failing miserably. The black church has a history where it can advocate for quality education for those on the margins. Education is a crucial component that can change the socio-economic status of families.

A final way that the black church can work with those on the margins is around housing. With most black people coming to the United States being enslaved, they were relegated to living in "slave quarters" that were substandard living conditions. When slavery ended in the 1860s in the United States, black people were placed in a difficult position. Even though they were legally liberated, many of them did not have housing or the essential resources to survive independently. Sherman's Field Order No. 15 was the first attempt for reparations for newly emancipated black people. It was on

January 16, 1865, during the United States Civil War (1861-65), Union general William T. Sherman issued his Special Field Order No. 15, which confiscated as Union property a strip of coastline stretching from Charleston, South Carolina, to the St. John's River in Florida, including Georgia's Sea Islands the mainland thirty miles in from the coast. The order redistributed the roughly 400,000 acres of land to newly freed Black families in forty-acre segments.⁷⁷

This order from General Sherman provided the foundation for what we commonly refer to as "40 acres and a Mule." But, unfortunately, even though the proposal was made, the promise was never realized.

With southern whites being cash-rich but land poor, and southern black having agricultural skills but lacking primary resources, this led to a sharecropping system across the southern part of the United States. Sharecropping is a system where farm owners allow tenants to use the land for agriculture in exchange for a share of the crop. This agreement encouraged the tenants to work to produce the largest possible harvest to ensure that they could maintain their place on the land and not be forced out for other people looking for a similar opportunity. Southern white people were land rich but cash poor. Former enslaved black people had the labor and skills for agricultural work.

This system gave newly emancipated black people the opportunity to solve the housing challenges and secure the essential resources that they had not had to provide in this country before. Even in sharecropping with both the blacks and whites being at the bottom of the social order, there were still biases that presented increased challenges to the black people. High

⁷⁷ Barton Myers, "Sherman's Field Order No. 15," New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed October 9, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/shermans-field-order-no-15>

Interest rates, unpredictable harvests, and unscrupulous landlords and merchants often kept tenant farm families severely indebted, requiring the debt to be carried over until the next year or the next. Laws favoring landowners made it difficult or even illegal for sharecroppers to sell their crops to others besides their landlord or prevented sharecroppers from moving if they were indebted to their landlord.”⁷⁸

The sharecropping system finally faded away in the 1940s.

In the early and mid-20th century, housing in most areas was racially segregated. In both urban and rural municipalities, there were primarily white neighborhoods and black neighborhoods. There was often resistance in both the north and the South when traditionally white areas were integrated. Additionally, many times blacks were often at a financial disadvantage. They would often earn less money and would not have the benefit of wealth. As a result, many times, there would be many blacks who were relegated to low-income housing. This was often in apartments of ghettos in urban areas, and in smaller towns, this would often be housing projects. These housing units were in the regions that were more economically disadvantaged. Therefore, these areas were inundated with criminal activities that included illegal narcotics and prostitution.

In many cases, when many black people moved into white urban neighborhoods, there were issues with white flight where white people would move to suburbs. Currently, gentrification reverses this occurrence where those gentrifying the areas that are primarily white and displacing people from their homes. As a result, housing is becoming an issue where many people are no longer able to afford to live in their homes. With all the unique opportunities that the black church has with dealing with challenges

⁷⁸ “Sharecropping,” Slavery By Another Name, Public Broadcasting System, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/sharecropping/>.

in housing, it continues to be uniquely qualified to minister to people on the margins with housing.

Comprehensive Understanding of Salvation

The final aspect of the renewed vision of black church ecclesiology is related to the comprehensive understanding of salvation. Since its inception, the black church has understood that salvation is so much larger than the afterlife. Warnock says, "It was black religion that was truly Christian, and it was Christian precisely because it had identified the gospel with the struggle for justice in society."⁷⁹ The black church understood that things in our earthly lives related to social injustices that we need to be saved. This reality has been impactful for how the black church has understood what it means to be the church.

Quoting Gayraud Wilmore, Warnock says, "Black religion has always concerned itself with the fascination of an incorrigibly religious people with the mystery of God, but it has been equally concerned with the yearning of a despised and subjugated people for freedom—freedom from the religious, economic, social and political domination that whites have exercised over blacks since the beginning of the African slave trade."⁸⁰ Consequently, it is this desire for human freedom that is expressed in both religious institutions and Christian theological terms that are defining characteristics in the black religious experience in this country.

⁷⁹ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 59.

⁸⁰ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 97.

The black church understands that liberation is at the heart of the salvific work of the church. At its core, salvation is freedom from poverty, inadequate housing, freedom from discrimination and prejudice, and ultimately freedom from final death. The challenging experiences of black people in America have made this reality central to the ecclesiology of the black church. The black church never had the liberty to focus solely on salvation related to physical death. Fluker says,

As we will see, black churches must employ the Holy Ghost—that Spirit who helps us to see our somebodyness and our possibilities—against the ghost of post-racialism, the ‘unholy ghost.’ In this way, black church leaders will be empowered to use tools of the spirit to embrace hope in the strangeness of its possibility and combat the tragic dilemma of failing to believe in the ultimate justice of the human drama.⁸¹

Without an expanded view of the salvation of the black church would not have been relevant in the lives of black people in this country. Throughout the American experience, the black church has expressed salvation through efforts to abolish slavery, the fight for civil rights, involvement in the political system, biblical preaching, evangelism, and bible study. All of these have been essential for the salvific work of the black church.

The experience informs this comprehensive understanding of the salvation of black people in this country and by the hermeneutic of the black church. From its inception, Exodus has been a foundational biblical paradigm that informed the ethical and moral direction of the black church and her practices. This biblical account of the Children of Israel being enslaved in Egypt was very informative for black people enslaved in

⁸¹ Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

America. There was an obvious connection where they were able to identify with the people in this biblical narrative.

The black church understood that the work for the people of God to be liberated from bondage is the work of salvation. While the work of liberation is connected to salvation, Fluker cautions that the entire identity of black people cannot be reduced to oppression. He says, “The exilic concept allows for honest appraisal of and response to white racism without, at the same time, having one’s own identity totally shaped by it; the dialectical understanding of existence need not become totally collapsed under the weight of oppression.”⁸² While I agree that black people cannot define themselves totally through the lens of enslavement, it is crucial to understand that it will be challenging to reach their God-given potential until liberty is achieved. Moreover, the privilege that the oppressor enjoys at the expense of the oppressed cannot be taken for granted.

Even as we move toward a post-racial society, the black church continues to have many valuable things to offer. God uses the unique perspective of the black church to speak to so many people on the margins. This is primarily significant for the reflection of the black church. Both ethics and theology seek answers to questions not only about God, but also about what it means to be beautiful and excellent. In a world that continues to change, primarily through the realities of gentrification, the black church speaks a language that those on the margins can understand. The black church encourages those on the margins to keep hope amid hurting.

⁸²Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

The black church encourages those on the margins to trust God in turmoil. The black church encourages those on the margins to persevere in problems. Fluker says, “Black church leaders must ask, what does this new season of worldwide struggle mean for us, for this nation, and for the world?”⁸³ Fluker ends his work by suggesting how the black church can move forward. He advocates that the black church must provide increased opportunities for a new generation of leaders, scholars, and youth activists in the institution. These are they who will be able to reflect upon the spiritual tools that will assist the black church in reaching across cultures and making a maximum impact. This new generation of black church leadership will rearticulate what it means to be the church to a changing community.

⁸³ Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted*.

Chapter Four: Practical Application of a Rearticulated Black Church Ecclesiology

The Distinctiveness of Black Church Ecclesiology

As we reflect on connecting Morris Brown AME Church to a gentrified community, three distinct components of black church ecclesiology will assist the congregation in this process. The first tenet is an expansive view of ecclesiology. A church with a holistic understanding of salvation will be involved in much more than simply trying to save souls. From the beginning of their presence in this country, black people have had to deal with unique challenges from any other group. The overwhelming majority of black people that came to America came as enslaved people. This institution in America was unlike any other place because it was chattel slavery. As a result, not only were the people enslaved but their children were also born enslaved. Even after slavery ended with the 13th Amendment, the mistreatment of black people did not end. Some systematic laws and practices were adopted to try to make blacks a permanent underclass in this country.

There was the Plessy Decision in 1896 that legalized separate but equal practices primarily in the southern part of the United States. There were segregated schools, hospitals, waiting rooms in doctors' offices, movie theaters, swimming pools, water fountains, and seating on public transportation. Even in northern cities where laws were not in place, blacks were often relegated to their neighborhoods. Blacks have traditionally been paid less than their white counterparts for doing the same work. As a result of the inferior treatment that blacks have faced in this country, the ecclesiology of the black

church has had to have a much more comprehensive understanding of salvation. The black church has not had the liberty to only focus on a salvation that is concerned with the afterlife. However, there are challenges and circumstances that black people face daily where salvation needs to be realized.

These realities have considerably fashioned what it means to be the church in a black church context. Salvation is getting sick and being able to receive quality healthcare. Salvation is having black children get the same access to quality education as their white counterparts. Salvation is being able to receive equal treatment with lending practices to become homeowners. Salvation is being able to gain career opportunities that have traditionally been denied to black people. Finally, salvation is being in a relationship with Jesus Christ that will give us eternal life when this life comes to an end. In the black church tradition, all these components are salvation important, and all are necessary for the church to live out its vocation. This expansive view of salvation continues to be needed in a gentrified community. Some people live in our community who need the comprehensive salvation that the black church embraces. These people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures will benefit from this distinctive ecclesial tenet that is essential to the black church.

A second component of the black church is hospitality. In a country that has always been hostile to accepting black people, the black church has a history of being hospitable to those who come through the doors of the black church. In the Hebrew Bible, the enslavement of Israel resonated with black people and their existence in this country. Consequently, the account of the Israelites became one of the formative passages

for black church ecclesiology. After the Lord liberated Israel from Egyptian captivity, hospitality became a primary theme for the covenant relationship that the Lord had with the Israelites. In Leviticus, the Lord instructs the Israelites, "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34, NRSV).

This passage is essential for two reasons. The first is that the Lord commands the Israelites that they shall not oppress them when a foreigner resides with them. In other words, the Children of Israel cannot treat foreigners the way they were treated. This verse was so impactful to the black church because it discloses that the Lord is opposed to oppressing those who reside within our community. Not only has the black church embraced this passage not to oppress others, but it has interpreted it as a mandate to fight for the liberation of all of those who are oppressed.

The second reason these verses are essential is that the black church internalizes it to treat others the way we want to be treated. The passage instructs Israel to treat the foreigner as a citizen and love the foreigner the same way they want to be treated. Then it gives a reminder that the Israelites themselves used to be foreigners in Egypt. This hospitality was expressed in these verses that provided a foundation of hospitality in the black church. In communities that continue to be racialized and fragmented, hospitality is needed—the ability to love others the way we want to be treated and show hospitality to others. Hospitality is crucial because it opens the doors to relationships that can break down so many of the divisions that we witness in our society.

The third component of black church ecclesiology is related to working with the people on the margins of society. The word marginalized has “the Latin root *margo*, [which means] ‘edge, brink, or border.’ Since the late 1920’s *marginalize* has referred not to a literal edge, but a powerless position just outside society.”⁸⁴ In other words, to be on the margins means that a particular group of people has been placed by another more influential group of people just outside the margins of what is defined as normal or acceptable. With all the discriminatory actions against black people in this country, the black church has become well-versed in ministry to the marginalized. The black church has a history of fighting for those who are unable to fight for themselves. From abolition to Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement and now to the Black Lives Matter Movement, the black church has lived out its vocation as the church by ministering to those on the margins.

The unique perspective of the black church positions it to continue to appeal to the marginalized. An exciting occurrence with gentrification is now the church has an opportunity to minister on behalf of the people on the margins who have been negatively affected by a changing community. Although gentrification is financial, it exposes the continued economic disparities in too many communities across the country. Many of which continue to be drawn across a line of racial and ethnic differences. The history of the black church renders a unique ecclesiology that can minister to those who have been

⁸⁴ “Marginalize,” Vocabulary.com, accessed September 20, 2021, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/marginalize>

displaced and disadvantaged by those that have influence. This black church ecclesiology expands outside of a racial demographic, but it can reach all of those who find themselves on the margins.

Why Ubuntu?

The use of the word “Ubuntu” is intentional in this process. Mungi Ngomane says, “Originating from a Southern African philosophy, [Ubuntu] encompasses all our aspirations about how to live life well, together.”⁸⁵ The word is commonly understood as “I am because we are.” It challenges us to acknowledge that our humanity is intimately connected to the humanity of others. Ubuntu calls us to embrace the reality that we must look outside of ourselves to find answers to the human condition. Someone cannot live in isolation and is unable to reach his or her full potential without other human beings. Ubuntu celebrates diversity and encompasses everyone regardless of race, color, and creed. Ngomane says, “Ubuntu is about reaching out to our fellow men and women, through whom we might find the comfort, contentment, and sense of belonging we crave.”⁸⁶ Ubuntu is essential in reconciliation because it reminds us that we cannot exist in isolation. The only way to truly appreciate who we are is to understand that we are only one part of immense humanity. It teaches us not only to embrace but to celebrate diversity. Through the lens of Christianity, God blesses the word through diversity, and

⁸⁵ Mungi Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu: Living Better Together, the African Way*. (New York: Harper Design, 2020), 13. Kindle.

⁸⁶ Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu* 14.

the more we build relationships, the more we can appreciate the divine complexities of God.

A second reason that the word Ubuntu is used is that it reminds us that transformation is achievable. A primary lesson of Ubuntu is that it demonstrates that change is possible even in the direst situations. The answers to the most pressing challenges in our community however must come from a collaboration people and not in isolation. It is amazing what we are able to find when we are willing to work together. However, we must understand that our humanity is inextricably connected to others, and building relationships can assist us in achieving reconciliation. Ngomane says, “My grandfather [Archbishop Desmond Tutu] supported the idea wholly. He thought that if people were to become ‘one’ again, they needed to share a common history. And you can only do that if you are allowed to experience what the other side has experienced. This includes listening to their thoughts, understanding their beliefs and ideas, and even empathizing with their motivations.”⁸⁷

For transformation to be realized, meaningful relationships must be formed. This is much more than shallow conversations, but relationships developed over time with intense listening, the exchange of ideas, and empathy regarding their motivation. This process will build a shared history where both parties can see how they fit into it. As a result, "Ubuntu teaches us that not everyone will share this view, however. We are all products of our culture and values, our upbringing and our life experience, our own

⁸⁷ Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu* 54.

particular set of character traits. And we naturally make sense of the world according to these factors.”⁸⁸ The better we can understand these factors, the more we will comprehend the world from multiple perspectives.

A third reason that Ubuntu is important is that it compels us to respect ourselves and other people. Perhaps the most essential foundational principle of Ubuntu is respect for both oneself and others. If someone respects himself or herself, they are much more apt to extend respect to other people. This is the primary tenet of Ubuntu; it encourages us to show respect instead of criticism. The respect must start with themselves and then extends to other people. If a person has respect for themselves, they are much more likely to show respect to others. Conversely, if someone does not respect themselves, there is virtually no chance that they will show respect to anyone else. This is vital because respect is the primary prerequisite for achieving reconciliation. Respect is also significant because it creates a path towards forgiveness. Ngomane says, “Ubuntu tells us forgiveness can give us back our self-respect and dignity. The spirit of Ubuntu counsels reaching outward and teaches us that it's not good to sit alone with the pain of bitterness. It demonstrates that forgiveness serves us well—not only as individuals but in our communities too.”⁸⁹ In its purest form, Ubuntu demonstrates the intricate connection between respect and forgiveness.

The Ubuntu groups will benefit both the congregation and the community. The groups will improve the congregation because the relationships that are formed will assist

⁸⁸ Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu* 68.

⁸⁹Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu* 137.

church members in knowing the neighbors who are moving into the surrounding community. The church members will have an opportunity to move past seeing unfamiliar people on the same street to know the people who share the same community. The Ubuntu groups will improve the community because the relationship will allow them to see the church's ministry. It will also enable the new neighbors to participate with the congregation to make the community a better place to live and worship. The relationships that will form because of the Ubuntu groups will connect the congregation to the community.

I was introduced to Ubuntu during my last year at Duke Divinity School. With the institution being predominantly white, the divinity school offered an Ubuntu group as an extracurricular activity to create an environment to foster racial reconciliation. Participation in the group was selective, and students had to express interest in joining. An equal number of black and white students were chosen after all the applications were submitted. There were two facilitators for the Ubuntu group at Duke Divinity School. A white facilitator was the Dean of Student Affairs, and a black facilitator was the head of Black Church Studies. The group was interesting, and often we had the opportunity to wrestle with biblical passages that had been used in controversial ways in the past. We had a chance to examine these passages and reinterpret these verses to bring healing and wholeness instead of division and discord.

There were some challenges in the group, not just between white and black group members but also between black participants. One of the most divisive texts between the black group members was the discussion of James 1:17 that says, "Every generous act of

giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." With God being described as the Father of lights and without shadow, this verse was often misused to discriminate against black people. The differences within the black participants were because some felt uncomfortable reading the verse. After all, it had been abused. Other black participants wanted to read the verse to show that the description of light, variations, and shadows had to do with evil deeds and not skin color. Finally, there was a resolution to use the verse in the larger Ubuntu group through many private conversations.

A highlight of the group was being able to have a dialogue with Ann Atwater.⁹⁰ A Durham native, she was very involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Durham with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She shared her firsthand experience of how she and Claiborne Paul "C. P." Ellis became friends. This was an improbable friendship considering Ellis was a leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Durham, once serving as the Exalted Cyclops. Through their participation in a group to integrate the schools in Durham in the early 1970s, they were acquainted and ultimately became best friends. Atwater's account of her friendship with Ellis let our group know that even the most unlikely racial reconciliation could be realized. The members of the Ubuntu group volunteered to go to Atwater's house on a Saturday morning to help get some things in order.

⁹⁰ Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

When we arrived at our house, we were instructed to be careful with the papers that were going through because there could be some important documents that needed to be saved. While we were going through some of her boxes, we found a handwritten letter to her from Martin Luther King, Jr., encouraging her efforts. During my involvement with the Ubuntu group at Duke Divinity School, I truly begin to understand the significance of this term. It is precisely what we need at Morris Brown AME Church to move toward racial reconciliation in a gentrifying community. Ultimately, according to Ngomane, "Ubuntu teaches us that there is no place for pride when it comes to dealing with each other. We have to support one another and grow together. Everyone gets things wrong sometimes. Everyone feels shame or embarrassment or weakened by a certain incident or situation. It's how we deal with the reality that makes all the difference."⁹¹ To be the church God calls us to be, we must build a supportive relationship with our neighbors.



⁹¹Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu* 177.

Figure 2. This is a 2007 photograph of the Ubuntu group at Duke Divinity School with Ann Atwater and the then co-facilitators: Reverend Gregory Duncan and Reverend Tiffany Marley.

Structure and Theoretical Foundation of the Ubuntu Group

To maximize the effectiveness of the Ubuntu group between Morris Brown AME Church and the surrounding community, the training program, Ubuntu—Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training, will provide an excellent foundation for the facilitators of our group. The training program is a part of Global Horizon, Inc. The premise of the program is to provide training to churches, schools, and other community groups. Global Horizon recognizes the changing demographics of communities and neighborhoods, and they specialize in training people with different cultural and racial differences to learn to live in peace. The organization affirms, "Even when people are willing to put in the hard work to find solutions and overcome challenges, dealing with the results of decades of racial disparities, misunderstandings or division, can be a very daunting undertaking."⁹² Global Horizon seems to recognize the systemic undertones that are in place that result in many of the divisions that are realized in our contemporary societies. They affirm that "Reconciliation happens when we intentionally come together to seek new insights, learn from one another, share perspectives and seek such understanding, thus we are restoring relationships."⁹³

⁹² "Ubuntu-Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training," Global Horizons, Inc., accessed September 27, 2021, <https://globalhz.org/ubuntu-training/>.

⁹³ "Ubuntu-Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training," Global Horizons, Inc., accessed September 27, 2021, <https://globalhz.org/ubuntu-training/>.

Consequently, Global Horizon seems to have the expertise and experience to help our newly established Ubuntu group impact our neighborhood on the Charleston Peninsula. The objective of the Ubuntu Training program has four primary purposes:

1. Developing Cultural Intelligence
2. Developing Multi-ethnic Ministries and organizations
3. Building Multi-ethnic Leadership Cohorts
4. Organizational Planning⁹⁴

It appears that Global Horizon can adapt its training techniques to the different collaborations that solicit its services. Cultural intelligence will be significant with a black congregation in a quickly gentrifying community into a predominantly white neighborhood. People with different cultural perspectives must be able to respect and appreciate where each other is coming from. This, like many other components in this process, will be intentional. Additionally, the development of multi-ethnic ministries and collaborations will be essential. As the relationships are established and strengthened, it will provide an excellent opportunity for the ministry to address the unique challenges of a gentrified community. The Ubuntu training program by Global Horizon will be beneficial in assisting with the ministry collaboratives between black and white people to take place in the surrounding community. With multi-ethnic participation, this will be a

⁹⁴ “Ubuntu-Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training,” Global Horizons, Inc., accessed September 27, 2021, <https://globalhz.org/ubuntu-training/>.

crucial component to ensuring that our efforts will have a conducive environment to be successful.

One of the only challenges I see with Global Horizon is that it says that "It is committed to racial justice and reconciliation. We offer our Ubuntu Training workshops *locally in Minnesota* to provide knowledge, insights, and a place to create new realizations." Even though I see the word locally involved in its mission statement, I also see on the website where they have project involvement both in different places in the United States and internationally. If the Ubuntu training is limited to Minnesota, I would like to see the feasibility of gathering our newly established racial reconciliation group leaders to travel to Minnesota to participate in the training sessions. Although different organizations provide similar training opportunities, Global Horizon does so while embracing the concept of Ubuntu.

Preparation for Facilitators

As I examined this Ubuntu training, I believe it will be most beneficial for the facilitators who will work with our Ubuntu group. The facilitators will be able to go through this training process to help the group move toward racial reconciliation. If all the participants took part in this training, it would take away from the vision and mission of our group that is inclusive of the congregation and community. The facilitators need the training so that they can be able to lead the group in its own unique direction. Each group will be different, and the training should assist the facilitators to allow the group to take its own course. Global Horizon can provide the essential foundation that the

facilitators need to advance the group and provide guidance on handling conflict when it arises in the group. Engaging in a work of this magnitude, there will be some conflict. However, handling it correctly can make the difference between success and failure. The current Ubuntu Training and Assessments that are being offered includes:

1. Cultural Intelligence
2. Unconscious Bias
3. Racial Reconciliation Training
4. Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)
5. Coaching and Consulting
6. Intergroup Dialogue facilitation and training
7. Webinars
8. Reading Resources⁹⁵

Furthermore, Global Horizon specifically caters to church because

The problem of reconciliation in our country and our churches is much too big to be wrestled to the ground by plans that begin in the minds of men. This is a God-sized problem. It is one that only the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can heal. It requires the quality of love that only our Savior can provide, and it requires some uncomfortable confessions.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ “Ubuntu-Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training,” Global Horizons, Inc., accessed September 27, 2021, <https://globalhz.org/ubuntu-training/>.

⁹⁶ “Ubuntu-Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training,” Global Horizons, Inc., accessed September 27, 2021, <https://globalhz.org/ubuntu-training/>.

As a church, this makes Global Horizon even more appealing for training. Not only do they embrace the tenets of Ubuntu, but they do so by using Christian principles. The organization says,

We look to the church as a moral leader, to show us the path for living in harmony. We can accomplish this goal by learning to be servants to one another and, as Jesus commanded us, to love one another. This also means working to break down the strongholds that create hardship and despair. Even church leaders need continual growth in multi-cultural perspectives and resources to be able to lead their congregations in a way that affirms the humanity of all.⁹⁷

This training program will be essential to assist Morris Brown AME Church to reconnect to a community that has a much different demographic.

In addition to the Ubuntu training offered by Global Horizon, the facilitators should read and implement those tenets presented in Gregory Ellison's *Fearless Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*. This is an ideal accompaniment to the Ubuntu training. According to Ellison, “Fearless Dialogues is a grassroots nonprofit initiative committed to creating unique spaces for unlikely partners to engage in hard, heartfelt conversations that see gifts in others, hear value in stories, and work for change and positive transformation in self and other.”⁹⁸ While the Ubuntu training gives comprehensive training on racial reconciliation, the Fearless Dialogues offers excellent insights into conversations. Ellison says, “Fearless Dialogues equips communities to see the invisible, to hear the muted, and to create change through quiet resistance and fearless speech.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “Ubuntu-Racial Justice and Reconciliation Training,” Global Horizons, Inc., accessed September 27, 2021, <https://globalhz.org/ubuntu-training/>.

⁹⁸ Gregory Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues: A Movement for Justice*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 6. Kindle.

⁹⁹ Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues*, 2.

Effective conversations are crucial to being able to realize racial reconciliation. The approach provided by Ellison equips facilitators, which he calls animators, to get the most out of conversations. Usually, workshop facilitators identify participants who raise their hands and wait on their opportunity to speak. Fearless Dialogues animators are different. They are trained to bring conversation to life by giving inspiration, encouragement and renewed enthusiasm to people who are unlikely to be in conversation.

For Ellison, five guiding principles are essential to have meaningful dialogue:

1. The inner teacher of the soul exists in all of us; so, when the student is ready, the inner teacher will teach.
2. The inner teacher speaks when honored, not invaded.
3. When fearless speakers communicate from their center, the ground of conversation quivers.
4. We need the support of fellow sojourners to listen empathically and help us discern the inner teacher's voice.
5. Skilled leadership is necessary to prepare the ground for the soul to speak in a circle of strangers.¹⁰⁰

Ellison advocates that it is crucial to understand that Fearless Dialogues is beneficial within the reconciliation group and initiates a lifelong learning process. He says, “Fearless Dialogues is far more than a series of theory-based experiments. It is a lifelong inward journey that manifests itself in how individuals change the world around them in three-foot increments.”¹⁰¹ In addition to providing great insights for facilitators to assist in

¹⁰⁰ Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues*, 104-105.

¹⁰¹ Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues*, 150.

challenging conversation, Ellison provides a process where there are five participants in a group for effective communication. There are five people in each group and there are five questions that will be posed by the lead animator. Each participant is encouraged to answer one of the five questions. The animator will introduce each question by describing their own personal encounter with the question.

The six-part process for each question includes:

1. The animator briefly frames a question.
2. A fearless speaker responds to the question for three minutes.
3. When the three minutes are up, the room will enter into thirty seconds of contemplative silence.
4. In this waiting moment, listeners absorb the shared wisdom and search internally for an honest, open question that might serve as a guide for the courageous speaker.
5. When the thirty seconds of silence are up, the four listeners will share their honest, open questions, and the speaker will receive these humble inquiries as gifts for the journey.
6. Finally, we give thanks for the speaker and the receptive listeners, and we move to the next question.¹⁰²

This questioning process will be essential to facilitate the group having challenging dialogue. It is designed to move past surface-level responses and engage in meaningful conversations that hopefully lead to racial reconciliation. The process does an excellent job setting parameters so that there is particular equity with the participants and the five questions addressed. In addition, the process continues to highlight the

¹⁰² Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues*, 112.

importance of the facilitator. Ellison says, “Like striking the abrasive edge of a matchbox, Fearless Dialogues animators seek to scratch the subconscious of unlikely partners, so they may consider how to interrupt the Big Three on a daily basis in their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.”¹⁰³ He goes on to contend that the five most difficult questions that will be asked in the reconciliation process are:

1. Who am I?
2. Why am I here?
3. What is my gift?
4. How does it feel to be a problem?
5. What must I do to die a good death?¹⁰⁴

How will people be selected to participate in the groups?

It is essential to have a group that is racially and culturally diverse. There needs to be an equal number of members from the congregation and community. Some members of the congregation are not as open to racial reconciliation. With the racial challenges in the history of Charleston, some are more hesitant than others to see the decreasing amount of black people on the Peninsula. Nevertheless, other members are more willing to engage in the changing neighborhood. Both factions of the membership are needed to have a more productive process in our Ubuntu group. Once the church is ready to begin the group, announcements will be made to the congregation and welcome members to

¹⁰³ Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues*, 151.

¹⁰⁴ Ellison, *Fearless Dialogues*, 112.

apply to participate in the group. The application process will be beneficial to make sure that the group is not too large and to be more selective in the process. The particular process will also ensure that we have an equal number of blacks and whites in the Ubuntu group. One of the benefits is having multiple groups, so there will be other opportunities for people to participate.

There will be different approaches to get community participants in the Ubuntu group. The first way will be to use some of our community connections as participants for the reconciliation group. For example, many companies in the neighborhood and students, faculty, and staff from the College of Charleston use the church lot to park through the week. Parking is so challenging on the Peninsula that companies must show parking before the city approves a permit. Morris Brown AME Church has some of the most economical prices for parking on the Peninsula, and there are many longstanding clients that we have built fantastic working relationships. These relationships may be beneficial for us to get potential participants for the Ubuntu group.

Additionally, we can use advertisements to solicit other neighbors that may want to participate. We can advertise through social media, the website, direct mail, and personal contacts that members may have in the community. We can even collaborate with other churches in the vicinity to assist in this process.

How are the groups set up?

The groups will be set up with ten participants that are equally composed of racial and cultural diversity. Two facilitators, one black and one white, will be trained to move the group forward. The group will sometimes be divided into two five-person subgroups

that will use the Fearless Dialogue method to address some of the most challenging subjects. When the subgroups complete their tasks, there will be times for collaboration in the larger group. The group shall meet once per month, and a curriculum should be developed after the Global Horizon Ubuntu training and working through the Ellison book. The facilitators should have input in developing the curriculum.

Each group, however, should read and discuss Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice's book entitled, *More Than Equals: Racial Healing for the Sake of the Gospel*. This book gives a diverse perspective as both authors represent a black and white background approaching racial reconciliation. Furthermore, the participants in the Ubuntu group should watch and discuss the movie "The Best of Enemies." The movie gives a tangible example of how people with different perspectives can become friends and work to improve their community. Finally, with Charleston being one of the primary places where enslaved people came into the United States, there are also multiple places where the group can take field trips to experience racialized history, including the African American History Museum, which is scheduled to open in Charleston next year.

Undoubtedly when a group gathers for any reason, there will be conflict that arises. This will be even more so with something as challenging as racial reconciliation. For this reason, the facilitators will engage with Jiansong Zhao's *Next Level Academy Conflict Resolution Conflict Management*. This book consists of a training manual to address conflict resolution. The manual says, "This course will give participants a six-step process that they can use to modify and resolve conflicts of any size. Participants will also learn crucial conflict resolution skills, including dealing with anger and using

the Agreement Frame.”¹⁰⁵ Both the strategies and the size of the book are appealing to the Ubuntu group. Zhao advocates that by the end of the workshop, participants should be able to do:

- Understand what conflict and conflict resolution mean
- Understand all six phases of the conflict resolution process
- Understand the five main styles of conflict resolution
- Be able to adapt the process for all types of conflicts
- Be able to break out parts of the process and use those tools to prevent conflict
- Be able to use basic communication tools, such as the agreement frame and open questions
- Be able to use basic anger and stress management techniques¹⁰⁶

The book gives strategies for managing conflict, but it also asks questions and gives assignments to reinforce the lessons. Successfully managing conflict is essential to the positive progress of the group. One of the disappointing parts about my participation with the Ubuntu group at Duke Divinity School is that conflict ultimately ended our group. We were not able to complete everything because of unmanaged conflict. Certain personalities and agendas proved to be too much in the end. I am hopeful that proper training will prevent that from happening with our Ubuntu group.

Incarnational Evangelism and Side Door Ministries

¹⁰⁵ Jianong Zhao, *Next Level Academy Conflict Resolution Conflict Management*: 2021, 5. Kindle.

¹⁰⁶ Jianong Zhao, *Next Level Academy Conflict Resolution Conflict Management*: 2021, 5-6. Kindle.

This leads to how Morris Brown AME Church will be able to utilize its rearticulated understanding of black church ecclesiology. The relationships developed through the Ubuntu group will lead to the expansion of side door ministries through incarnational evangelism that will address some of the challenges associated with gentrification. Incarnational evangelism is defined as "being intentionally Christlike in our normal, everyday lives—among the people in our social network."¹⁰⁷ I hope that one of the results of the Ubuntu group will be to bring racial reconciliation and compel the participants to engage in evangelism in our surrounding community.

This incarnational evangelism will be influenced by black church ecclesiology and address community challenges with gentrification through side door ministries. The way that Charles Arn suggests doing this is through using side doors. Arn says, "A side door is a church-sponsored program, group, or activity in which a nonmember can become comfortably involved with the church regularly...The goal of an effective side door is to provide a place in which participants (both church members and nonmembers) can develop friendships around important things that they share in common."¹⁰⁸ There will be three side door ministries that we will use that will correspond to some of the challenges in our surrounding community.

The first side door ministry will expand our partnership with the Hollings Cancer Center at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). Since the arrival of Bishop

¹⁰⁷ Charles Arn, *Side Door: How to Open Your Church to Reach More People*. (Indianapolis: Western Publishing House, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Arn, *Side Door*.

Samuel L. Green, Sr. in the Seventh Episcopal District,¹⁰⁹ there has been a collaboration between the AME Church in South Carolina and the MUSC. This collaboration has often focused on cancers that disproportionately affect the black community. To this point, there has been a focus on breast cancer and prostate cancer. Dr. Marvella Ford, a professor and the Associate Director of Population Science and Cancer Disparities at MUSC, has been the primary person who has assisted with the collaboration. There is a training component to the programs. The participants are encouraged to go and share the information that they receive with family members and friends to help in the prevention and early detection of the diseases. Morris Brown AME Church has been an active participant in this partnership.

This is a ministry that can impact the challenges that we experience with healthcare in the surrounding community. The expansion of this ministry can be a way that we embrace the rearticulated ecclesiology of the black church while at the same time building relationships with the neighbors in the surrounding community. An additional way we can expand this ministry is to use our relationship with MUSC to work with other health conditions that have disparities in minorities and people on the margins. Medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and Sickle Cell disease are great ways to expand upon this vital ministry that is already in place while addressing conditions that disproportionately affect those on the margins of society.

A second side door ministry is establishing a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) program at Morris Brown AME Church and the surrounding

¹⁰⁹ The Seventh Episcopal District of the AME Church includes the entire state of South Carolina.

community. When schools are in an economically challenged neighborhood within a gentrified community, they often lack specific educational opportunities. Not only are the academic opportunities lacking, but also many of the extracurricular opportunities are restricted. A primary challenge that many students on the margins have experienced is related to STEM fields. The reason is not that students in more economically affluent neighborhoods are naturally inclined to do better in these areas. Still, it is a lack of exposure for those on the margins. In other words, there are opportunities that some schools can offer that other schools are not. Unfortunately, STEM programs are offered by the more affluent schools in the same school district that is disproportionately white. As a result, many African American and other minority students do not get the same opportunities. These opportunities are not relegated to academic performance, but participation in a STEM program, which often includes a robotic team, can lead to scholarship and post-secondary opportunities. These opportunities must be afforded to students on the margins as well. Moreover, people in STEM-related careers often have more significant earning potential that is impactful not only for that individual but also for their family and community.

Morris Brown AME Church has many members who have distinguished careers in STEM-related fields. Several engineers, healthcare professionals (physicians and nurses), science educators, college professors, and other members work in STEM-related areas. Many of these members have expressed an interest in working with young people to expose them to these fields. For example, a church member who is an engineer wants to start a robotics team for students, especially minority students, who are not given this

chance. This will be educational, competitive, and fun. A STEM program at Morris Brown AME Church will also allow the congregation to connect with those in the neighborhood who may be in STEM-related fields. There will be opportunities for collaboration to assist students on the margins who may not otherwise get these opportunities. Additionally, there are ways that we can partner with Boeing South Carolina and other companies that have programs that try to expose young people to STEM-related fields.

There are several things that this STEM Program will be able to do. First, some STEM educators can provide tutoring for students who may need assistance and reinforcement with their academics. There can be identified times that the educators will be available to assist in this way. When things improve with the COVID-19 pandemic, we can identify a location either in the church building or the building next door that will be renovated. With virtual learning becoming more prevalent, there will be opportunities for educators to use virtual platforms to assist students who need additional help. Secondly, the robotics team can meet either once or twice per month to work on projects that can increase learning and prepare for competitions. We can identify space on the church campus for them to meet and store the projects they need to participate in.

There will also be opportunities to take the students on field trips to see some STEM-related activities firsthand. One of the most exciting things that I have done since coming to Charleston is taking the Boeing South Carolina plant tour. It is interesting to see everything that goes into making airplanes and the amount of science and precision it intakes to get everything for a plane to fly. Another exciting thing about Boeing here in

Charleston is the woman who is over the company here is an African American. For students on the margin to see a woman of color in a leadership position like this can give hope and encouragement of what is possible through STEM-related careers. Finally, the collaboration between Morris Brown AME Church and the surrounding community can result in a summer STEM Camp. This will be an excellent opportunity to learn about STEM-related fields while engaging in fun activities during the summer break. The STEM program is a way to address the disparities in formal education among the marginalized and reconnect with the gentrifying community to make progress in racial reconciliation.

The third side door ministry that we can implement deals with the housing crisis that is taking place with the gentrification on the Charleston peninsula. Many people are coming to work in downtown Charleston every day who cannot afford to live there. In addition, some people have inherited houses on the Peninsula through multiple generations who can no longer afford the property taxes. A direct way to respond to the housing crisis in Charleston is through the development of the Morris Brown Community Development Corporation (CDC). This nonprofit corporation will focus on assisting those who have been negatively affected by gentrification.

Consequently, housing will be one of the first things that is addressed. Although the name of the CDC will be Morris Brown, it will be a collaborative effort between the church and the surrounding community. The issues related to housing are too large for the church to address alone. There will be several challenges related to housing that the Morris Brown CDC will do.

The first housing challenge that the Morris Brown CDC will address is with our unhoused neighbors. As the property value increases in Charleston, some neighbors do not have anywhere to stay. Although we knew that this was the reality for some people in our community, we became more acquainted with this fact when we initiated our breakfast ministry. It started a couple of years ago as a part of the Sojourner Truth Unit of the Carrie R. Grady Women's Missionary Society at Morris Brown AME Church. Before the Coronavirus pandemic, the ministry provided a hot breakfast on the third Saturday every month. As the breakfast continued, the number of people coming to get something to eat increased. Relationships were formed between several of the church members and our neighbors coming to get breakfast. Many of them were speaking about them being unhoused. This is also visible on rare nights when it gets cold in Charleston when the city builds collaborations with congregations in the community to serve as warming shelters to get unhoused somewhere warm to stay. These are the first people that the Morris Brown CDC can assist in the housing crisis.

Through collaborations and securing funding, we can provide education and assist the unhoused with finding somewhere to stay and ways to support themselves and their families. For many years this congregation has had a passion for helping those on the margins to attain quality housing. Morris Brown AME Church, in conjunction with two of our sister congregations, Mother Emanuel AME Church and Ebenezer AME Church, owns three apartment complexes in different parts of South Carolina. The original complex is located here in James Island. There are also complexes in Darlington and Conway. The Emanuel-Morris Brown-Ebenezer Apartments, Inc. was established in

1968, immediately after establishing the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. These apartments are income-based housing, and maybe there will be a way to assist with the unhoused population in our surrounding community.

Unfortunately, the complexes usually stay at capacity with a waiting list, but maybe we can identify other partners to assist the unhoused on the margins.

Another aspect of the housing crisis that we can address with the Morris Brown CDC is homeownership. Many people on the margins, especially minorities, do not own houses in the surrounding community. Many of these people rent homes or apartments, and some are relegated to quickly diminishing public housing. The City of Charleston announced in the last couple of months that many of the residents who live in the public housing on the Peninsula would be displaced for the next several years. Undoubtedly, there is no contingency plan to assist them with finding places to stay during this period. In addition, the housing units that replace the current units will probably be much more expensive and much more difficult for people on the margins to afford the cost of living. This is another reason that homeownership is so important for the marginalized.

The Morris Brown CDC can assist those who would like to become homeowners and current homeowners who are having challenges retaining their homes. We can provide training sessions that will address credit repair and recovery to qualify to be homeowners. Additionally, a better credit score can save thousands of dollars on interest. There are people on the margins who may not understand how credit can affect the amount of interest that will be added to the house's total price. There will also be training on budgeting to handle the cost of living that comes along with homeownership.

Budgeting is a crucial component with making things stay afloat financially because it causes people to prioritize necessities. Finally, a training session on property taxes and homeowner's insurance should be offered by the Morris Brown CDC. Accountants and insurance professionals will give new homeowners tax strategies that can be beneficial in their new endeavor. To this end, new homeowners should collaborate to assist with things such as lawn care, landscaping, appliance repair, and other home improvements.

In conclusion, the way that Morris Brown AME Church will be able to reconnect to a changing community is by establishing an Ubuntu group. With the drastic demographic shift that is taking place on the Charleston Peninsula, with many of the new neighbors being white, Morris Brown AME Church must place racial reconciliation at the center of reconnecting to the surrounding community. The relationships developed through the Ubuntu group will lead to embracing incarnational evangelism where there will be a collaboration that will be able to expand side door ministries. These ministries will reaffirm a rearticulated black church ecclesiology that will address some of the challenges associated with gentrification.

Chapter Five: Evaluation

Evaluation of the Project

As we evaluate the results of this project, it is essential to understand the expansive view of salvation in the black church. Therefore, it is critical to know that the work in the community is the salvific work of God. There are hells in this world from which the marginalized need to be delivered. Morris Brown, similarly to other churches, has developed an inward focus over the years. The congregation that used to be so active in the community is not as active as in the past. This does not mean that Morris Brown does not do things in the community, but there is no active engagement with the neighborhood.

This condition continues to be realized with the increased gentrification that is taking place. Morris Brown AME Church must be once again actively engaged with the surrounding community. There is a difference between simply having programs and providing services and intentionally building relationships, even across racial lines. To be congregational-focused means that we develop programs that we can do for the community, but to be community-focused means that we will build relationships with neighbors to do things with the community. Unfortunately, too many churches are more concerned about buildings than the broken lives of people on the margins.

It is not just essential to get the parishioners concerned with what is happening in the community. Still, it is also an excellent opportunity to reignite the ecclesiology of the black church. When the church membership understands the challenges of the community through the lens of black church ecclesiology, it helps to maintain the essential elements

of the black church in collaboration with the surrounding community. To do this, I will commit to writing a series of my congregational article entitled "The Pastor's Pen." This is a weekly piece that marries theology, scripture, and current events. It gives an intentional way to interpret contemporary events through the lenses of scripture and theological reflection.

As it relates to this project, the Pastor's Pen will be beneficial for highlighting the challenges in our gentrifying community and interpreting them through the theology of the black church. I will begin this process by dedicating three months of the article to addressing challenges in our surrounding community. The following community challenges will be handled for one month at a time:

- A. Challenges in Healthcare
- B. Crisis in Housing
- C. Inequities of Formal Education

After reiterating these three challenges, I am hopeful that it will assist in changing the perspective of the church to focus on helping those on the margins. This is significant because there are many times that churches are so hidden behind stained-glass windows and out of touch with reality that they are unaware of the truths that are happening just outside of the building. First, we must understand the effects of what happens in a gentrified community. As we see the demographics changing in the community resulting in higher costs of living and people being priced out of their homes, we must understand the impact of the changes taking place around us. We cannot believe that the magnitude of the changes in the community will not affect the congregation. There are people inside

of Morris Brown AME Church who has been affected by gentrification, but how do we walk with those who are continually affected? Additionally, how do we engage the new neighbors that are moving into the surrounding community?

To shift the perspective of the church members at Morris Brown, it will be imperative to have sermon series and bible studies to challenge our understanding of the church and revisit black church ecclesiology. An example of this would be a sermon entitled, "Don't Abort the Mission,"¹¹⁰ Which reminds us of the true purpose of the church of Jesus Christ. I will commit to preaching two sermon series every year to expand the congregation's understanding of what it means to be the church. Moreover, I would like to have a series of bible studies that look at the connection between the church and the community. Bible study is an ideal setting because it is much easier to ask questions in a bible study than during a sermon. Likewise, it will be beneficial to have small groups from the bible study group to have more in-depth discussions about the connection. The bible study and small groups should have this curriculum for six months to help in the process.

Evaluation of the Ubuntu Group

The length of the Ubuntu group should be long enough to cover essential lessons and have a relationship begin to develop. However, it should not be so long that people get burned out in the process. The group sessions are not all-inclusive, but it begins relationships that will hopefully exist long after the group has completed its curriculum. I

¹¹⁰ Please find the full text of this sermon in the appendix.

would suggest ten sessions with enough time between the session for relationships to develop. Some pre-gathering coursework, such as reading assignments, should be completed before the group assembles. This is essential because it will be beneficial for discussions to take place and transformation to occur.

Six months after the group has completed its curriculum, the group should be reassembled to discuss how their participation has influenced their understanding of the community and built relationships with people of different racial and cultural diversity. It would also be appropriate to see how many participants are actively involved in the side door ministries if there is anyone they could recommend participating in a future Ubuntu group. Additionally, it will be beneficial for some who have completed the Ubuntu group to come back and talk to the current participants about their experiences.

In a highly racialized society, the Ubuntu group is countercultural. There are not too many places where there can be an open and honest dialogue about race. This endeavor will give this forum to a gentrified community. There are many conversations where people use their preconceived notions to talk about racial and cultural differences. There are not enough places where people have an opportunity to talk to people that come from different racial and cultural backgrounds. This is important because, at its core, gentrification is a visible reminder of the economic gap that continues to exist between whites and blacks in this country. The white neighbors may understand moving into the neighborhood as an excellent financial investment or an intelligent decision to move into a more urban area. Black people will interpret the same demographic shift with

resentment of being priced out of property that has been in their family for generations. It is these kinds of experiences that can hopefully be addressed through the Ubuntu group.

A primary goal of the Ubuntu group is to have the participants build a relationship and work together in the side door ministries. One of the beautiful things about the side door ministries is that they collaborate between congregation and community. Hopefully, one of the benefits of the side door ministry is to increase the numbers of people coming through the front door of Morris Brown AME Church. Past participants of the Ubuntu group will be the most excellent spokespeople to recruit people from both the congregation and community to participate. It is one thing to read about or an experience or be compelled to for participation. However, it is an added benefit to having a firsthand conversation with someone who has already had the experience.

Evaluate the side door ministries

As we reflect on our collaboration with the Hollings Cancer Center at MUSC, I believe that we can expand this partnership to include other conditions that disproportionately affect those on the margins. Conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and sickle cell anemia are particularly challenging for the black community. It will be beneficial for us to extend our involvement with MUSC. For example, we can work to offer a class to work with people who have diabetes. The course can highlight changes in nutrition and increasing physical activity. There can be accountability partnerships formed that can encourage each other in the process. Daily glucose levels can be monitored, and every three months, A1c levels can be observed. Every three months, it will be a time for celebration as participants have control over diabetes.

Furthermore, there can be classes to assist with hypertension. While diet and exercise will be beneficial, there should also be strategies to reduce stress levels and find better ways to handle uncertainties of life. There can also be accountability partners who will help make better decisions to get blood pressures down. Every month there can be celebrations for those who are experiencing improvements in hypertension. Sickle cell workshops will further be beneficial for those on the margins who have this condition. There should be instructions on how to treat the disease and take proactive measures that can be taken to lessen its effects. Celebrations can take place when the number of episodes experienced from sickle cell continues to decrease. The expansion of this side door ministry can address some of the healthcare challenges that affect those on the margins.

Secondly, as it relates to the STEM program, students will connect with educators who will be willing to tutor them and provide additional support in their academic subjects. The tutoring can begin once per week and hopefully increase to twice per week by the second semester. Grades can measure improvements on assignments, quizzes, tests, and final grades for the course. The success of the tutoring program will be evaluated at the end of the interim grading periods and the conclusion of the nine-week grading periods.

I am hopeful that we will be able to begin a STEM summer camp with ten young people participating and three to four STEM professionals working with them in three years. The camp will give the students something productive to do during the summer break and immerse them into STEM areas they are interested in. There will be a

dedicated space for the participants and advisors in the church building. A part of the summer camp will be to engage in field trips that will allow the participants to reinforce the camp's curriculum. The summer camp will be advertised in both the congregation and the community, giving preference to marginalized participants.

The church will identify community partners that will assist in financially investing in the camp in the following areas:

- A. Computers
- B. Computer software
- C. Lab materials
- D. Books and instructional materials
- E. Food (lunch and snacks)
- F. Field trips (entrance fees)

In addition to the STEM summer camp, we will initiate a robotics club. Unlike the summer camp, the robotics club will meet during the school term, and there will be meetings one Saturday per month. There will be additional meetings that will take place once the competition begins, and the advisors will determine the frequency. There will also be an effort to identify community partners to assist with financial investments in the robotic club that will provide supplies, competition entrance fees, and travel to competitions. The advisors of the robotics club will collaborate with the faculty of local colleges and universities to give the participants added exposure.

Ideally, it will be great to provide both the summer camp and robotics club participants with mentors from Boeing, South Carolina. Additionally, we will ask them to help with the financial investment. Boeing has a long track record of making financial investments in the Charleston community. After three years between the summer camp and robotics club, we hope that four student participants will be able to secure a scholarship in a STEM-related field. Ultimately, it is expected that many participants will take advantage of their participation in the STEM program and realize STEM-related careers.

Lastly, regarding homeownership, it will be imperative to have financial and insurance professionals teach classes to assist people on the Charleston Peninsula in purchasing homes and keeping the house they already own. Education is essential in this process. After one year of classes, I am hopeful that some participants in the classes will be able to purchase new homes on the Peninsula, and others with challenges in homeownership will maintain their property. Higher cost-of-living is a significant contributor to residents being priced out of their property. Still, I also believe that if current homeowners understand some of the legal and financial loopholes, they will be better equipped to maintain their property. This collaboration will test this theory.

As it relates to those on the margins, in addition to providing hot breakfast, we can explore a collaborative relationship with the Low Country Foodbank to provide food staples for those in need. Is positive change happening with the Breakfast Ministry if there are more participants or fewer participants in the breakfast? Ironically, I believe that when we see fewer people coming to receive a hot breakfast out of necessity, it will mean

that more people on the margins are becoming more independent. When I pastored in Camden, New Jersey, I served as a principal partner of the South Jersey Food Bank. Every month we provided between 1,200 and 1,500 families food baskets. These baskets included meat, eggs, rice, pasta, and other staples that could assist them with the food they needed to survive. There were times that the offerings had fresh produce, but that was more infrequently and harder to find. Nevertheless, Parkside United Methodist Church was making outstanding contributions to the surrounding community.



Figure 3. This is the South Jersey Food Bank truck making the drop off at Parkside United Methodist Church for the food distribution.



Figure 4. These are members of Parkside United Methodist Church meeting to unload the truck for the weekly food distribution.



Figure 5. This is a line of people forming at Parkside United Methodist Church to receive the food baskets for the week.

I hope that a collaboration with the Low Country Food Bank can yield the same kind of results. Morris Brown AME Church can be a principal partner that provides staples for those on the margins in the Charleston community.

Hopes for the future

I sincerely hope that this project will assist Morris Brown AME Church and other churches in the same condition to reconnect to gentrified communities. Many times, longtime church members refer to the "glory days" of Morris Brown during the 1950s and 1960s. They reference how many people were active in the church and how many young people were participating. However, this congregation, like many in the western world, has been in significant decline. There seems to be a rift between the church and the community that has left many people in the newer generations to distinguish between spirituality and church attendance. These realities were present before gentrification begins to take place on the Charleston Peninsula. However, the effects of gentrification on the marginalized, including many black people, are exacerbating something that started before. The neighborhood church that was strengthened by church members living in the surrounding community is weakened. Nevertheless, I hope that this project will allow Morris Brown AME Church to connect to the gentrified neighborhood and preserve the ecclesiology of the black church through this collaboration.

Goals for the Project

This project aims to keep the indispensable contributions of the black church alive in a gentrifying community. It is imperative to understand that the black church is so much more than a church consisting of black members. However, a comprehensive understanding of salvation, a distinctive biblical hermeneutic, and a passion for ministering to the marginalized are great resources that show that the black church has

much to offer the larger Christian church and community. Unfortunately, there are times that the unique witness of the black church is not valued in larger Christian circles, especially when compared to the white church. The devaluing of black personhood in the nation and communities has often carried over into the church.

Therefore, the black church in the United States was identified more by racial distinction than an authentic Christian witness formed and fashioned by a unique experience. Nevertheless, out of these experiences, the Lord has allowed the unique experience of the black church to relate to the pains of the marginalized when the white church has no credibility to do so. Consequently, this project aims to apply the lessons of the black church by producing side door ministries that are a collaboration through congregations and communities that have racial and cultural differences. To put it simply, the application of the lessons from the black church is broad enough for everyone in the Christian family to share, especially with those who are on the margins.

Benefits from this Project

The challenges that Morris Brown AME Church faces on the Charleston Peninsula are not unique to this congregation. Gentrification becomes a common occurrence throughout the country. Many people, especially minorities, are being priced out of urban areas with significant increases in costs of living. Therefore, the challenges in Charleston are indicative of urban realities throughout the United States. For this reason, this project will apply to many other congregations. However, the project will be most beneficial for urban black churches in gentrified neighborhoods. Congregations have historically been neighborhood churches that thrived off black members who lived

in the surrounding community who could easily commute to church. Many of the members in the past could walk to the church, and therefore Sunday morning and weekday ministry opportunities often garnered tremendous participation.

When many of these historic congregations had their most significant participation, most of the neighbors were black. Therefore, the necessity for racial reconciliation was not as much of a factor. Therefore, many urban black churches, regardless of denomination, will find the research presented here beneficial.

Nevertheless, on some level, I am hopeful that this project will provide a roadmap for other churches who desire to reconnect to the surrounding neighborhood. There are numerous churches, even in communities that are not going through gentrification, that have a disconnection from the people outside their doors. I hope that this project will provide practical inspiration to move outside of the church's walls and get actively involved in the life of the community. Even when there may be different challenges, each congregation should be able to access the needs of their community and make attempts to work together to assist with the unique challenges of that neighborhood to the glory of God.

Additional Side Door Ministries

Relationships with Law Enforcement

An additional side door ministry worth exploring is strengthening the relationship between those on the margins, especially in minority communities, and law enforcement. Unfortunately, there continues to be a rift in the relationship between members of law enforcement and minority communities. The needless death of George Floyd over one

year ago in Milwaukee was the breaking point for countless deaths, especially unarmed black men and women at the hands of law enforcement. In North Charleston, Walter Scott, a black man, was killed by a white police officer after being stopped for a non-functioning taillight six years ago. During events, the officer fatally shot Scott, who was not an imminent threat to his safety since Scott was running away from the officer at the time. In both killings, the officers were found guilty and sentenced to time in prison. However, this is the exception and not the rule. In countless other incidents, black and brown bodies have been murdered by law enforcement without facing any consequences for their crimes.

Over time this has built a resentment of many people on the margins toward law enforcement. In addition to being gunned down by members of law enforcement, many officers are often seen as carrying out the desires of those who have wealth and influence with the government. In addition, police officers are often called when people are being evicted out of their homes when they become unable to pay property taxes and keep up with the increases in the cost of living. As a result, the church needs collaboration to establish a side door ministry where people on the margins and members of law enforcement can develop healthy non-threatening relationships.

There must be intentional opportunities for members of law enforcement and the minority community to have difficult conversations to overcome challenges of the past. This must be an ongoing effort to address the mistrusts that have been formed throughout the centuries. Additionally, there must be outlets for bonding to take place. Something as simple as having bowling outings and other moments of intentional bonding can create an

environment free from hostility and resentment. The goal is to have fewer minorities killed at the hands of law enforcement and more respect for the responsibility that officers have in the community.

Healthcare Clinics

Help to establish community health clinics for the marginalized who are uninsured and underinsured. With the Medical University being in Charleston, there are many hospitals and healthcare providers in the area. People come from all over the state and region to receive treatment in Charleston. Still, so many of the uninsured and underinsured residents are not able to receive the treatments needed. This not only affects the marginalized when they are ill, but it precludes them from going to the doctor for wellness visits to prevent conditions from occurring. When attempting to make a new doctor's appointment, there is an inquiry about health insurance before asking anything else. This makes the marginalized susceptible to conditions that other people do not have to face. As the clinics are established, maybe our relationship with MUSC can result in some of the third- and fourth-year medical students can help provide medical services for the marginalized. The challenges in healthcare do not preclude dental needs and hygiene.

There may also be an opportunity for local dentists and dentistry students at MUSC to assist with the dental needs on the margins. Finally, there may also be a way to solicit mental health professionals to provide counseling for those on the margins. Mental illness is a significant concern throughout our country. However, in too many communities, especially the black community, too many marginalized people do not access mental health care. There are times in the black community that there are even

stigmas associated with mental health. During my time at Duke Divinity School, some of my colleagues took the opportunity to go to Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) to assist with the academic pressures. Nevertheless, other students allowed the stigma of seeking mental health to prevent them from taking advantage of the assistance that could have been very helpful.

Post-secondary Opportunities

An additional side door ministry will create an opportunity to assist young people with exploring post-secondary options that include college education, technical education, and military service. It is essential to expose young people to different options they have after they graduate from high school. There are so many times young people struggle to reach their full potential because they do not know all their options. For example, I had the privilege of working with a judicial reinvestment program in Erie, Pennsylvania, where money was taken from the judicial system to invest in a program where young men could experience different opportunities to make good decisions.

Half of the participants in the program had been negatively involved in the judicial system, and the other half had not. A part of the curriculum focused on exploring post-secondary opportunities. There was an opportunity for them to visit a four-year college and receive a firsthand glimpse of what a college experience is like. On two other weeks, there was a presentation from a technical school and military recruiters. These opportunities present them with chances to ask questions and seriously explore options they would have after graduating from high school. This model will be beneficial for other young people on the margins. They need to have intentional experiences to make

informed decisions about the direction where they want to go. It is challenging to try to have discernment without knowing all the options.

Relationship with Financial Institutions

Another side door ministry will be to solicit the support of financial institutions, especially local credit unions, to assist with those desiring to become homeowners and who are having financial difficulty with keeping their homes. When I pastored Saint James AME Church in Erie, Pennsylvania, I developed relationships with several local credit unions. They expressed a desire to work closely with the community and help invest in the neighbors' advancement. The management of the credit unions was even willing on several occasions to send employees to different events to teach classes about finance and reestablishing credit. These sessions were very informative for people who desired to get back on an excellent financial footing. There were even times that information was given about doing the things necessary to become homeowners.

I am hopeful that the same kind of relationship can be established. When local financial institutions are willing to teach similar classes and help those on the margins do the things necessary to become homeowners in a gentrified community, the financial institutions could assist those who already own homes to do what is required to hold on to their homes. Not only can they provide information, but maybe they can establish professional relationships that may help in areas of refinancing that will make it possible for them to maintain ownership of their homes. For financial institutions, these relationships can be mutually beneficial. Not only will the people on the margins receive

information and the ability to use financial tools to assist in homeownership, but the financial institutions will be able to gain new clients and invest in the community.

Fresh Produce Availability

Another side door ministry will collaborate with farmers' markets to provide fresh produce for those on the margins to offer a healthier option securing healthier foods. This could lead to strategically placing new produce stands in the most needed areas of the community. With people on the margins, access to fresh produce can be challenging, especially in urban areas. When people have financial challenges, often, less healthy food choices are more affordable. To complicate matters in urban areas, it is usually more challenging to have access to fresh produce. While I served as the senior pastor of Parkside United Methodist Church in Camden, New Jersey, we faced challenges getting fresh produce into the city. There were many malnutrition and childhood obesity cases because many of the people on the margin were relegated to getting food for corner stores. These stores did not sell fresh produce, so the limited food offerings contributed to challenges in health conditions. Parkside collaborated with the Campbell Soup Company, Healthy Kids of New Jersey, and local farmers' markets to provide fresh produce in different parts of the city. Many of the people on the margins were grateful to get fresh fruits and vegetables for their families. I believe the same thing can work in Charleston in some of the more challenged neighborhoods. We can establish a side door ministry where the marginalized will secure fresh produce that will help them have more nutritious oppositions with their diet.

Increase Minority-owned Businesses

Another side door ministry is establishing a strategic collaboration that increases the number of minority-owned businesses on the Peninsula of Charleston and intentionally supports the already established minority businesses. There are very few minority-owned businesses in downtown Charleston. In fact, on King Street, which is one of the busiest streets in Charleston's tourist section, is only one black-owned business. This is disheartening because historically, Charleston was a place that had similar or more black people in the population, and as a result, there were many minority-owned businesses. Many native black Charlestonians speak fondly about the black-owned companies that used to be so prominent in downtown Charleston. For example, black people in downtown Charleston owned movie theaters, restaurants, clothing stores, and mom-and-pop stores. Longtime Charleston residents speak about coming to town and walking down the streets patronizing the different businesses in the downtown area.

Nevertheless, things have significantly changed. Not only are minorities, including black people, being priced out of homes, but they are also missing out on the economy of one of the most prominent tourist cities in the country. Therefore, there needs to be a strategic collaboration that will support an increase in minority-owned businesses. The following areas need to be strategically addressed in this collaboration:

- A. Solicit financial investors to assist with establishing more minority-owned businesses on the Charleston Peninsula.
- B. Consult with business advisors to help understand the business analysis process and identify the best areas strategically for businesses to be placed.

- C. Make connections with the City of Charleston to assist with the process of getting business licenses and approval.
- D. Secure a company that will develop advertising campaigns that will make both the Charleston residents and visitors to the city aware of the businesses.

Mentoring Program

We need to create a program in the church and community where men will mentor young men at higher risk in the community. A primary challenge that continues with people on the margins is the lack of traditional family structure. There are many instances where young men, especially in the black community, grow up in homes with no fathers or male presence. Both boys and girls need to have a fatherly presence in the house as they grow up. This is especially the case with boys. There are some lessons that only men can teach, and when there is no male presence in the home, these instructions will go missing. There needs to be a place where young men on the margins can be identified for this mentoring program in this side door ministry.

Working with youth, the men will need to go through an extensive background check to ensure that the young people are working with safe adults. There also needs to be a system of checks-and-balances where other adults are around during the time they spend together. This will provide protection for the boys and the men who are volunteering their time to the ministry. There can be specific times every month where the mentor can meet with the boy, and there can also be special events like sporting events, bowling outings, and movies that can be group outings with other mentors and mentees. This can be an additional way that the boys in the program can build relationships with one another.

Employment Placement

An additional partnership to establish professional skills and career placement for the marginalized. There are specific skills that are needed to secure employment. This collaboration can offer classes that can assist with these skills. These courses can help the marginalized with the following:

- A. Assistance with composing a resume.
- B. Teach best practices for a job interview.
- C. Help with secure clothes for interviews and employment.
- D. Assist with lessons in business etiquette.

In addition to these skills, the collaboration can help identify companies looking to hire from within the community. Several companies have open positions, and they are looking to employ inside the community, but they need to find qualified candidates. Furthermore, there can be job fairs held once the training has taken place and enough companies have been identified.

Expungement and Second Chances

There can be recruitment for attorneys and legal professionals to help retain expungements for the records of those with misdemeanors and minor offenses. This will help these people secure a second chance and help them get a fresh start related to formal education and career opportunities. When someone has a criminal record, it makes it difficult to get admitted to institutions of higher learning, find places to live, gain

employment, and even participate in civic responsibilities such as voting. These opportunities will not be intended for people who have committed significant felonies and can be a danger to the community. Some people deserve another chance to overcome mistakes of the past. Even some states where people who have had negative involvement with the judicial system have to check a box that could prevent them from getting an opportunity before they even have a chance.

Especially in cases now where people have been convicted of possession of marijuana. Many black men have been convicted of this, but now many states are legalizing recreational uses of the drug. With the changes in law, there should be a way that people who have these convictions can secure expungement. Throughout history, laws have disproportionately targeted minorities, especially black people, that have led to convictions for marijuana. This was especially true during the Clinton Administration. Even though an apology came later, many blacks were affected by these laws to prevent them from supporting Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016. This side door ministry could be influential in helping give people on the margins another opportunity.

Learning Foreign Languages

Lastly, there can be opportunities to have foreign language classes for young people on the margins of society who may not get another chance. These could be opportunities for them to experience another culture in unimaginable ways. This could lead to outings in restaurants, watching foreign films, developing international pen pals, and maybe even travel to different countries. With all the colleges and universities in Charleston, this can be an excellent opportunity to collaborate with the foreign language

departments with both faculty and students. They can help the young people in the community to learn another language and build excitement around different cultures.

When there are several young people involved, this can lead to them utilizing the lessons that they are learning. It is essential with a foreign language to have opportunities to use what is being

known.

Learning a foreign language can lead to increased higher education opportunities and career options in the long run. As the world becomes more global, the ability to speak more than one language is an asset. Many career opportunities are present for multilingual people. Learning additional languages can make young people more marketable and create opportunities that may not otherwise be presented. This side door ministry that begins as an exciting learning opportunity can catapult them away from the margins of society. Once when I had a layover in the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, I met a gentleman in a store in the mall who worked as a translator. Through conversation, I learned that he moved to Germany in the military, and when he was retired, he decided to stay in Frankfurt. His ability to speak German provided opportunities for him to find jobs that gave him an additional income to provide for his family.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been my endeavor throughout the previous five chapters to demonstrate that even in a gentrified community, the unique Christian witness of the black church continues to be relevant in the 21st Century. Amid all the transitions, the black church must continue to ask, where do we go from here? In other words, how do we take our distinctive ecclesiology and show the larger church what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ when we have been constantly relegated to the margins of society? Throughout this work, I have endeavored to look through a historical lens at how the black church, particularly Morris Brown AME Church, has lived out its vocation faithfully in a country and community that have primarily understood black people as both a possession and a problem. Nevertheless, through all the hatred and hostility, the black church has shown hospitality, which is an essential characteristic of the People of God.

Hospitality must be how the black church interacts with the new neighbors who are moving into the communities where our congregations are located. The hospitality of the black church has presented opportunities to lead other people into a salvific relationship with Jesus Christ. A primary example of this is Richard Allen. His commitment to Christ allowed him to show his slaveowner a relationship with Christ. Allen could have been bitter and not taken advantage of his chance to share his Christian faith. However, Allen did not dismiss an opportunity to share his faith with someone who reduced Allen's existence to property by purchasing him as an enslaved person.

Hospitality gives us an example of handling the gentrification in so many of our communities. Showing hospitality to our new neighbors is not mutually exclusive to addressing the oppressive systems causing price outs and economic inequalities. The black church has a history of balancing advocacy for social justice on the one hand and showing hospitality to their oppressors on the other. This hospitality is consistent with the gospel. Jesus Christ teaches us to forgive those who mistreat us and turn the other cheek to those who have slapped us. Jesus prays for the same people who placed Him on the cross to be crucified. Nevertheless, it is the same Jesus who teaches us to preach liberty to those oppressed and serve those who cannot help themselves.

Not only is hospitality a primary tenet of black church ecclesiology, but ministry to those on the margins is vital. Even as the community gentrifies, many neighbors are homeless and lack primary resources. A hopeful consequence of Morris Brown AME Church connecting with our new neighbors will be a collaborative effort to assist the marginalized. This effort will incorporate different opportunities because many things contribute to people being on the margins. The social ill of racism continues to affect many of our communities negatively. We have witnessed an environment conducive to overt racism in the last several years.

The numerous murders of unarmed black people at the hands of law enforcement, the bitter defense of confederate monuments being preserved in public places, and how COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the black community demonstrates that racism continues to be present in our society. It was only five minutes from Morris Brown that the horrific massacre occurred at Mother Emanuel AME Church. The world

was in disbelief as a young white man sat through a bible study and carried out a callous racialized murder on a pastor and eight of his parishioners. During the investigation, it was discovered that Dylan Roof had a list of churches contemplating doing the same thing. Morris Brown AME Church was the second church on his list. On the night of the massacre, June 17, 2015, many people were at Morris Brown AME Church that night for the annual Vacation Bible School. The church must continue to reach out to those on the margins and cannot allow racism and interrupt this vital ministry work.

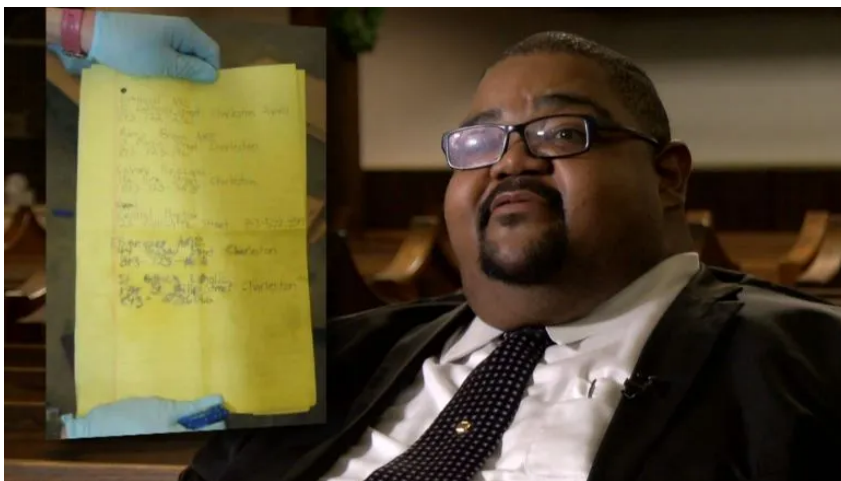


Figure 6. This is a picture of Reverend James A. Keeton, Jr. being interviewed by the CBS National news after learning that Morris Brown AME Church was the second church on Dylan Roof's list. There is a picture of the handwritten list displayed next to me in this photo. The article may be found at <https://www.wspa.com/news/pastor-of-church-second-on-dylann-roofs-alleged-hit-list-opens-up/>.

An expansive view of salvation is also a distinctive principle of the black church. From its earliest existence, the black church has understood that salvation is not relegated to the afterlife, but salvation must be understood in the present world. In other words, physical death is not the only thing we need to be saved from, but there are injustices and

discriminatory practices in this life that the church must be committed to as part of the work of salvation. When our society continues to be plagued by the ills of racism, economic discrimination, gender inequalities, and lack of quality healthcare, it is the vocation of the church that we must work for salvation in these circumstances. The black church has never had the luxury only to understand salvation in terms of the afterlife because there are too many challenges in this world where salvation is needed. This tenet of the black church continues to have much to offer the larger Christian church.

The differences realized by this project will not be seen immediately in both the community and congregation. It seems that Morris Brown and the surrounding neighborhood essentially exist independently of each other. The congregation witnesses the new people moving into the community, but there is little to no intentional ministry engagement that is taking place. Over the upcoming years, I am hopeful that meaningful relationships will be formed between Morris Brown congregants and new neighbors around the church. These relationships will be more inclusive than simply knowing each other's names. Still, there need to be relationships that will have positive results for people in the congregation and community. Through these relationships, I am hopeful that people in the community will begin to see the values in the church by attending and eventually becoming church members. This reality can be obtained through the relationship between congregational members and community neighbors.

Over the next ten years, one of the criteria that will display how this collaboration works is through the in-person worship composition. At present, the congregational

members make up essentially 100 percent of the in-person worship participants.

Hopefully, this will be a more inclusive endeavor as we move forward incrementally:

1. 2024 (80 percent congregation/20 percent community)
2. 2026 (70 percent congregation/ 30 percent community)
3. 2021 (60 percent congregation/40 percent community)

These three-year, five-year, and ten-year projections regarding in-person worship participation will help determine how effectively the church and community will work together. The local congregation and society depend on each other to reach their full God-given potential. Through these newly formed relationships, God will be glorified through overcoming barriers and allowing our identity through the children of God to be the most informative identity in our lives. The love of God causes us to come together and not create division. Furthermore, when we can overcome differences, it allows us to truly recognize that everyone is made in the image of God. When we reach this reality, it causes us to have a deeper appreciation for those who cross our paths.

Moreover, this collaboration will expand the lessons of the black church. The black church is much more than race and ethnicity. Still, it is much more about the shared relationships and experiences that marginalized people in America have with God and each other. Similarly, these newly formed relationships that will take place in communities of faith, like Morris Brown AME Church, will continue to expand the lessons of the black church. Whenever the congregation displays radical hospitality to others, the black church will live. Every time the community ministers to those on the margins, the black church will live. Every time the congregation expands the view of

salvation, the black church will live. The black church lives through relationships to God and neighbor and not through the race.

Finally, gentrification is not unique to the Charleston Peninsula. Many urban and suburban places throughout the country are experiencing the same reality. Every day people are being priced out of the homes that have been their geographical refuges for multiple generations. Some schools used to be the pinnacles of education for minority communities that are sharply declining in enrollment, and their days for survival are limited. There are small businesses that have played significant roles in the local communities that can no longer survive. Some neighborhoods have been the bedrock of minority America that have been removed one family at a time. Then there is the black church that has been a faithful witness even while being relegated to the margins of not just the community to the institutional Christian church. I pray that this work will not only help the black church have a broader impact through its ecclesiology but also that congregations in gentrifying communities will be able to connect and live out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

Appendix I: “Don’t Abort the Mission”

Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV)

The term to “Abort the Mission” is a very familiar adage. It means that the “mission” or the “objective” or the “purpose” that has been originally planned has to end very “quickly” and often “unexpectedly.” Most of the times that I have heard this term it has been in connection to a military or covert governmental mission. In the midst of the mission, something happens that brings the mission to a sudden end.

To be honest, “aborting the mission” is NOT something that is intended before the mission begins. However, when certain unanticipated things arise, it is a better alternative than leading into a place that can lead to “disaster” and “devastation.” The reason that it is so difficult to abort the mission is because a lot of planning... and preparation... and partnerships have gone into carrying out the mission. However, when the mission has to be aborted, all of these “preliminary preparations” have to be abandoned.

It is important that we understand that before the mission can be carried out, that all of the “missionaries” (those who have been commissioned to carry out the mission at hand) must be able to NOT ONLY understand, but they must be able to articulate exactly what the mission is. This is NO different here, in the Christian Church, before we can carry out our God-given mission, we have to understand exactly what our mission is. It is in our passage for today, that Jesus gives all of HIS disciples the mission.

Brothers and sisters, it is in these last few verses of the gospel of Matthew that we see a “resurrected Christ” who is calling HIS disciples together to share with them the

mission that must be carried out. The passage says in verse 16, “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.” We remember that the twelve disciples have been reduced by one. After the defection and suicide of Judas, there are now eleven disciples left and they are meeting Jesus at the mountain where HE has directed them to go. We CANNOT forget that, in the gospel of Matthew, this is the first time that they have seen Jesus after the resurrection and so the text lets us know that there is a dichotomy of responses between the eleven disciples.

This becomes evident in verse 17 when the text says, “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” In other words, when the disciples see the resurrected Christ there are some of them that worship HIM. They are so happy to see HIM alive after the difficulty of going to Calvary... and dying on a Roman cross... and being buried in a borrowed tomb... and having a large stone rolled in front of the tomb... and having soldiers guard the tomb—and now, after all of this, they see Jesus alive and well.

Therefore, there are some of these “eleven disciples” who are worshipping HIM. This is the appropriate response when we enter into the presence of Jesus. Morris Brown, every time we enter into the Lord’s presence, we ought to worship HIM for being who HE is. We worship Jesus for being the “King of kings.” We worship Jesus for being the “Lord of lords.” We worship Jesus for being the “Only begotten Son of the Father”—and so every time we gather in the Lord’s presence, we have to worship HIM for who HE is.

Nevertheless, NOT all of the disciples worship HIM, but there are some of the eleven that doubt HIM. The Greek word that is translated “to doubt” in this verse can also be translated “to hesitate.” These disciples that left everything to follow Jesus are now

hesitant or doubtful to believe HIS resurrection. Even though they saw HIM heal the sick... Even though they saw HIM raise the dead... Even though they saw HIM feed thousands with a little boy's lunch—they have a hard time accepting the fact that this Christ is able to get out of a borrowed tomb.

Morris Brown, we can NEVER be so “deceived” or “distracted” by the things that we see in the world that they cause us to doubt what the Lord can and CANNOT do. If we are honest with ourselves, sometimes we come to church “worried about so many problems” and “paralyzed by so many fears” that we miss the opportunity to worship the Lord when we enter into HIS presence. However, brothers and sisters, if the Lord has been as good to you, as HE has been to me, I refuse to waste my time in HIS presence doubting HIM. HE has brought me from too far and done too much for me to doubt who HE is. As the old song says, “You can't make me doubt HIM because I know too much about HIM.”

After the eleven disciples gather together, Jesus begins to give them the mission of the Church. It says in verse 18, “...And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...’” The *first thing* that we have to understand about a mission is that it has to come from SOMEBODY who has authority. In other words, a mission is ONLY as “powerful” as the PERSON that gives it to us. This is the reason that it is important from the beginning for Jesus to let the disciples know that the mission that HE is giving to them is coming from a place of authority.

We have to remember that this is the resurrected Christ that is talking to HIS disciples. So many things changed when Jesus got up out of the grave, and one of the

benefits of the resurrection is that all authority in heaven and on earth was placed in the hands of Jesus. It is with this new authority that Jesus begins to empower HIS disciples to become “missionaries.” Jesus says, at the beginning of verse 19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

Notice that the first part of the mission of the Church has to be to make disciples. We know what a disciple is. A disciple is a faithful follower of Jesus Christ... A disciple is one who is willing to leave his or her life behind a follow Jesus Christ... A disciple is one who has a daily determination to be more like Jesus—Morris Brown, it is the mission of the Church to make disciples, but we have to do this by going into all the nations. The mission of the Christian Church is inclusive. It does NOT give us permission to pick and choose where we go to make disciples.

We have to make disciples of people that look like us and people that do NOT look like us. We have to make disciples of people that speak the same language and people that may NOT speak the same language. We have to make disciples of people that have a common ancestry and people of different ancestry—Morris Brown, it is the mission of the Church to make disciples of all nations.

Well, how do we make disciples? The second part of verse 19 says, “...Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” Brothers and sisters, baptism is an essential part of the mission of the Church. There are too many times that we misunderstand the importance of baptism, but it is baptism that incorporates us into the “Family of God.” It is baptism that lets us know that we are the “Children of Almighty God.” This is the reason that as Methodist we do NOT withhold baptism from

children because we do NOT have the authority to tell anybody that because of their age that they will be excluded from the “Family of God.”

The interesting thing about the mission that Jesus gives us, as it relates to baptism, is that HE gives us the formula, but HE does NOT give us the method. Jesus tells us that we must baptize “. . .In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It is important, that Jesus gives us the trinitarian formula to use for baptism. The reason is since God is “trinitarian by nature,” it is important that we share in the very nature of God as we are baptized into HIS family.

Notice with me that although Jesus gives us the formula of baptism, HE NEVER says anything about the physical method that we should use. Jesus NEVER says to ONLY baptize by immersion. . . Jesus NEVER says to ONLY baptize by sprinkling. . . Jesus NEVER says to ONLY baptize by pouring—but Jesus says that it is the mission of the church to go out and make disciples, in all nations, through Christian baptism. I submit to you today, Morris Brown, that the reason that Jesus does NOT give us a particular method to use for baptism is because true baptism is NOT experienced on the outside, but real baptism is something that we experience on the inside. It does NOT matter “how much” or “how little” water we use on the outside, if we are NOT baptized by the Holy Spirit on the inside then the whole parade has passed us by.

It is at the beginning of verse 20 that Jesus goes on to say, “. . .And teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Morris Brown, a large part of the mission that Jesus gives to the Church is to teach the disciples. However, we CANNOT just teach anything, but we have to teach everything that the Lord has commanded us. In

other words, the mission of the church is to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is an awesome responsibility because during HIS time of earth, Jesus was the primary teacher. Now that HE is about to ascend back to the Father, Jesus tells us that the mission of the church is to continue to teach.

As I think about this mission of Jesus to HIS Church, it becomes clear that too many times, in the contemporary Church, there is NOT enough teaching going on. Part of the reason that there is such a lack of teaching is because we CANNOT teach what we do NOT know. Unless we first commit ourselves to learning the gospel of Jesus Christ then we can NEVER carry out the mission to teach it. It is ONLY after the disciples have learn at the feet of Jesus that they are able to teach others the good news of Jesus Christ. We have to teach, the disciples, that we have to pray for those who despitefully misuse us. We have to teach, the disciples, that there is a blessing in turning the other cheek. We have to teach, the disciples, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind—but we have to love our neighbors as ourselves—we CANNOT carry out the mission of Jesus Christ unless we teach the gospel.

This passage concludes, at the end of verse 20, when it says, "...And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." This promise of Jesus assumes the division between "this present world" and "the world to come." This was familiar in Jewish theology, and it envisions an abiding presence of the risen Lord among Christians. In other words, the resurrected Christ is always with HIS believers. This is the real blessing of the mission. We do NOT have to carry out the mission by ourselves, but the ONE who gave us the mission is with us every step of the way.

As we come to a close, this morning, it is important that we understand that this mission that Jesus Christ gives us is too important to abort. When we carry out the mission of Christ, there are disciples that are waiting to come to Christ. The mission is so important, I believe that is the reason that Jesus reminds us of the promise that HE is with us every step of the way. As I thought about this mission of Christ, I thought about weightlifting. ONE thing I like about going weightlifting is that people do NOT go by themselves. When someone is doing the bench press, and they begin to strain on number twelve or thirteen, and start making weird noises, it becomes obvious that they are pressing more weight than they can bear. It becomes evident that if they keep pressing the limits, they could very well drop the weights and let them fall down on them, and lead to a serious injury.

However, just in the nick of time, the gentleman who is standing over them and there to help them, reaches over them and say, “You keep pushing, but I’ve got you. Keep going but I’m here too. You don’t have to push up these last few on your own.” Then when they have gone up for the last one, his friends do a merciful thing for them. They lift the weights totally out of their hands and puts them on the rack. That’s grace. That’s what God does. When the weight of the mission is too heavy and we CANNOT keep it up, when our arms are trembling and we start to make all kinds of noises, when we are going through difficulty, God’s grace steps in, carries the weight, picks it up, and puts it on the rack.

As I take my seat, I will be the first one to admit that carrying out the mission can get difficult sometimes. There will be people who talk about us... There will be people

that will try to put stumbling blocks in our way... There will be people that want to see us fail—but the mission is too important to abort. I do NOT know about you, but I am so glad that when things get tough, that we have a Savior who has promised that HE is always with us, even until the end of the age.

Don't abort the mission—because the ONE who “called” you will also “keep” you. Don't abort the mission—because “There is a friend WHO will stick by you closer than a brother.” Don't abort the mission—because “Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will always stand.” Don't abort the mission—because “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings like eagles. They shall run and NOT grow weary, and they shall walk and NOT faint.”

Morris Brown, I am so glad that I have learned to wait on the Lord, because: When you wait on HIM, HE will make crooked places straight. When you wait on HIM, HE will make a way out of NO way When you wait on HIM, Jesus will be a bridge over troubled waters.

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