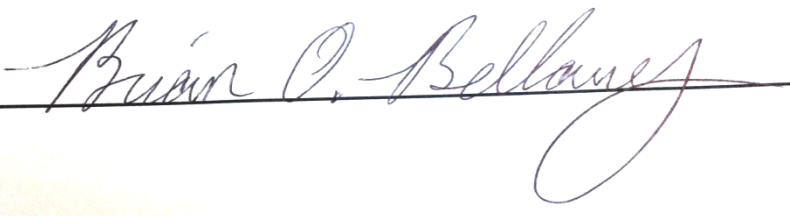


An Examination of Prevalent Twenty-First Century Models of
Community Engagement by the Black Churches

Submitted by Brian Odem Bellamy to the University of Exeter
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(ABSTRACT)

This thesis examines three prevalent models of community engagement in the black churches in the United States of America since the year 2000. It will contribute to existing scholarship by identifying theological motivations for community engagement by the black churches, and assessing the extent to which the black churches address and fulfill criteria for advancing liberation delineated from three generations of scholarship in Black Theology. This shall provide theological insight into the continued social relevance of the black churches.

Existing scholarship has shown that the black churches historically have engaged the oppressed communities they have served by addressing their secular and social needs in addition to their spiritual ones, with a sense of mission to affirm human dignity and advance social justice. This praxis of liberation through community engagement was necessitated by the oppressive contexts in which the black churches were founded, and has continued in varied ways in tandem with shifts in social location of black people in America. Black church community initiatives have also been marked among three generations of scholars in Black Theology, who have delineated imperatives for which the black churches might engage their communities to fully continue the praxis of liberation in the present. The interrelated aims of this thesis are to discover the theological motivations of black church community engagement agents, and, to consider the extent to which the community engagement initiatives of the black churches of the twenty-first century address critical theological criteria from Black Theology for advancing liberation; each of which will help to illuminate theological implications for the continued social relevance of the black churches.

This project requires an examination of contemporary models of black church community engagement in their own social reality. The models of community engagement that are researched are grass-roots movements where black churchpersons use non-violent direct action to advance particular social justice causes, community development corporations where churches filter grant money from the government to create economic opportunities for their local communities, and megachurch initiatives where congregations use the revenue of their large memberships to effect positive change in their communities. Local examples of each model are examined from a grounded theory approach through interviews with clergy and community workers, observations of worship and program activities, and textual analysis of bulletins, websites, and brochures.

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Chapter One: Thesis Introduction

1.1 Introduction

While the black churches in the United States have been lauded for their prophetic voice and social witness in the past, there have been consistent concerns about the social relevance of the black churches since the conclusion of the Civil Rights Movement to the present era.¹ To address concerns about the social relevance of the black churches today, this thesis examines models of black church community engagement (BCCE) in the United States of America since

¹ For example, James Cone asked, “Do black churches, as institutions, still regard black peoples’ struggle for liberation as the theological foundation of their *raison d’être*? If black church people would answer this question in the affirmative, then all I can say is that their judgment of themselves differs significantly from many black non - Christians who at best regard the churches as irrelevant in the black struggle for justice. Aside from two or three isolated examples, where is the empirical evidence that black churches are involved in the liberation struggle for the poor? How long will we continue to appeal to the Black heroes of the past as evidence for the contemporary relevance of the black churches?” James Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism Liberation and Black Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), p. 148. Gayraud Wilmore pinpointed the end of the Civil Rights Movement as the beginning of the waning of the prophetic witness of the black churches. He said, the prophetic witness of the black churches began to be compromised as early as the end of the 1960’s by a “flood of white retrenchment and black conservatism,” that has continued into the twenty-first century. Iva Carruthers. “The Black Church in the Age of False prophets: An Interview with Gayraud Gilmore.” *Blow the Trumpet in Zion!: Global Vision and Action for the Twenty-First Century Black Church*. Iva Caruthers, Frederick Haynes, & Jeremiah Wright, eds. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), p. 167. Even further, in his introduction to *Long March Ahead: African American Churches in Public policy in Post-Civil Rights America*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3., R. Drew Smith observed that the black churches have effected little-to-no changes in public policy. He said, “African American Churches emerged from the Civil Rights Movement with political momentum stemming from their successful mass-based public policy activism and legally enhanced electoral opportunities achieved as a result of that activism. Although there is ample evidence that African Americans have built effectively on the electoral momentum produced by the mid 1960’s civil rights legislation, there is less evidence of significant public policy involvement on their part over the last 40 years.” As a result of this conservative retrenchment, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya observed in their work that, “Today’s Black Church is struggling for relevance in the resolution of today’s black problems: racism; drug abuse; child care; health and welfare; housing; counseling; unemployment; teenage pregnancy; the false securities of conspicuous consumption; and the whole tragic malaise with which society in general is burdened. It must address all of these social challenges without abandoning its distinctive mandate to assist human beings in their efforts to find conciliation and comfort with their Creator.” *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 398. In his article, “The Black Church is Dead” *Huffington Post*. 28 February 2010. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html. Accessed on September 1, 2010; Eddie Glaude has concluded that the black churches have all but lost their social relevance for the following reasons. First, while the black churches have had the legacy of being socially progressive, they have also been largely theologically conservative. Secondly, the black churches of today have much more competition than they did during the time of the Civil Rights Movement. They are no longer the center of the community that they were when African Americans were forced to live out their existence in segregated spaces, and there is an increase in the number of African Americans who are attending charismatic churches pastored by white ministers as a source of competition for the black churches. Ultimately, Glaude claims that the prophetic witness of the black churches has been routinized. In this claim, the black churches of today are guilty of using victories of the past for justifying a continued relevance for the present.

the year 2000.² In so doing, I seek to discover the theological motivations of the black churches for their community engagement in the twenty-first century, and, to consider the extent to which the community engagement initiatives of the black churches address the theological criterion of Black Theology for advancing liberation, each of which shall aid in illuminating the theological implications of the continued social relevance of the black churches.

Defining the black churches in the United States can be a most difficult task, because the black churches are composed of different denominations, socio-economic classes, geographical

² By community engagement, I mean the churches interaction with their local communities to address temporal and social needs created by social and economic oppression. Scholarship demonstrates that this activity has taken place in the black churches from their beginnings to the present. For example, E. Franklin Frazier noted the following ways black churches engaged the secular needs of their communities during the Reconstruction period. The churches provided organization for new black communities of free persons after the emancipation, as the churches provided a form of leadership, structure and organization of black lives to an extent that had not existed since social life had been destroyed among transplanted Africans. The churches served as a basis for economic cooperation. The churches took on the monumental task of educating the former slaves, as slaves were kept illiterate by the law. The churches also served as an arena of political life, and ultimately, as a refuge in a hostile white society. *The Negro Church in America*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 51-59. Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson identified ways in which the black churches engaged the secular needs of their communities during the period of Jim Crow segregation from 1877 through the first decades of twentieth century in what they called the “genius” of the black churches. They observed that the churches served as community centers, hosting social activities for the disenfranchised, while also encouraging education and the support of black owned businesses. The churches have existed as a democratically free fellowship that has transcended racial barriers, and it has existed as a potentially free ministry, where the minister may challenge social ills without fear of reprisal from the congregation. In these ways, the churches functioned to construct an identity for black Christians that asserted their human dignity in the face of oppression. *The Negro's Church*. (New York, Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933), p. 279-292. David Chappell concluded that the black churches were the leading force of mobilizing the community to advance the Civil Rights Movement of the mid- twentieth century in pursuit of voting rights and equal protection under the law. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Aldon Morris pointed out that the black churches filled a large part of the institutional void, providing support and direction for the diverse activities of an oppressed group. They furnished outlets for social and artistic expression; forums for the discussion of important issues; social environments that developed; trained, and disciplined potential leaders from all walks of life; meaningful symbols to engender hope, enthusiasm and a resilient group spirit. The churches were the place to observe, participate in, and experience the reality of owning and directing an institution free from the control of whites. The churches were also an arena where group interests could be articulated and defended collectively. For all of these reasons the black churches have served as the organizational hub of black life. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. (New York, NY: MacMillan, Inc., 1984), p. 5. Andrew Billingsley, discovered in his research, that at end of the twentieth century the black churches continued to address temporal needs of their communities. He noted that, “... community outreach activities are much more widespread than is generally believed, especially in urban areas, ... and that the nature of that outreach activity is different from the community activity of the civil rights era. The most frequent type of community outreach program operated by black churches in the survey is that designed to strengthen and support families, for black adolescents and service to the elderly.” *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform*, (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2003), p. 88.

regions, and they encompass many theologies and worship experiences. Therefore, I will narrow my focus on the black churches by concentrating on independent black churches. That is, those religious bodies that were founded and led by black Americans and that continue to have a majority black membership.³ I will then review literature in Black Theology with regard to the social commitments of the churches to ascertain pivotal theological criterion for liberating community engagement.

The most prevalent models through which black churches have continued to engage their communities since the year 2000 models became apparent as I documented in the review of literature the various ways that the black churches have engaged their communities in tandem with the social location of blacks in the United States in a chronological manner. These models are grass-roots movements, community development corporations, and megachurch initiatives.

Grass Roots Movements

Grass-roots movements emerged as a prevalent model of BCCE during the mid-twentieth century struggle for Civil Rights in the United States. These groups were largely ecumenical in makeup, and often met in churches to galvanize support from the community to fight against discrimination and social injustice. These groups employed direct non-violent methods such as protests, marches, sit-ins, and boycotts. These protest activities drew the attention of the media to acts of social injustice and successfully brought an end to segregation and secured voting rights and equal protection under the law for all Americans in the middle twentieth century. The most

³ The seven largest independent black church bodies are identified by C. Eric Lincoln, and Lawrence Mamiya as follows: The African Methodist Episcopal (AME); The African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion); The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME); The National Baptist Convention, USA (NBC); The National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA); The Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and The Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Each of these groups claims over 1,000,000 adherents. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995.), p.1.

prominent of these groups to continue into the twenty-first century is the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Yet, newer grass-roots groups have continued to emerge across the country to confront the twenty-first century urban crisis.

Community Development Corporations

In the post-Civil Rights Movement, as the popularity of the grass-roots movement began to ebb, a new form of BCCE began to gain momentum, the Community Development Corporation. A Community Development Corporation may be maintained as a separate non-profit agency by a local church or group of local churches to filter grant monies from the government and philanthropic organizations to improve their local communities in a plethora of ways, such as; housing development, charter schools and job creation through the establishment of local businesses.

Megachurch Initiatives

Within the last twenty years there have been churches around the country, particularly in the south and southwest that have grown in excess of 2000 weekly adherents, with some drawing over 25,000 parishioners over a weekend. These very large congregations, with their tremendous resources, have the power to make a positive impact in their communities in a number of ways.

I have chosen a local example of each of these models of BCCE and will research them from a grounded theory approach through observations, interviews and textual analysis to develop theories to describe, from agents of the churches themselves, their theological motivations and sense of mission. Their motivations for community engagement will then be considered with liberation criteria for community engagement from Black Theology to provide

theological insight into the continued social relevance of the black churches in the twenty-first century.

1.2 The Formation of Independent Black Churches and the Liberation Mandate

Although some scholars have reduced the formation of independent black churches to a purely social phenomenon, the formation of the independent black churches must be simultaneously understood as both social and theological.⁴ The independent black churches of the twenty-first century find their roots in a nineteenth century movement of protest that coincided with the slaves in the south and the freed persons of the north. When enslavers introduced the slaves to a version of Christianity that reduced their earthly moral obligations to obeying their masters, for which they would be rewarded in heaven, scholarship has demonstrated that many slaves surreptitiously began to hold their own religious meetings where they affirmed their human dignity, their agency as persons, and their unfettered relationship to their Creator.⁵ Free persons in the north worshipped with whites in a segregated manner. Blacks were forced to sit in the balcony or an assigned section of the church during worship. Another

⁴ In his article, "Black Ecumenism and the Liberation Struggle." *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. VII, No. 1, (Fall 1979), James Cone highlighted that black and white scholars have often reduced the appearance of the autonomous black churches during the nineteenth century to social factors, to the exclusion of theology. For example, H. Richard Niebuhr said, "The causes of the racial schism are not difficult to determine. Neither theology nor polity furnished the occasion for it. The sole source of this denominationalism is social." *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1929). J. Deotis Roberts claimed, "We left the white churches for non-theological reasons." "A Black Ecclesiology of Involvement" in *Journal of Religious Thought*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, (Spring-Summer 1975), p. 43.

⁵ Albert Raboteau illuminated this phenomenon in his work, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" In the Antebellum South*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1980), where he uses firsthand accounts to examine the religious meetings of the slaves, which he has termed the "Invisible Institution." This work is further explicated in the literature review. For additional firsthand accounts of the slaves opposition to the enslaver's theology see Clifton H. Johnson, ed., *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1993. Norman R. Yetman, ed., *Life Under the Peculiar Institution": Selections From the Slave Narrative Collection*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970. Furthermore, some scholars are convinced that the slaves used their spirituals as coded songs of protests against their condition, and the hypocrisy of Christian enslavers. As such, the spirituals are considered a primary source of evidence of the slaves' rejection of the enslaver's theology. This idea is expanded in Howard Thurman, *Deep River and the Negro Speaks of Life and Death*. Richmond Ind.: Friends United Press, 1975), as well as in James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 1972.)

humiliating occurrence was that blacks would receive the Lord's Supper only after whites had been served.⁶ These practices were most famously protested by Richard Allen at the racially-mixed St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1787 when Allen and the black parishioners of that church walked out never to return after having grown weary of being humiliated in the house of the Lord. Allen and his followers subsequently founded the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and from this church grew the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a national denomination by 1816.⁷

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was the first independent black denomination in the United States to organize on a national level. Its founding represented not only the start of a social phenomenon, that is, of blacks in America organizing formal regional and national religious bodies, but it also illuminated the theological impetus for the founding of independent black churches. It was the same theological impetus that compelled the slaves to hold hidden worship services that were free from the enslavers' theology. In separating themselves from white Christians to affirm their human dignity, blacks made the theological statement that their worth as children of God was no less than any other human being, that the God of creation

⁶ Accounts of segregated worship practices in the antebellum period can be found in Carol V.R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths, Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches 1760-1840*. New York: Oxford University press, 1973. James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power*. Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986. William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South, 1865-1900*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1993.

⁷ For more detailed accounts of the founding of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (also called "Mother Bethel") and the subsequent founding of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination see Allen's autobiography, Richard Allen. *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen, to which is annexed the rise and progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1960. Other accounts can be found in J. Curtis Foster. *The African Methodist Episcopal Church Makes its Mark in America*. Nashville, Tenn.: AMEC, 1976. Richard S. Newman *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*. (New York: New York University Press, 2008.) Daniel Alexander Payne. *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. (New York, Arno Press, 1969). Wesley, Charles H. *Richard Allen, Apostle of Freedom*, Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1969.

extended grace impartially.⁸ This theological understanding of their relationship to God, and the equality of humanity under God, formed an enduring mission in the independent black church to affirm human dignity and to decry injustice in the world. Thus, the black churches were founded as houses of liberation.⁹

The independent black church movement was further organizationally solidified after the emancipation of the slaves. While many joined white congregations and denominations after

⁸Several scholars have read theological meaning into the separation of blacks into their own worship spaces. For example, Albert Raboteau concluded from his research on the religion of the slaves that in creating hidden worship spaces free from the enslaver, “they [the slaves] essentially denied, the doctrinal basis of slaveholding Christianity by refusing to believe that God made them inferior to whites.” Timothy E. Fulop, Albert J. Raboteau. *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 95. That, the separation of blacks into their own worship services was a theological statement, is further explicated by Dwight Hopkins. In his work, *Shoes That Fit our Feet: Sources For a Constructive Black Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993, Hopkins used the slave narratives to tell how slaves received their masters' faith and transformed it into a gospel of liberation. Even further, in his work, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000, Hopkins drew a constructive theology of liberation from the faith and witness of the slaves as represented in slave narratives. James Cone surmised of the theological formation of independent black churches as follows, “Segregation and slavery in the society prompted black churches to define black people's political resistance against oppression as a witness to God's eschatological intentions to establish justice for the poor and weak in the land. Whether we speak of northern black independent churches, blacks who remained in white churches or of the so-called "invisible institution" in the south, the dominant theme in black ecclesiology is God's election and empowerment of an oppressed community to struggle for justice in human society.” “Black Ecumenism and the Liberation Struggle.” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. VII, No. 1, (Fall 1979), p. 2.

⁹ This is the consensus amongst scholars of the black churches. Gayraud Wilmore called the black churches commitment to freedom, “the defining characteristic of black Christianity and black Religion in the United States.” *Black Religion & Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of the Afro-American People*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), p. ix-x. Willie White said, “The revelation of God in the black churches and in the lives and experience of black Christians has laid an obligation on black people: their task is to stand everywhere in the world as a Christian symbol of God’s opposition to oppression.” “Separate Unto God”, *Christian Century*, (February 13, 1974), p. 179. Peter Paris noted that the black churches have seen their mission to stand against oppression as a commitment of their faith in Christ. He said, “In the minds of the black churches, aggressive action in behalf of justice has always been tantamount to serving the needs of the race. Similarly, zealous action in behalf of truth has traditionally characterized the nature of their preaching and worship, the substance of which had been for them a source of justice. In other words, they have viewed justice as improving the quality of the race’s life as grounded in truth, that is, in the will of the Redeemer.” *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 74-75. James Cone pointed out that the mission to liberate the oppressed continued to be advanced by the churches well into the twentieth century. James Cone said, “The theme of God’s impartiality is not only found in black churches of the nineteenth century but also in the twentieth century. In the writings of such black theologians as Howard Thurman and Benjamin Mays, and in the political activism of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Martin Luther King, Jr., the black churches projected an image of church unity based on a political commitment of justice for the poor.” *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1999), p.145.

slavery, the vast majority of free blacks organized independent churches,¹⁰ where they continued throughout the years of Jim Crow segregation and civil rights struggles to affirm human dignity and to advance social justice in the spirit of liberation.

The liberation mission is integral to defining the black churches. The need to affirm human dignity and advance social justice, which required a separation from the oppressive theology and practices of white Christians, is the *raison d'être* of the black churches. For the black churches to turn away from the cause of advancing the liberation of the oppressed is to turn away from the very purpose of their founding.¹¹

Noting the founding of the black churches on the premise of liberation, scholars in Black Theology have mandated that the black churches must continue to provide liberating ministries for the communities they serve as a black church distinctive. Liberating practices by the black churches have been observed across the shifts in social location of black people in America through the denomination-

¹⁰ The development and work of the independent black denominations will be further expanded in section 2.4 of the literature review.

¹¹ For example, William Watley observed of the denomination-transcending mission of the black churches, "Justice and liberation are to the African American churches what the Eucharist is to Episcopalians, what conversion is to Methodists, what believer's baptism is to Baptists, what local church autonomy is to Congregationalists, what constitutionality is to Presbyterians, what justification by faith through grace is to Lutherans, what the papacy is to Catholics, and the Trinity is to the Orthodox. Justice and liberation are the issues upon which the black churches cut their teeth. Along with their holistic view, those concerns form the basis of their distinctive theological witness, upon which they dare not and cannot compromise." *Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land; the African American Churches and Ecumenism*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993), p. 44. Willie White said, "the black church is defined not by any or all of the traditionally accepted creeds but by the creed of liberation: the creed that one man does not have the right to oppress another, be the other black or white, baptized by immersion or by sprinkling, fashionably attired or running naked in the jungle. It is defined by the creed that the dehumanization of one man by another is in total contradiction to the way of Christ and must be opposed. And it is this creed which makes possible the black Christian or black church *community*." *The Christian Century*, (February 13, 1974), p. 180. C. Eric Lincoln posited that this unofficial creed of liberation was profound enough to have served as the theological basis of a new Christian church, had not the founders of the black independent church chosen to follow white denominational models. "The Social Cosmos of Black Ecumenism," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Fall 1979, p. 14. James Cone offered that the commitment to affirm human dignity and advance social justice provided a continuity that made it possible for black churches to come together across denominations in the Civil Rights Movement. He said, "... the unity of the black churches was found in a religious expression grounded in the practice of freedom in the larger society. When our faith was expressed in the struggle for justice, we were joined together by a common spirit of liberation that controlled our community." Cone, James H. *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*. (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1999), p. 149.

building period of the black churches after slavery and through the Civil Rights Movement. This becomes apparent as we trace models of community engagement in the black churches through the twentieth century.

1.3 Community Engagement through the Societal Shifts of the Black Churches

In this section, I will identify the ways the black churches have engaged their oppressed communities in tandem with the evolving social location of black people in America, which shall be expanded in chapter two of the thesis. Although this exploration will be expanded in the literature review in chapter two, it is necessary to briefly discuss it here to support the position that there has been a continuity of liberation praxis by the black churches through community engagement from its genesis in the hidden religious meetings of the slaves through the Civil Rights Movement of the middle twentieth century.

The hidden religious meetings of the slaves¹² addressed the needs of enslaved communities in several ways. First, as the slaves were divided by African origins, broken family units and divisions of labor on the plantation, these meetings served as a source of social cohesion. Secondly, the hidden religious meetings of the slaves promoted solidarity and protection from the cruelty of the enslaver through codes that forbade reporting members from the faith community to the enslaver for behaviors forbidden by the enslaver. Additionally, in their hidden religious meetings, the enslaved communities reformed the enslavers' theology and developed an unofficial creed of equality and liberation while affirming the slave as a child of God, inferior to no person. Further, in their hidden religious meetings the enslaved communities

¹² Because these meetings are only documented by those who survived slavery years after the emancipation, there are no official dates. To give a broad time frame for the existence of the hidden church of the slaves, it is known that the chattel slavery of Africans began in the American colonies in the 17th century and these hidden religious meetings would have no longer been necessary after the adoption of the 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution which ended slavery on December 6, 1865.

created free pulpits. The hidden nature of the slaves' religious meetings made it so that the slave preacher could preach, and the community could affirm, a message of liberation free from the consequences of the enslaver. The innovation of this free pulpit would remain a constant feature of the black churches as they continued to advance the cause of liberation in subsequent social shifts.¹³

The mutual aid societies engaged communities of free blacks in the antebellum north in very important ways.¹⁴ First, the mutual aid societies provided opportunities for leadership development for blacks in a way that no other institution in a segregated society would. The officers would lead meetings, resolve disputes, and represent the community to government officials. Further, until the founding of independent black churches the mutual aid societies engaged the spiritual needs of black community, by performing wedding and funeral rites, and purchasing cemeteries, as blacks were not allowed to be buried in white cemeteries. In particular, the mutual aid societies engaged their communities by enforcing moral codes with guidelines for discipline very much like a church congregation. Importantly, the mutual aid societies also engaged the larger black community through their work in the abolitionist movement.¹⁵

After the emancipation of the slaves, blacks were free to establish formal church

¹³ The acts of community engagement through the religious meetings of the slaves are further explicated in chapter two through the review of the following works of scholarship; W.E.B. Du Bois, ed. *The Negro Church*. Lanham MD: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003-Reprint of 1903 ed. E. Franklin Frazier. *The Negro Church in America*. New York: Schocken Books, 1964. John Blassingame. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. Albert Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980. Albert Raboteau. *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹⁴ These quasi-religious organizations of free blacks, created for mutual aid and support lasted from the late 18th century through the antebellum period. The Mutual Aid Societies are explicated in section 2.3.

¹⁵ The acts of community engagement through the mutual aid societies are further explicated in chapter 2 through the review of the following works of scholarship; W.E.B. Dubois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899, 1996 reprint. C. Eric Lincoln. "The Social Cosmos of Black Ecumenism," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. VII, No. 1, (Fall 1979). Lawrence N. Jones *African Americans and the Christian Churches: 1619-1860*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007. Julie Winch. "The Leaders of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1787-1848," Ph.D. Diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1983.

congregations across the south, uniting with their brothers and sisters in the north through the building of denominations.¹⁶ During this period of denomination building, black church bodies engaged black communities by founding organizations for the training of youth, developing and publishing Christian education materials, through the founding of schools, colleges, and seminaries, and through the training of missionaries to work domestically and abroad.¹⁷

During the Civil Rights Movement¹⁸ black churches engaged their communities through the creation of ecumenical groups that appropriated various tactics to challenge the racial injustices encoded in state and federal law. These groups were foreshadowed by the Fraternal Council of Negro Churchmen, which was founded in 1934 by clergymen who were disillusioned by the Federal Council of Churches¹⁹ reluctance to address social injustice. The most popular of these groups was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference founded by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1955 to organize movements of direct non-violent action in the urban centers of the segregated south. These groups engaged black communities to fight against segregation and to fight for voting rights and equal protection under the law.²⁰

¹⁶ While the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church were founded during the antebellum period in the north, they developed as national denominations within the first fifty years of the emancipation of the slaves as they organized formal church bodies of the freed persons in the south. This is also when the remaining major black denominations were founded, with the exception of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., which split from the National Baptist Convention, USA in 1961. Refer to footnote # 3 for Lincoln and Mamiya's list of seven major black denominations.

¹⁷ The acts of community engagement by the black denominations are further explicated in chapter 2 through the review of the following works of scholarship; Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*. Washington, D.C., The Associated Publishers, 1945. Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of The First Years*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 2004. Peter J. Paris. *Social Teaching of the Black Churches*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985. Eddie S. Glaude. *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

¹⁸ The Civil Rights Movement occurred during the middle twentieth century with heightened intensity during the years of the public career of Martin Luther King, Jr., 1954-1968.

¹⁹ Precursor to the National Council of Churches

²⁰ The acts of community engagement by the black churches during the Civil Rights Movement are further explicated in chapter two through the review of the following works of scholarship; James Cone. "Black Ecumenism and the Liberation Struggle." *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. VII, No. 1, (Fall 1979). Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography*. Athens, GA : University of Georgia Press, 1987. Mary Sawyer. "Black Ecumenism: Cooperative Social Change Movements in the Black Church." Ph.D. Diss., Duke

As American society became more conservative in the post-Civil Rights era²¹, non-violent protests began to diminish. The black churches continued to engage their communities in local configurations, at times in cooperation with other churches, through economics and politics as primary modes of activism, through the development of community organizing agencies, and community development corporations. These organizations would appeal to politicians to effect change on the local level, and apply for grants from the government and philanthropic organizations to create jobs, develop real estate, and to pursue other economic opportunities to support troubled black communities.²²

Beyond the post-Civil Rights era,²³ America has seen the development of megachurches. As worshippers gather in the multiple thousands each week at these churches, they create vast resources to engage their communities in a number of ways, such as sponsoring programs for youth and teens, counseling and support groups, food and clothing programs for families and individuals, the support and maintenance of hospitals and nursing homes, and temporary, or permanent housing or shelters.²⁴ The former three models of community engagement; grass roots

University, 1986. Mary Sawyer. *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice*. Valley Forge, PA Trinity Press International, 1994.

²¹ The post-civil rights era is marked by a period of conservative retrenchment from 1970s through the early 1990s.

²² The acts of community engagement by the black churches during the post-civil rights era are further explicated in chapter two through the review of the following works of scholarship; Anthony B. Pinn. *The Black Church in the Post Civil Rights Era*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000. Katie Day, *Prelude to Struggle: African American Clergy and Community Organizing for Economic Development in the 1990's*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996. Michael Owens. "Doing Something in Jesus' Name: Black Churches and Community Development Corporations." *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post Civil Rights America*. ed. R. Drew Smith. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

²³ From the mid-1990's to the present.

²⁴ The acts of community engagement by black megachurches are further explicated in chapter two through the review of the following works of scholarship; Scott Thumma. "*The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: The Megachurch in Modern American Society*," Ph.D. Diss., Emory University, 1996. Scott Thumma and Dave Travis. *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn From Americas Largest Churches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007. Robert M. Franklin. *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs. "Get on Board, Little Children, There's Room For Many More: The Black Megachurch Phenomenon." *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. XXIX Nos. 1&2 (Fall 2001/Spring 2002). Milmon Harrison. *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005. Shayne Lee. *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators in the Spiritual Marketplace*. New York, NY: New York University, 2009.

groups, community development corporations, and megachurch initiatives continue to be prevalent models of BCCE in the twenty-first century and shall be examined in this thesis using local examples.

1.4 Three Generations of Black Theology and Liberation Criteria for BCCE

In this section, I will discuss how I selected works in Black Theology that yield liberation criteria for BCCE that are necessary to maintain the liberating tradition of the black churches, which shall be expanded in chapter three of the thesis. To canvass the intellectual development of Black Theology for works on BCCE, I used Dwight Hopkins' outline of the progression of the discipline. I chose Hopkins's outline because, beyond being a disciple of James Cone who is considered to be a founder of Black Theology as an academic discipline,²⁵ Hopkins is an authoritative figure in Black Theology, having published numerous major works which are accepted as central to the discipline.²⁶ Hopkins outlines at least three generations of intellectual development within Black Theology, with categories in each generation, which are divided by

Charmayne Patterson. "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread: The African American Megachurch and Prosperity Theology. Ph.D. Diss., Georgia State University, 2007. Sandra Barnes. *Black Megachurch Culture: Models for Education and Empowerment*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.

²⁵ Hopkins discusses his relationship with Cone while introducing a collection of essays entitled, *Black Faith and Public Talk : Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, 1999. The following are examples of scholarship that reference Cone as a founder and, or authoritative figure in Black Theology; Harry H. Singleton III *Black Theology and Ideology: Deideological Dimensions in the Theology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002. Julian Kunnie. *Models of Black Theology: Issues in Class, Culture, and Gender*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994. Rufus Burrow, *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology*. Jefferson, MO: McFarland & Co., 1994. Anthony B Bradley. *Political Economy of Liberation: Thomas Sowell and James Cone on the Black Experience*. New York Peter Lang, 2012.

²⁶ Hopkins's scholarship in Black Theology spans over two decades. Major works include: *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989. *Shoes That Fit our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology*. Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1993. *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. *Heart and Head: Black Theology: Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2002. *Walk Together Children: Black and Womanist Theologies, Church and Theological Education*. Eugene, OR. : Cascade Books, 2010.

methodology and or sub-discipline.²⁷ I identified a work of scholarship on church community engagement from the perspective of Black Theology from each generation and methodology identified by Hopkins so that the review is representative of the intellectual development of Black Theology as a discipline.²⁸

Identifying particular scholarly works to review from each generation and category of Hopkins' developmental history of Black Theology necessitated a selection process for works to be reviewed. Rather than reviewing several works from one generation or methodology, I reviewed one work from each generation and methodology. Additionally, due to the parameters of this dissertation chapter, I had to be highly selective as I chose works to review, as a review of all potential works would be substantive enough to serve as an entire anthology of BCCE from the perspective of Black Theology. Therefore, because I had to be highly selective I had to make judgment calls about the extent to which each work focused on BCCE, in particular, and the extent to which each work is representative of its generation and methodology. To any potential address concerns about my selections, with each selection of a work of scholarship, I have identified other works that could likewise be reviewed in its place and explained my decisions for each choice.

²⁷ Hopkins gives this outline in his book, *Introducing A Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.:Orbis Books, 1999. He further discusses and develops the outline in the following articles and book chapters, "The Future of Black Theology," *The Quarterly Review*, volume 21, number 4, (winter 2001). "Black Theology: Origins, Intellectual Terrain, and Future Agenda," in *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*. Miguel A. De La Torre, ed. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004. "Black Theology of Liberation," in *Black Theology: An International Journal*, volume 3, number 1, (2005).; and "Black Theology of Liberation," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd edition (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), David F. Ford, ed.

²⁸ The dates of Hopkins generational outline are not fixed for the following reasons. First, the generations are identified by methodological shifts, and dating when methodological shifts become predominant can only be done in an approximate manner. Secondly, first generation scholars, many of whom are still producing scholarship, have adapted to methodological shifts and have produced new works that are no longer characteristic of the methodology of the generation from when they started. As such, to help delineate generational shifts, the works selected for review will reflect the methodology with which each scholar was established.

Hopkins divided the intellectual development of scholarship in Black Theology by generations, beginning with a founding generation of scholars who developed the first major works and broke ground for the new discipline. He categorized this first generation by methodology. There are those scholars who developed their work following a systematic methodological approach patterned after classical theology and then there are those who identified and drew methodological sources from black culture and public thought such as, sermons, speeches, books, in addition to African traditional religions, and black folk religion in America.²⁹ (Cone, Roberts, Wilmore)

A second generation of scholarship in Black Theology can be observed, that critiques the gender bias in the first generation of scholarship, as well as in the institutional black church with the development of Womanist theology.³⁰ (Williams, Cannon, Grant, Townes) The second generation also pushes the discipline further by developing scholarship from the perspective of Black Theology in other categories of religion and ministry such as Pastoral Theology, Biblical Studies and Ethics. Additionally, second generation scholarship broadens the scope of Black Theology to include a Roman Catholic perspective, as the founding generation was largely Protestant; African Diaspora and international focus; and considerations from those who do not concur with black theological and Christian suppositions.³¹ (Andrews, Harris, Harris, Wimberley)

Hopkins, who considers himself a second-generation scholar in Black Theology, gave recommendations for the present generation of scholarship in Black Theology. In particular, he

²⁹ Hopkins, "Black Theology of Liberation," 21-28.

³⁰ The term "Womanism," coined by author Alice Walker in her work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego, CA : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983., is a theoretical perspective grounded in the experiences of racism, sexism and poverty by black women. Womanism shall be further explicated in section 3.3

³¹ Hopkins, "Black Theology of Liberation," 21-28.

recommended the development of more scholarship on sexuality from the perspective of Black Theology, the development of interdisciplinary methods, and the practical application of Black Theology in the church and community. Hopkins also advocated for more scholarship on the black family and church, and the larger African American community. Lastly, in the age of globalization, Hopkins advocated the need to mount an international network of black theologians.³² (Barnes, Day, Frederick, Harrison, Lee, Tucker-Worgs, Walton)

With all works reviewed, I identified common thematic criteria from across the development of Black Theology for BCCE to be used in consideration of the theological motivations for twenty-first century BCCE that was discovered from the data collected during my research.

1.5 Methodology

In this section, I will discuss the research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations for the empirical work performed in this study, which shall be expanded in chapter 4 of the thesis. The research was undertaken from a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an established qualitative research method that was introduced by Glaser and Straus in 1967.³³ According to Kathy Charmaz, an expert in constructivist³⁴ grounded theory, “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible

³² Hopkins, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 29.

³³ The following works are foundational in the development of grounded theory; Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine Pub. Co., 1967. Barney G. Glaser, ed. *Examples of Grounded Theory: A Reader*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1992. Barney G. Glaser. *The Grounded Theory Perspective*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 2001. Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss. *Basic of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, 3rd ed.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008.

³⁴ A constructivist approach to grounded theory places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants, as opposed to the objectivist approach, which is within the positivist tradition and, as such, attends to data as real in and of themselves and does

guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.”³⁵ A primary research aim of this thesis was to learn the theological motivations of the agents of BCCE for their service in the community. Through the employment of grounded theory, I was able to construct theories grounded in the agents’ words and service, as I collected data.

I chose to study twenty-first century BCCE by identifying local examples of grass-roots movements, community development corporations, and megachurch initiatives as the three prevalent models of BCCE. To be sure, there are numerous ways in which black churches engage communities on a smaller scale such as through maintaining soup kitchens and feeding programs, day care and after school programs, and facilitating homeless shelters, but I chose not to focus on these smaller initiatives individually for two reasons. First, exploring each of these examples of community engagement with the same intensity as the three prevalent models are examined would broaden the research scope to a cumbersome degree. Second, very often the aforementioned smaller scale examples of community engagement are subsumed in the identified three prevalent models, so that grass-roots movements, community development corporations and megachurch initiatives often incorporate one or more of these in their total program of community engagement. As such, to treat the small scale examples of community engagement individually would be redundant.

I chose as local examples for the models of twenty-first century BCCE, the Christian Community Commission based in New Haven, Connecticut as an example of a grass-roots group; The Beulah Land Development Center of the Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church of New Haven, Connecticut as an example of a community development corporation, and the First

not attend the processes of their production. Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory: a Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: SAGE, 2006) p. 130-131.

³⁵ Charmaz, p. 2.

Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut to research megachurch initiatives. These local examples are largely representative of their models on a national level, and were chosen not only for their well documented work in their respective communities, but also for traveling feasibility. The extensive data collection required for this project required subjects that were accessible over an extended period of time.³⁶

Data was collected through interviews, observations and textual analysis with the goal of gleaned theories about theological motivations for twenty-first century BCCE. With each local example interviews were conducted with members of the clergy, program facilitators, program volunteers, and those who had benefited from the programs offered. Respondents were asked questions about their personal theology, their cultural identity, their understanding of the black churches, and their motivation for community engagement work.³⁷ Observational data was collected for each of the local models from worship services, rallies, meetings, and at community work sites. Textual analysis was made from the websites, constitutions, mission statements, meeting minutes, handbooks, manuals, pamphlets, and newspaper articles from each local model.

A grounded theory analysis of the data has resulted in the construction of theories. To begin with, I collected rich data from the local models of community engagement.³⁸ The data was then coded, which is the attachment of labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Charmaz clarifies that coding distills data, sorts them, and gives a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data.³⁹ As an analytic grasp of the data began to take form by making and coding numerous comparisons, I wrote memos or preliminary analytic notes

³⁶ Site selection is explicated in section 4.2.

³⁷ Specific questions are listed in Appendix A.

³⁸ Charmaz offers that rich data are, “detailed focused and full. They reveal participants’ views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the context and structures of their lives. Obtaining rich data is referred to as seeking ‘thick’ description, (Geertz, Clifford. *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.), such as writing extensive field notes of observations, collecting respondents’ written personal accounts, and or compiling detailed narratives.” (Charmaz, 14)

³⁹ Charmaz, 3.

about the codes and comparisons and any other ideas about the data that occurred.⁴⁰ Through studying data, comparing them, and writing memos, I identified tentative analytic categories, or ideas that best fit and interpret the data. The analytic categories and the relationships drawn between them provided a conceptual handle on the studied experience.⁴¹ Levels of abstraction were built directly from the data, and then emerging analytic categories were checked and refined by gathering additional data. This then culminated in abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience, or grounded theory.⁴²

1.6 Expectations of Subsequent Chapters

The Christian Community Commission based in New Haven, Connecticut, as a local example of the grass-roots model, is presented in chapter five. This ecumenical group of clergy holds rallies, marches, and hosts community events to bring awareness to social justice issues. There will be a discussion of the theological motivations for those who continue to engage the black community through grass-roots organizations from this group with many questions in mind. In particular, what is the twenty-first century agenda of an organization that comes from a mold that was created to address the social injustices of the 1950's?

The Beulah Land Development Corporation, a CDC maintained and operated by The Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church of New Haven, Connecticut, as a local example of the Community Development Corporation model is presented in chapter six. The Beulah Land Development Corporation has worked to change their crime-ridden neighborhood by replacing blighted buildings with new single family homes, converting an old apartment building into a

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibid., 4.

residence for senior citizens, and adding an education wing on to their sanctuary that has been used by the City of New Haven as a school for transitional students. With several new developments on the way in addition to these, the Beulah Land Development Corporation appears to be a glowing example of how the black churches in the twenty-first century use CDC's to effect positive change in their communities. However, the extent to which the urban crisis may be remedied through economic development is not yet certain.

In chapter seven, I will present the latest of the three prevalent models of BCCE, black megachurch initiatives. I will focus on The First Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut to research megachurch initiatives as a model of community engagement. Although it is situated on a large suburban campus, the First Cathedral boasts a number of programs that continue to positively affect the blighted and deindustrialized north end community of Hartford, Connecticut. Yet it remains to be seen whether the megachurches, with their varying ostentatious displays of wealth, can continue the liberation mission of the black churches with integrity.

In the concluding chapter I shall consider the data generated at the BCCE sites in light of the liberation criteria of Black Theology and what this implicates for the continued social relevance of the black churches. There are a range of potential outcomes. It is possible that the black churches continue to do liberation work in the twenty-first century in ways that are not as outward and observable as they have in the past. It is also possible that the black churches have waxed more conservative and insular, bringing about the slow death of the churches prophetic witness. The data shall provide insight on the present status of the liberation work of the black churches of the twenty-first century.

Chapter Two-Tracing the Models of Community Engagement through the History of the Black Churches

2.1 Introduction

My research objective was to develop viable theories regarding the theological motivations of twenty-first century BCCE to be considered in light of criteria from Black Theology for community engagement. As I have claimed, the black churches have engaged the oppressed communities they have served by addressing their secular and social needs in addition to their spiritual needs out of a sense of mission to bring liberation to the oppressed. This mission of liberation was necessitated by the oppressive contexts in which the black churches were founded. Certainly, the black churches have continued liberation praxis through the twentieth century in the struggle for civil rights. Yet, recent claims that the black churches are losing their social relevance warrant an examination of present models of community engagement.

Most pertinent for this thesis was literature that illuminated functions of community engagement in the black churches that come from the disciplines of history, sociology, and Black Theology. Scholarly works from black church historians demonstrate that the black churches, from their founding, have engaged the oppressed communities they have served to address secular and social needs, (Raboteau, Blassingame, Jones, Winch, Woodson, Mitchell, Chappell.) The literature in sociology (Du Bois, Frazier, Billingsley, Lincoln, Mamiya, Barnes, Morris, Sawyer, Lee, Tucker-Worgs, Patterson), evinces that the black churches have engaged their communities, beginning with the religious meetings of the slaves, and in every subsequent social shift, which has been predicated on the social location of black people. Finally, scholars in Black Theology (Cone, Paris, Wilmore, Grant, Pinn, Glaude, Franklin) demonstrate that, as the black

churches were founded with an unofficial creed of liberation, community engagement has been driven by a mission to affirm human dignity and advance social justice.

The literature review, in this chapter, supports the following claims. First, the black churches have a well-documented history of addressing oppression through community engagement. Secondly, the black churches have addressed the needs of their oppressed communities in every social shift, which has been predicated on the social location of Blacks in America. Thirdly, community engagement has been motivated by a continued praxis of liberation from the beginning of the black churches through the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, while the black churches continue to engage their communities in the present, community engagement since the Civil Rights Movement has largely been focused on addressing economic issues and personal development rather than social injustice, thus warranting an investigation of the theological motivation for present models of BCCE in order to draw conclusions of the social witness of the black churches today.

As the review of literature supports these claims, I am left with the following questions. Do the black churches continue liberation praxis through community engagement, or did this phenomenon within the black churches die in the conservative retrenchment of the late twentieth century? What insights does the answer to this question give us concerning the social relevance of the black churches in the present, and their social witness moving forward?

My research is intended to contribute to the existing literature, by addressing these questions through the development of theories grounded in the words and work of the agents of BCCE in the twenty-first century. These theories were developed as I examined local examples of BCCE models. I began with the grass-roots movement model of community engagement, where black

churchpersons use non-violent direct action to advance a particular social justice cause, the Christian Community Commission of New Haven, Connecticut serving as the local model to be examined. I also examined community development corporations, through which churches filter grant money from the government agencies and philanthropic organizations to create economic opportunities for their local communities, the Beulah Land Development Corporation of New Haven, Connecticut serving as the local model to be examined. Finally, I turned my focus to megachurch initiatives where congregations use the revenue from contributions of their large memberships to effect positive change in their communities, the First Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut serving as the local model to be examined.

2.2 The Religious Meetings of the Slaves

Although fragmented and oppressed, the slaves came together in hidden religious meetings to create community and affirm their status as Children of God, despite their suffering. The scholarship reviewed in this section will demonstrate the ways in which the slaves' religious meetings constituted a community formed to affirm their human dignity, laying the groundwork for their posterity who would advance the cause of liberation as they pursued social justice and equality in America.

W.E.B. Du Bois presented the findings of the first major sociological treatise on the black church, entitled, *The Negro Church*, in 1903.⁴³ Using various research methods, including, interview, survey, and participant-observation, *The Negro Church* explores multiple aspects of African American religious life at the dawn of the twentieth century, including church finances,

⁴³ The full title for this work is, *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903.*

denominational diversity, and belief. As a result of his research findings, Du Bois concluded that the Negro Church was a mighty social power with the potential to be the most powerful agency in the moral development, and the social reform of blacks.⁴⁴ This foreshadowed what would occur by the middle of the twentieth century in the Civil Rights Movement.

In *The Negro Church*, Du Bois highlighted the African influence on the social arrangement of the church among the slaves. He first notes that African slaves came to America already informed by social, political, and religious systems and ideas.⁴⁵ In particular, he notes that the indigenous groups of the African West coast were organized in family-clans ruled by hereditary or elected chiefs.⁴⁶ In the clans, religion was facilitated by the priest or medicine man who mediated between the family-clan and the spirit world, and that the African priest was second in power only to the chief.⁴⁷

While much of the traditional African social arrangements were changed under the auspices of slavery, Du Bois suggested that the religion of the slaves was arranged in such a way that it was largely unaffected, in that, within the plantation system the priest or medicine man reemerged as spiritual leader of a new type of clan composed of individuals forced to live and toil in a common space. The priest functioned among the slaves in America much as he did in Africa, interpreting the supernatural, and bringing comfort to the sorrowing.⁴⁸ Du Bois submitted that it is because the priest was able to hold on to his role, that the church among the slaves

⁴⁴ DuBois, W.E.B. ed. *The Negro Church*. (Lanham MD: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003-Reprint of 1903 edition), p. 208.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 2

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 3

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

gained strength. Through missionary efforts, the priest began to espouse elements of Christianity and gradually slave religion became a Christian church, built on the priest or minister as a social figure.⁴⁹

Du Bois's position that the religious meetings of the slaves took on a social arrangement similar to the structure of the pre-colonial West African family clan demonstrates that from the beginning, religious institutions have been a source of community cohesion for blacks in America. In Du Bois's assessment, the slaves' church emerged from the coming together of African-descended people with no necessary family ties, who centered themselves around the slave preacher in search of comfort and familiarity, to the effect of creating community.

In *The Negro Church in America*, E. Franklin Frazier's thesis was that changes in the religious life of blacks in the United States could be understood only in terms of the social organization and social disorganization of black American life.⁵⁰ Frazier posited that the Christian religion and the advent of the church among the fragmented community of the slaves presented a new basis for social cohesion, as slaves inevitably began to form their own religious meetings, with and without the supervision of enslavers.⁵¹ Further, he agreed with the Du Bois that the slave preacher played a central role in this social development. The slave preacher was one who was believed to be "called" to preach, sometimes licensed by a denominational church, one gifted with musical abilities, and given very limited authority under the supervision of the enslaver.⁵² Socially arranged around the charisma of their preacher, Frazier posited that the coming together of the slaves was based on a shared identity of unjust suffering. This was

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ E. Franklin Frazier. *The Negro Church in America*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 8-9.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵² Ibid., p. 24-25

expressed by the slaves in their spirituals, which gave voice to the devaluation of their lives and bodies, separation from their loved ones by the enslaver, loneliness and desolation.⁵³

Historian John Blassingame, in his seminal work, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, broke ground by departing with the historiographical tradition of focusing only on the testimony of enslavers when collecting data on the institution of slavery, and, instead turning to the slave narratives as the primary focus of his research. He added to the data the observations of enslavers, as well as travelers through the American South, thus creating a multi-faceted view of the life of the slave, and the slave's personhood. This historiographical departure influenced a generation of scholars, Albert Raboteau chief among them, who researched the religion of the slaves through similar sources.

Of the slaves' exercise of religion, Blassingame noted that the slaves had a distinctive culture that helped them to develop a strong sense of group solidarity. Fully aware that they were weak as individuals, they found ways to protect themselves from the enslaver through their informal church communities.⁵⁴ Blassingame discovered a particular example of the solidarity in the hidden churches of the slaves consistently reported in the slave narratives. Church members protected each other through a group code which called for the support of a slave who broke plantation rules by not reporting them to the enslaver, so as not to expose the slave to the enslaver's brutality.⁵⁵ Such a code created and upheld by the informal church communities of slaves not only evinces that the slaves recognized that the enslaver's rules were unjust, and punishments too harsh, but also that they rejected the idea that their status as slaves was divinely

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 21-23

⁵⁴ John Blassingame. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 133.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

determined. Through this code the slaves came together in solidarity through their churches to uphold their personhood by protecting themselves from the enslaver's cruelty.

In his work, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution of the Antebellum South*, historian Albert Raboteau, provided a rough sketch to fill the void of black church history, and black religion, in general.⁵⁶ Raboteau used slave narratives, autobiographies, and black folklore in order to gather from former slaves the story of their religious experiences. He supplemented these sources with more traditional ones of travel accounts, missionary reports, and journals of white observers in his attempt to portray the complexity of the religion of the slave.⁵⁷ Raboteau proved, through the sources he analyzed, that the slaves left sufficient records, and solid testimonies of their faith for all who wish to understand it.⁵⁸

Among the many discoveries in Raboteau's review of the slaves' primary source documents was that many slaves rejected the plantation mission outright. The plantation mission, as an institution, was established once enslaving planters became accustomed to the idea that their slaves should be converted to Christianity. The planters allowed denominationally sponsored ministers to come and preach to their slaves.⁵⁹ From the reports of slave narratives, Raboteau concludes that the messages that were preached in the plantation missions were messages of docility, where slaves were encouraged to obey their masters, and to accept suffering in this world for reward in the next. This came to be rejected by the slaves as, the white

⁵⁶ Albert Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. ix.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

man's religion.⁶⁰

The rejection of Christianity as presented by the enslaver marks the beginning of a distinct theological identity among the slaves, in that, the slaves began to separate themselves theologically from their enslavers, rejecting a Biblical hermeneutic that promoted their inferiority. The rejection of the enslavers' theology inevitably necessitated a reinterpretation of Christianity. The slaves who found enough scriptural truth from the enslavers' theology to craft a reinterpretation of Christianity that affirmed their human dignity are the theological founders of the black churches that would advance social justice in succeeding generations. In this regard, the slaves' community of faith affirmed their human dignity by reforming the enslavers' theology, and developing an unofficial creed of liberation, which has been sustained in black churches to this day across denominational lines.

Raboteau, argued the position that separation from the enslavers' theology gave rise to the black churches in his subsequently published work, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*. In this work, he used the slaves' identification with the ancient Hebrew narrative and builds a metaphor that likens the Children of Israel's pursuit of the Promise Land after escaping slavery in Egypt to black Americans' freedom from slavery and subsequent continued pursuit of equality through their religious institutions. *In Canaan Land*, Raboteau picked up where he left off in *Slave Religion*, beginning with the faith of the slaves and continuing on to the black churches' twentieth century social justice agenda, with the continued purpose of correcting the neglect of African American religious history in the academy.

As he began the story of the black churches' march to liberation, Raboteau noted that it was precisely the plantation minister's message of docility that gave rise to the black churches in

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

their original manifestations among the slaves. Drawing from the testimony of the slaves, he surmised that the desire for preaching free of proslavery propaganda pushed the slaves to gather together in their own religious meetings.⁶¹ As a result slaves began to meet secretly to form their own religious services, where they could affirm their own view of God's concern for their plight by identifying with the Biblical Hebrew slaves and a suffering Jesus who overcame the cross.

Not only were the churches among the slaves unique in their theological departure from the enslaver, but also they were unique in worship style. Raboteau notes that, drawing upon the worship traditions of Africa, as well as those of revivalist Christianity, the slaves created services that resembled the spirit-empowered ceremonies of their African ancestors.⁶² The slaves often had to gather in hidden places in order to hold worship services, where the preaching was free from the enslaver's theological constraints. Slaves devised several techniques to avoid detection of their meetings. One practice was to meet in secluded places, such as the woods, gullies, ravines, and thickets of brush, also called brush arbors or "hush arbors."⁶³ Thus, Raboteau coined the term, the "Invisible Institution" to represent the hidden religious meetings of the slaves⁶⁴

Canaan Land demonstrates that the very formation of the black churches was the creation of community. As they were separated from their African roots, denied the essentials of freedom in a most hostile environment, and then presented with the possibility that their plight was the express will of their Creator, the slaves came together in isolation from their enslavers to affirm their faith in God, who was on their side, as he was on the side of the Children of Israel held in

⁶¹ Albert Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 43.

⁶² Ibid., p. 45.

⁶³ Albert Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*. 215.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

Egyptian bondage.

The hidden religious meetings of the slaves served to create community in a most oppressive context, by engaging that community to affirm their human dignity as children of God in a number of ways. The slaves used these religious meetings as a new basis for social cohesion, centered on the preacher in social arrangements similar to the traditional African family-clan system. Within the church they created codes to promote solidarity and protection of church members from the cruelty of the enslaver. Intellectually, the slave church came together to reform the enslavers' theology and to develop a creed of equality and liberation. All of this occurred in spaces hidden from the enslaver to establish a free pulpit for the preacher and to cultivate free expression for the worshippers.⁶⁵ While the slaves came together to affirm their dignity in the hidden churches of the south, the next section shall focus on the free blacks in the north who came together in mutual aid societies for the same purpose.

2.3 Mutual Aid Societies

While the slaves were building invisible institutions in the south, free blacks in the north initially worshipped with white congregations, but came together in quasi-religious self-help communities commonly referred to as mutual aid societies. While there are records of the establishment of mutual aid societies in other urban centers in the north,⁶⁶ for the purpose of identifying the ways that mutual aid societies, in general, engaged their communities, it is

⁶⁵ Although they were extremely scarce, there were formally organized “unhidden” churches in the antebellum south. These included First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia (1773), Springfield Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia (1773), Silver Bluff Baptist Church of Beech Island, South Carolina (1774) First Baptist Church of Petersburg, Virginia (1774), and Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Charleston, South Carolina (1816).

⁶⁶ According to Julie Winch, by the year 1830, there were as many as 100 of these societies across the urban centers of the northern United States. “*The Leaders of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1787-1848*” (Ph.D. Diss, Bryn Mawr College, 1983), p. 115.

expedient to focus only on the scholarship on Philadelphia's Free African Society as a prototype for two critical reasons. First, not only did Philadelphia have the largest population of free blacks in the country during the antebellum period, but as an outgrowth of the Philadelphia Free African Society, the black community's network of social and religious institutions in that city was unmatched anywhere else in the North.⁶⁷ Secondly, while very little scholarship has been published on other mutual aid societies, substantive scholarship has been published on the Philadelphia group, because it famously served as the incubator for the first black American denomination. Using the Philadelphia Free African Society as a prototype of antebellum mutual aid societies, the review of literature in this section will demonstrate that in their coming together for common support, free northern blacks were able to affirm their human dignity.

In *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.E.B. Du Bois presented the results of his sociological exploration of the geographical distribution, occupations, daily life, homes, organizations, and white relations, of Philadelphia blacks, through house to house canvassing, with the purpose of developing a safe guide to solve the problems confronting blacks in the city.⁶⁸ In giving an historical overview of blacks in Philadelphia, Du Bois marked the Free African Society (FAS) as the foundation of the social and religious future of black Philadelphia. He paid particular attention to the denominational tensions within the organization, observing that through their involvement with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the Philadelphia FAS, was initially influenced by Quakerism, but ultimately split into two factions, with Absalom Jones leading one faction to found the Free African Church of St. Thomas, Episcopal (1794), and Richard Allen leading the other faction to found Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (1796), and

⁶⁷ Winch. *The Leaders of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1787-1848*,

⁶⁸ W.E.B. Dubois. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899 (1996 reprint)), pp. 1-2.

subsequently the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, the first independent black denomination in the United States.⁶⁹ The fact that the FAS existed for years before splitting into denominational churches demonstrates the importance of creating a sense of community for free northern blacks during the antebellum period, in that, coming together to address the social concerns of blacks took precedence over denominational affiliation.

In her dissertation entitled, *The Leaders of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1787-1848*, Julie Winch examined the basic aspects of leadership in Philadelphia's antebellum black community in her attempt to address fundamental questions and consideration regarding the nature of leadership and authority in the black community. The consideration most central to her dissertation was the extent to which those who perceived themselves as community leaders believed that they had a responsibility to those they claimed to represent. In this work, Winch identified the ways in which the Philadelphia FAS functioned to bring together the city's free blacks, and affirm their human dignity. First, the FAS provided leadership development for blacks in a way that no other institution would at the time. Those religious, social, and civic institutions that would allow blacks to participate would never allow them to ascend to the ranks of leadership. Winch noted that the FAS fostered the development of a leadership group which was composed of those individuals who considered themselves best able to speak for the rest of the black community.⁷⁰ This leadership spoke to the city's establishment on behalf of the black community, and very often garnered the respect of white officials. Second, the Philadelphia FAS also served to perform and record ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. Winch observed that the FAS would draw up certificates of marriage for members in a manner that was similar to

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 20-22.

⁷⁰ Winch, p. 115-116.

that of the Quakers.⁷¹ So that blacks could be buried with dignity, Winch noted that in 1790 FAS members approached the mayor, aldermen and common council of Philadelphia with an offer to match any bid to rent a portion of the city's Potter's Field, since blacks were not welcome to bury their dead in white-owned cemeteries.⁷² One of the more important functions of the FAS was its involvement in the abolitionist movement. In this regard, the FAS worked closely with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.⁷³

Using historical denominational and local church documents, historian Lawrence Jones noted a rather important void filled by the FAS in the absence of denominational bodies, that being, a voice of moral authority. In his book, *African Americans and the Christian Churches: 1619-1860*, Jones used slave narratives combined with church and denominational historical documents to provide a broad overview of the response to Christianity by enslaved and free Africans; to explore the effect of slavery upon white Christians in early America; to trace the appropriation of Christianity by African Americans in pre-Civil War America; to describe the emergence of African denominations and the extent to which they mirrored that of whites; and to recount the efforts of black denominations to address pressing social and economic issues in their communities.⁷⁴

In this work, Jones observed that in the absence of an independent black church, the Philadelphia FAS, provided moral guidance and discipline very much like a church congregation. Jones disclosed as an example of this that the FAS disciplined one member for

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 118.

⁷² Ibid., p. 118.

⁷³ Winch., p. 116.

⁷⁴ Lawrence N. Jones. *African Americans and the Christian Churches: 1619-1860*. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007), p. vii.

abandoning his wife and child to have an affair, and for his frequent public disturbances. This member was excommunicated from the FAS until he was willing to publicly repent.⁷⁵ The primary motive behind the group's insistence on a moral code was that they wanted to demonstrate that blacks were socially worthy of the abolition of slavery.

As previously noted, the Philadelphia FAS eventually dissolved into two separate protestant church bodies. In a lecture entitled, "*The Social Cosmos of Black Ecumenism*," presented at a conference on "Black Ecumenism and the Liberation Struggle" at Yale University in 1978, C. Eric Lincoln sought to provide a sociological perspective of the roots of black ecumenism to solve the problem of black sectarianism. In observing that the Philadelphia FAS gave way to denominational churches, he posited that if the Free African Society movement was a move toward unification, then the development of white-modeled denominational churches seems to be a separation. The cause for this, Lincoln posits, is that the sources for Black sectarianism begins with the fact that sectarian proliferation of religious bodies is institutionalized in American life, and was so long before the advent of the black churches. The sources of white sectarianism are historic, but the emergent Black Church had the advantage of creating a church around a creed of liberation, had it determined to recognize and make use of it.

The question logically follows then, with the opportunity to create a new and radically different church built on a creed of liberation, why would blacks choose to emulate white denominations. To answer this Lincoln offered two reasons. The first is that during the founding of the institutional black churches most blacks were illiterate and captive. Secondly, there was simply no other religious precedent available. When traditional African religions were destroyed

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 170.

by slavery, Christianity filled the void. Christianity was all that they knew.⁷⁶ The advent of denominational churches in the north signaled a shift in the evolving of the black churches to a period of denomination building.

2.4 Denomination Building Period

The seven major historic denominations of the black churches were founded over a one hundred and fifty year period. Free Blacks in the North began to found denominations as early as 1816 beginning with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and shortly thereafter, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1821. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church⁷⁷ was founded in 1870. The National Baptist Convention, USA was solidified from state and regional conventions in 1895. It later suffered a split in 1915 resulting in the emergence of the National Baptist Convention of America, and again in 1961, when the Progressive National Baptist Convention emerged. Lastly, the Church of God in Christ was founded in 1908 as an offshoot from the Azusa Street Revival of 1906.⁷⁸

For the purposes of this review, however, the focus for the period of denomination building will be from Reconstruction until the early twentieth century for the following reasons. First, although free blacks founded churches in the north and started denominations long before the end of slavery, because the vast majority of the black population was still enslaved, it is not until the end of slavery that the building of churches, associations, conferences, regional

⁷⁶ C. Eric Lincoln. “*The Social Cosmos of Black Ecumenism*,” presented at Yale University, February 16-17, 1978.

⁷⁷ Now Christian Methodist Episcopal

⁷⁸ Ithiel Clemmons, a Bishop and General Board member in the Church of God in Christ, uses primary sources and firsthand accounts to tell the story of the emergence of the Church of God in Christ from the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in his work, *Bishop C.H. Mason and the roots of the Church of God in Christ* Bakersfield, CA: Pneuma Life Pub., 1996.

jurisdictions, and conventions occur in significant numbers. Secondly, while blacks made attempts to build coalitions across northern state lines, it is only after slavery that blacks were able to build movements that included the American south, thus making the black denominations true national movements. It was during this period of forming denominational bodies that blacks, for the first time, came together from across the nation, and they came together with the advancement of social justice at the top of their agendas. Finally, with the founding of the Church of God in Christ in 1908 the models for black denominations was set. Subsequently founded denominations were splits and schisms from the models established within the first fifty years of the emancipation of the slaves.

Summarily, this section will be a review of literature that focuses on how blacks, rejecting racism in white denominational churches, came together to build church bodies that would affirm their human dignity, and the equality of all humanity under God, and that would work to address the social concerns of their communities.

A northern antecedent to denominational bodies was researched by Eddie Glaude, in his work, *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, as he examines metaphorical use of the exodus story to describe a particular style of imagining nation, as he found it in his research of the National Negro Convention Movement, a quasi-religious convention movement that developed concomitantly with the Methodist conferences, and as a precursor to the Baptist conventions. This movement consisted of a series of national meetings between blacks throughout the north who gathered to deliberate issues facing their communities and to formulate responses to the wretched conditions of black Americans, which lasted from 1830 to 1861.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Eddie S. Glaude. *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1.

As black Americans appropriated the Exodus story of the Hebrew people to articulate their own sense of personhood with a common history and destiny, Glaude contended that a conception of a black nation was formulated, not predicated on a biological conception of race, as with the Children of Israel, but as an expression of solidarity among the oppressed to confront the realities of race in the United States.⁸⁰ This shared identity propelled free blacks as early as 1830 to come together to address issues of great moral and social concern to African America in the National Negro Convention.

Glaude took care to note that although the AME and AME Zion Conventions were in full operation by this time, religious affiliation did not determine who could participate in the National Negro Convention; making it a fully inclusive and ecumenical gathering focused on ameliorating the plight of blacks.⁸¹ The National Negro Convention served as a template for national meetings where blacks would come together in the remainder of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. A common focus for all subsequent national meetings of blacks, both religious and secular involved a focus on the social conditions of oppressed blacks in America.

This focus on the social condition of oppressed blacks within black denominations is discussed in Peter Paris' work, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, in which he gave a constructive interpretation in religious social ethics, based primarily on the official records of two selected denominations, National Baptist Convention USA, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, both representing subsequently founded black Baptist and Methodist groups.⁸² Paris began his research assuming that a study of two denominations would lead to the discovery of differences. Rather, Paris found no distinctive differences in the social thought of the two

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁸¹ Ibid., 125.

⁸² Peter J. Paris. *Social Teaching of the Black Churches*. (Philadelphia, P.A.: Fortress Press, 1985), p. xi.

denominations in the study.⁸³ In particular, he found in both denominations an identical principle, which he calls the “Black Christian Tradition,” the principle that, at its very core, posits that people are equal in the eyes of God, and as such, social inequality is an evil that must be addressed and corrected. Paris claimed that the principle of the “Black Christian Tradition” was the primary cause for the emergence of independent black churches in the nineteenth century from racial segregation within white churches, and that the “Black Christian Tradition” is the sustaining force of the black churches continuance in the present day.⁸⁴

As blacks refused to be treated as second-class citizens in the house of God, the Paris’s principle of the “Black Christian Tradition” became the core reason for the founding of independent black churches and denominations. This is made clear in historian Carter G. Woodson’s *The Negro Church*. Published in 1921, it was the first work to view the history of black churches across denominational lines as a contiguous movement, relying on denominational records and interviews with denominational leaders. In reviewing Woodson’s research, particularly his chapter entitled “The Independent Church Movement,” it is nearly impossible not to realize that the commonality of the earliest black churches and denominations is that all of them removed from white church bodies out of a desire for independence from white subjugation, the freedom of expression in worship and leadership, and to affirm their human dignity and equality under God.⁸⁵

The development of independent black denominations made it so that local black

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. xiii.

⁸⁵ Woodson identifies the founding of the following black church bodies from white church bodies in his work: the secessions of the AME Church, the AME Zion Church; the African Baptist Church of Boston; the African Baptist Church of Philadelphia; and the Abyssinian Baptist Harlem. *The History of the Negro Church*. (Washington, D.C., The Associated Publishers, 1945), pp. 74-80

congregations could come together to build larger platforms to address the social concerns of blacks. Henry Mitchell, in his book, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years*, highlighted anecdotal histories to give a less formal analysis of the genesis of the black churches.⁸⁶ In doing so, he noted three patterns for how local black congregations joined denominations. The first is the pattern of local initiative, where local churches requested formal recognition and pastoral services from denominational bodies after they were already founded. The second pattern came about when newly formed denominations sent forth missionaries to unchurched communities to establish an black congregations. The third pattern involved the white-sponsorship of black churches of their denomination. Consistent with the conclusions of the aforementioned scholars who have researched the founding of black denominations, Mitchell reported that blacks would withdraw from white sponsorship in favor of independence from whites, because what whites saw as kind supervision, blacks saw as tyranny.⁸⁷

Once black congregations withdrew from white denominations to form their own denominations, they worked together to build a solid religious and social infrastructure for their communities. In Du Bois's work, *The Negro Church*, he gave a social snapshot of the work of the AME, AME Zion, CME, NBCUSA, as well as the combined efforts of Black Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Across the board these denominations founded organizations for the training of youth , developed and published Christian education materials, founded schools, colleges, and seminaries, and trained missionaries to work domestically and abroad.⁸⁸ These efforts evince that once black denominations were formed they began to engage

⁸⁶ Henry H. Mitchell. *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of The First Years*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 2004.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁸⁸ Du Bois profiles the missions and work of black denominations at the turn of the twentieth century from pp. 111-152.

black communities by building social structures to address both the spiritual and social concerns of blacks, providing the platform necessary to launch the Civil Rights Movement.

2.5 Civil Rights Movement

Several scholars lend credence to the fact the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century in the American south was just as religious as it was political. In his work, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion in the Age of Jim Crow*, historian David Chappell, isolated and magnified one of the reasons why the Civil Rights Movement was successful, but that had received insufficient academic focus. That is, that black southern activists drew strength from their religious tradition and used it to inspire solidarity and self-sacrificial devotion to their cause. In a chapter entitled, “The Civil Rights Movement as Religious Revival,” Chappell drew on the testimonies of Civil Rights Movement activists to conclude, “... it may be misleading to view the Civil Rights Movement as a social and political event that has religious overtones. The words of many participants suggest that it was for them, primarily a religious event, whose social and political aspects were, in their minds, secondary or incidental.” As such, he concludes that, “To take the testimony of intense religious transformation seriously is to consider the Civil Rights Movement as part of the historical tradition of revivals, such as the so-called First and Second Great Awakenings, as much as it is part of the tradition of protest movements such as abolitionism, populism, feminism, and the labor movement.”⁸⁹ This revivalistic inspiration was another important way in which the black churches engaged the community during the Civil Rights Movement. From the churches, communities that had been disempowered for generations drew the spiritual fortitude to fight for freedom in the Civil Rights Movement.

⁸⁹ David L. Chappell. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion in the Age of Jim Crow*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 87.

In *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, Gayraud Wilmore attempted to survey in one volume the entire three hundred year sweep of African American history in an attempt to understand and appreciate the meaning of the black religious experience as expressed in the churches, religious institutions, and the movements of the African American people.⁹⁰ In so doing, Wilmore highlighted the ebbing and flowing of the radical nature of black religion, with “radicalism” being drawn from the historic black intellectual “assumption that race and color are at the root of the problems of Western civilization and that the only lasting solution would require a transformation of human relationships that would amount to a national conversion involving the recognition of dignity and equality of blacks.”⁹¹ Wilmore preceded Chappell in identifying the revivalistic nature of the Civil Rights Movement, observing that between 1955 and 1960, the south experienced a revival of black religion, “a revival that did not break out with sawdust trails and mourners’ benches, but with picket lines, boycotts, marches through downtown sections of scores of southern towns and cities.”⁹² This revival that proceeded from the black churches spilled out into the community to effect positive social change in major ways. Wilmore observed that the religious community as a whole played an important role in the Mississippi Summer Program for increasing voter registrations, the March on Washington, and the lobbying effort leading to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.⁹³

Sociologists Lincoln and Mamiya’s primary purpose for their work, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* was to present as authentic and objective a profile of the black

⁹⁰ Gayraud Wilmore. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. xi.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

⁹² Ibid. p. 207.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 210.

churches and black religion as possible, consistent with the most contemporary sociological theory and methodology for their time, with the hope that clearer insights might make for an understanding of the black churches that was less simplistic than the conventional view that the black churches are a replication of the white churches with added emotionalism and exoticism. This was done with the premise that black religion is a significant part of the American experience in religion and to it exclude arbitrarily from the normative study of religion in America would seriously distort the full picture of American religion.⁹⁴

Lincoln and Mamiya highlighted some of the ways that the black churches served as the community base of operations for the Civil Rights Movement. Black churches were major points of mobilization for mass meetings and demonstrations, and black church members fed and housed the civil rights workers. Most of the local black people, who provided the bodies for demonstrations, were members of black churches, acting out of convictions that were religiously inspired. Black church culture also permeated the movement from oratory to music, from the rituals and symbols of protest to the ethic of nonviolence.⁹⁵ Additionally, Lincoln and Mamiya observed that those in opposition to the goals of the Civil Rights Movement were keenly aware that the black churches were central to the effectiveness of the movement. They state, “It is estimated that several hundred churches in the south were bombed, burned, or attacked during the civil rights years, with ninety-three of those occurring between 1962-1965, with more than 50 in Mississippi alone. The white opposition understood the importance of black churches.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Eric C. Lincoln, Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), p. xi-xii.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 211-212

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

Sociologist Aldon Morris wrote his work, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, to explain how the Civil Rights Movement took root and became a major force in American society. He focused on local organizations and movements that had largely been ignored by pre-existing literature to analyze the roles they played in the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, he focused on the role of the black masses and the complex decision-making and actions undertaken by ordinary participants in the course of a social movement to highlight the courage and creativity of the black masses.⁹⁷ He identified the ways in which the black churches were the galvanizing institutions for launching the Civil Rights Movement. He observed that churches provided the movement with an organized mass base; a leadership of clergymen largely economically independent of the larger white society and skilled in the area of managing people and resources; an institutionalized financial base through which protest was financed; and meeting places where the masses planned tactics and strategies and collectively committed themselves to the struggle.⁹⁸

The black churches engaged their communities during the Civil Rights Movement, as never before, to offer women the opportunity to fulfill leadership roles.⁹⁹ In her article, “Civil Rights Women: A Source for Doing Womanist Theology,” Jacqueline Grant observed that alongside many of the men, like Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, and Medgar Evers who are heralded for their leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, there were women, who provided

⁹⁷ Aldon D. Morris. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. (New York, NY: The Free Press/ MacMillan, Inc., 1984), p. vi.

⁹⁸ Morris, p. 4.

⁹⁹ The following are among the many works of scholarship that are critical of patriarchy in the black churches: Bell Hooks. *Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981. Katie Geneva Cannon. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and The Soul of the Black Community*. New York, NY : Continuum, 1995. Peter J. Ling. Sharon Monteith, eds. *Gender and The Civil Rights Movement*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004. Demetrius K. Williams. *End to This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004. Toni C. King, S Alease Ferguson, eds. *Black Womanist Leadership: Tracing the Motherline*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011.

leadership at the local level. Fannie Lou Hamer, who ascended to leadership in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, spoke at rallies, and sang powerful hymns of protests before thousands. Hamer acknowledged that before 1962 she would have been afraid to speak before more than six people, but after that she spoke before thousands and attributed her strength to God.¹⁰⁰

In his book, *Martin & Malcolm in America: A Dream or A Nightmare*, James Cone offered a careful examination of the life and social teachings of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in relation to one another and in light of the two main resistance traditions in African-American history and culture; integrationism and nationalism. Grounded in black liberation theology, this work examines the meaning of justice and blackness in America in the context of the lives of these two influential leaders of the mid-twentieth century black American community.¹⁰¹

Cone suggested that it was only natural that a movement to fight social injustice would proceed from the black churches. He observed that the Civil Rights Movement was not thought of as something separate from the church; rather it *was* the church living out its obedience to Jesus Christ's calling "to preach good news to the poor," "proclaim release to the captives," and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed."¹⁰² He further states that, unlike white churches, which separated religion and politics when the racial question was involved, black churches have always viewed them as belonging together, especially in regard to race. He states, "When their

¹⁰⁰ Jacqueline Grant, "Civil Rights Women: A Source for doing Womanist Theology," *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers*. Crawford, Vicki L, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, Barbara Woods, eds. (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), p. 45.

¹⁰¹ James H. Cone. *Martin & Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. ix-x.

¹⁰² From Luke 4:18, RSV. Cone, p. 143.

dignity was being disregarded, blacks used religion and anything else in their possession in order to fight for their right to be treated as human. Religion was their best weapon and no one used it better than Martin King. Black Churches were his base of operations and their ministers supported him more than any other group.”¹⁰³

As black churches engaged their communities to fight for social justice during the Civil Rights Movement they also reached across denominational lines to form ecumenical grass roots groups to advance their noble cause. This is well documented in the research of Mary Sawyer. In her dissertation entitled, “*Black Ecumenism: Cooperative Social Change Movements in the Black Church*,” Sawyer offered a sociological and phenomenological study, which was undertaken to describe the various black ecumenical groups, while documenting their origins and histories, and exploring their meaning and significance. In so doing, Sawyer drew from primary and secondary source documents, as well as interviews with movement participants and attendance at meetings of selected organizations.¹⁰⁴

The primary focus of her dissertation was the explicit ecumenical activity carried out under the auspices of the black denominations and black enclaves in the white denominations, that were interdenominational and cooperative in form, and that had in common an agenda of social change.¹⁰⁵ From her research, Sawyer arrived at a pivotal conclusion pertaining to the mission and vision of black ecumenism. She posited that Black ecumenism is not an end, in and of itself, but is preliminary to the possibility of participation in the universal church on an equal basis. It is directed toward securing a position of strength and self-sufficiency, and is mission-

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Sawyer, “*Black Ecumenism: Cooperative Social Change Movements in the Black Church*,” iii.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 23 .

oriented, emphasizing Black development and liberation.¹⁰⁶ Beyond this, Sawyer observed that the ultimate vision of Black ecumenism is not only the liberation of Black people through the agency of the black churches, but engagement in the world-wide liberation struggle by the whole church, a universal church whose ecumenical thrust is centered on justice.¹⁰⁷ As such, Sawyer's research illuminates the notion that the mission of the black churches to fight social injustice and affirm human dignity did not simply spring from self preservation, but from a desire to address oppression in the world as a divine vocation.

Sawyer published her continued examination of the black ecumenical groups of the Civil Rights Movement nearly a decade later in her book, *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice*. While using the same research methods as in her dissertation, in her book she focused on interviews and primary sources in an attempt to let the voices of the various movements speak for themselves, and to approach the organizations and their spokespersons from an empathetic, yet critical stance.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, she detailed the histories, missions and methods of the many grass-roots groups of the Civil Rights Movement. She began with the Fraternal Council of Negro Churchmen, founded in 1934 by clergymen who were disillusioned with the white-dominated Federal Council of Churches' reluctance to address social injustice.¹⁰⁹ She examined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference founded by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1955 to organize movements of direct non-violent action in the urban centers of the segregated south.¹¹⁰ She explored the National Committee of Black Churchmen, founded as the National

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 18-19

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Mary R. Sawyer, *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice*. (Valley Forge, PA Trinity Press International, 1994.), p. xiv.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

Committee of Negro Churchmen in 1967 by scholars as well as churchpersons, with the long term goal of rendering black ethnicity theologically legitimate.¹¹¹ Sawyer then gives snapshots of two generations, of local black ecumenical groups based in America's urban centers. The first generation was established during the black power movement of the 1960's, the second was established during the conservative retrenchment of the late 1970's and 1980's.¹¹² Sawyer profiles The National Association of Black Evangelicals founded in 1973 by black evangelicals who were disheartened by the lack of concern for their community by their white counterparts,¹¹³ and the Black Theology Project founded in 1977, devoted to black theological development, dialogue, networking, and coalition building.¹¹⁴ Sawyer gives an account of Partners in Ecumenism, founded in 1978, an attempt by black ecumenists to work within the National Council of Churches (NCC) under the auspices of its Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism (CORLE),¹¹⁵ as well as, The Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC), founded in 1978, which began as a series of dialogues on how best to use support from the Lilly Endowment to support black church efforts.¹¹⁶

Having profiled these groups, Sawyer discusses several themes within the black ecumenical groups including; degrees of inclusiveness, varying cultural ideologies, levels of

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 79

¹¹² The first generation of local black ecumenical groups that Sawyer profiles are; Alamo Black Clergy (San Francisco Bay area), Chicago Committee of Black Churchmen, Philadelphia Council of Black Clergy, Black Ecumenical Commission of Massachusetts (Boston area). The second generation includes; The Gathering (Los Angeles), Organization of African-American Clergy (New York City), Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta, African American Clergy Action Network (Chicago), Church Association for Community Services (Washington, D.C.).

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 113.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 155.

fiscal independence, governance, political/spiritual balance, and economic philosophies.¹¹⁷ These theological think tanks and grass roots organizations emerged from the black churches during the Civil Rights Movement to engage the community through social justice advocacy. The grass-roots organization as a model of community engagement within the black churches to address social injustice continues to be prevalent in the twenty-first century. While many of the original grass-roots organizations have ceased to exist since the Civil Rights Movement, some, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference continue to exist today alongside emerging groups on the local and national level.

In summary, the black churches engaged the black community during the Civil Rights Movement in a number ways. First, the black churches through revivalistic inspiration, empowered black people to fight against discrimination and social injustice. Further, the black churches functioned as community bases of operations for the movement, providing the movement with a multiplicity of resources, including, leadership, a financial support, and a venue for meetings and rallies. Uniquely, the black churches during the Civil Rights Movement engaged female leadership as never before. Finally, the black churches during this era gave birth to the grass-root organization as a model of community engagement that continues to be prevalent today. The revival fire that seemed to launch the Civil Rights Movement began to cool down by the 1970's. However, in the post- Civil Rights Movement, the black churches continued to engage their communities through community development and economic opportunities.

2.6 The Post-Civil Rights Movement

¹¹⁷ Themes are discussed in chapter 8 of Sawyer's *Black Ecumenism*.

The post-Civil Rights period was highly influenced by the conservative retrenchment of the late 1970s, which continued to the early 1990's. During this period, the black churches came together in local configurations with other churches to engage their communities through economics and politics as primary modes of activism. This period marks the rise of the development of community organizing agencies, and community development corporations in the black churches. The scholarship reviewed in this section demonstrates how black churches engaged their communities and continued the mission begun in the religious meetings of their enslaved ancestors to affirm human dignity and fight for social justice in the post-Civil Rights era through the creation of opportunities for economic advancement for the economically oppressed, on the local level.

In his work, *The Black Church in the Post Civil Rights Era*, Anthony Pinn attempted to give a snapshot of the activism of the black churches in the decades following the Civil Rights Movement in order to provide an updated history of black church activism.¹¹⁸ He noted that while the present social arrangements of community organizing agencies and community development corporations in the black churches may be new, it is consistent with the historic mission of black Christianity.¹¹⁹ He posited that, the black churches have maintained a publicly-expressed commitment to changing the economic situation of black Americans, and that economics and politics have been the primary modes of black church activism.¹²⁰

Katie Day examined models of community organizing and economic development in her work, *Prelude to Struggle: African American clergy and Community Organizing for Economic Development in the 1990's*. In this work, she examined faith-based organizing and economic

¹¹⁸ Anthony B. Pinn. *The Black Church in the Post Civil Rights Era*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), p. xv.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

development efforts among African American churches in North Philadelphia during the early 1990s through surveying members and interviewing the clergy of a diverse sample of ten African American churches in North Philadelphia.¹²¹ She observed that Black churches, for the most part, have been savvy in leveraging public monies to develop much-needed community programs since the beginning of faith-based initiatives of the 1970s. She further observed, however, that this was born from sheer pragmatism rather than a political ideology, as African American churches have had a long tradition of entrepreneurship, born out of necessity.¹²²

Day juxtaposed community organizing and economic development as two models of community engagement. She noted that economic development is the more traditional of the two, observing that W.E.B. Du Bois documented a wide variety of economic activity in Philadelphia congregations during the nineteenth century, ranging from employment opportunities to cooperative services.¹²³ This model was most prominently defined in Philadelphia through the work of Leon Sullivan, the Pastor of The Zion Baptist Church from 1950-1988, through his founding of the Opportunities Industrial Council (OIC). Day noted that Sullivan's philosophy was that African Americans needed more educational and employment opportunities in order to function as full participants in the economic system.¹²⁴ For Day, Sullivan exemplifies the traditional model of community engagement, which relies on lone entrepreneurial pastors who access the system in order to get resources for development projects

¹²¹ Katie Day, *Prelude to Struggle: African American Clergy and Community Organizing for Economic Development in the 1990's*. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America), 2002.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹²³ Du Bois makes these observations in *The Philadelphia Negro*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899 (1996 reprint) in Chapter 12, "The Organized Life of the Negroes."

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

in their immediate neighborhoods.¹²⁵

The newer model of community engagement, which relies on pastors and congregations coming together in local ecumenical arrangements to confront social issues in the community was embodied in Day's research of the development of the Philadelphia Interfaith Action (PIA), an ecumenical organization launched in 1992, that in a short period distinguished itself through its aggressive grassroots organizing, boisterous public assemblies and willingness to employ confrontational tactics to hold public officials accountable to their promises and P.I.A.'s agenda.¹²⁶

In her examination of the two models, Day sought to discover, why some African American clergy and their congregations within the same urban context, when confronted by the same issues and opportunities would choose to affiliate with P.I.A. while others had decided against this approach in favor of a more traditional one. She concluded that a primary cause for the model a church pursues for community engagement points to a decision-making process which is complex; at once the product of the individual pastor, but only as he is imbedded in his congregation. Her data on the pastors suggested they make the decision about strategies for change based on pre-existing consciousness about leadership and social change within the congregation, which finds affinity in the social movement organization and gets reinforced by it. Their consciousness is reflected in the congregation, the context in which their leadership is constructed.¹²⁷ In either mode the primary agenda of the congregations is to positively engage their communities **in** pursuit of justice and dignity.

In his essay, entitled, "Doing Something in Jesus' Name: Black Churches and

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

Community Development Corporations,” Michael Owens considered the role of black church associated CDCs as civic and social institutions in urban black neighborhoods. It is based on surveys and face-to-face key informant interviews with directors and staff of nine black church-associated CDCs, along with an in-person survey of pastors of ten black activist churches that maintain, or have supported, CDCs in New York City since the mid-1980’s.¹²⁸ Owens observed that while an emphasis on community development by black churches through CDCs, may not be enough to revitalize most black neighborhoods, as local churches come together with their immediate community through economic development, they also provide their neighborhoods with black controlled institutions that function as conduits for substantive resources from institutions external to their communities. In doing so they bring greater public and private resources that can result in new housing, social services and jobs.¹²⁹

Andrew Billingsley produced a major work employing both ethnographic case studies and large scale surveys to examine what churches around the nation were doing to serve their communities beyond meeting the spiritual needs of their parishioners, which he entitled, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform*. In his research, he discovered that many congregations directly engage their communities in a variety of ways. Billingsley profiled twelve churches, in particular, that use their resources to directly engage their communities on a scale grand enough to make their cities more livable.

Among the twelve is Concord Baptist Church of Brooklyn, New York, the community outreach programs of which, span an entire city block, including an academic school, a 31-apartment senior citizens housing development, a 123 bed nursing home with an annual

¹²⁸ Michael Owens. “Doing Something in Jesus’ Name: Black Churches and Community Development Corporations.” *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post Civil Rights America*. R. Drew Smith, ed. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 217.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

operating budget of 4.5 million dollars, a clothing exchange that provides free clothing to some 200 families in the community per month, a publishing house, an office from which nearby substandard properties are purchased and converted into livable quarters, and a credit union with assets of \$1.5 million.¹³⁰

Billingsley also profiles the First A.M.E. Church, Los Angeles, California which won a \$1 million dollar grant from the Walt Disney Company, that they used to create a Micro Loan Program to supply low interest rate loans of \$2,000 to \$20,000 to minority entrepreneurs in the area who would not otherwise qualify for a bank loan;¹³¹ The Olivet Institutional Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio which sponsors a community medical center in partnership with University Hospital, an affiliate of Case Western Reserve University;¹³² and the Third Missionary Baptist Church, New Orleans, Louisiana, a small congregation which used its \$35,000 building fund to purchase crack houses across the street from the church and transform them into low income housing.¹³³

Black churches in the post-Civil Rights Movement era engaged their communities by creating economic opportunities through community development. What is interesting to note is that of the twelve churches profiled in Billingsley's research almost all of them can be considered megachurches,¹³⁴ which leads to the most prominent community engagement

¹³⁰ Andrew Billingsley. *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.) p. 147.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹³⁴ Based upon Scott Thumma's criteria of an average weekly attendance of 2,000 persons to qualify as megachurch status. See Thumma Scott. "*The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: The Megachurch in Modern American Society*" (Ph.D. Diss., Emory University, 1996.) and Thumma, Scott and Dave Travis. *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn From Americas Largest Churches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

configuration of the twenty-first century, the megachurch.

2.7 The Twenty-First Century: Megachurch Initiatives

On a weekly basis, black Christians gather for worship in the multiple thousands in megachurches. While some scholars are critical of the theology espoused by many of these churches, and the extent to which they continue the black churches' liberation mission to affirm human dignity and commit to social justice, a solid body of research indicates that many of these churches use their vast financial resources to engage their communities in a multiplicity of ways.

Drawing from two years of research funded by the Lilly Endowment on the changes and continuity in African American churches since the Civil Rights Movement, Robert Franklin, in his work, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis*, observed that many megachurches tend to de-emphasize the role of the historically black denominations, preferring to promote a more individualistic style of faith based on Biblical teachings. Those churches, in particular, that espouse a Word-church theology,¹³⁵ tend not to focus on social evils such as racism, sexism, and class discrimination, nor do they mobilize members to counteract these forces. Instead, they tend to spiritualize these sins, urging members not to engage personally in such behavior.¹³⁶ This common criticism of the social commitments of megachurches, has been significantly challenged by recent research on the community activities of megachurches, and predominantly black megachurches in particular.

¹³⁵ "Word of Faith Theology" or "Prosperity Theology", emerges from pastors, who through Biblical exposition and subjective interpretation, teach divine empowerment for individual prosperity. Franklin says that, "Word [of faith] churches proclaim a gospel of health, wealth, and success through personal acts of heroic faith," and in doing so, "may be guilty of distorting the explicit message of Christian tradition." Franklin gave the following example, "by making human will and the exercise of personal faith equal with the mysterious omnipotent intentions of God, these churches may unwittingly disempower God and enthrone themselves as arbiters of the divine will." Franklin, p. 70.

¹³⁶ Robert M. Franklin. *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis*. (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1997),p. 70.

In their work, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn From America's Largest Churches*, Scott Thumma and Dave Travis employed several methods, including, drawing on quantitative surveys of megachurches and other congregations, observational visits; compilations of group discussions and personal interviews; analysis of financial documents and annual reports; excerpts from sermons; speeches; and writings of megachurch leaders both to examine the megachurch, and the misunderstandings of it as a new and significant American religious social institution.¹³⁷

Among the myths addressed in this work is the idea that megachurches are insular, in that, they are only concerned about themselves and the needs of their attendees. While Thumma and Travis posited that in the advent of megachurches, the 1960's-1980's, many of these churches were turned inward to discover what it was like to worship on such a large scale, over the past two decades the data shows that many of these churches have begun to engage, not only their communities, but the world at large.¹³⁸ For example, of the many services provided by the vast majority of the churches surveyed, it was discovered that 99% of them had programs for youth and teens, 95% offered counseling and support groups, 91% gave cash and vouchers to families and individuals, 80% supported hospitals and nursing homes, and 78% maintained temporary or permanent housing or shelters.¹³⁹

With such a high level of community involvement within the majority of the churches profiled being at conflict with the insularity myth, Thumma and Travis set out to identify the origins of the myth. The first possibility lies in the fact that megachurches draw people from a

¹³⁷ Scott and Dave Travis. *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn From Americas Largest Churches*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), p. xvii.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

broad area of the city, and that their membership is spread across an expansive region and over multiple communities, thus megachurch social ministry activity may be dispersed over a large area. Another possible origin of the insularity myth may come from the fact that most megachurches are located outside of the inner city, where the need for social ministry is greatest, forcing many megachurches to be creative in how they do social ministry. Another possibility lies in the fact that megachurches rarely advertise or promote their ministries to the poor, so they may not be known, even by church attendees. Furthermore, some megachurches choose to do social ministry following their own vision rather than participating in already established ministry projects. In tandem with this, on the national level, many megachurches have not been viewed as great financial participants in denominational mission efforts, using their resources, which sometimes rivals that of denominations at the national level, to fund independent projects. Lastly, Thumma and Travis suggested an accounting of what individuals within megachurches do in terms of social ministry independent of the church adds yet another dimension to these congregations' outreach to their communities as well.¹⁴⁰

In her essay, "Get on Board, Little Children, There's Room for Many More: The Black Megachurch Phenomenon," Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs described the black megachurch phenomenon, in general, then explored two of the most dominant tendencies among these churches: a neo-Pentecostal theological orientation and disproportionate engagement in community development activities; specifically, housing, economic development, social service delivery, and community organizing. Lastly, she presented a typology of black megachurches

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 82-87.

that demonstrates common tendencies, and variances in black megachurches.¹⁴¹

Employing a variety of methodological approaches including interviews, participant observation, content analysis and survey data, Tucker-Worgs discovered that most of the black megachurches participated in direct social-service provision, performed health care activities such as inoculations, health screenings, or health information seminars, had benevolence programs to provide emergency funds for people needing assistance with rent or utility payments, and distributed goods and services such as food and clothing.¹⁴² As it pertains to the community engagement of Black megachurches, Tucker -Worgs also observed that nearly half of these churches have particular ministries dedicated to political or social affairs, 77.4% hold voter registration and education on site, and many host candidate forums during local elections, and hold information forums on community issues such as public schools, hospitals, and environmental hazards.¹⁴³

Milmon Harrison, in his work, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African- American Religion* sees continuity in the work of the black megachurch and the religious meetings of the slaves. His book viewed the Word of Faith Movement in the context of contemporary American Religion in general, but also as a distinct subculture. He placed particular emphasis on the inner workings and the congregational culture of a Word of Faith Movement church led by an African American pastor, with a predominantly African American membership and worship style. The church is situated in an urban setting with a substantial African American presence. Harrison employed participant observation and in-depth

¹⁴¹ Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs. "Get on Board, Little Children, There's Room For Many More: The Black Megachurch Phenomenon." *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, Vol. XXIX Nos. 1&2 (Fall 2001/Spring 2002), p. 179.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 194-195.

interviews with a small subset of members of a large Word of Faith congregation in Sacramento, California, and 20 interviews, 19 of which are conducted with people who were current or past adherents to the Word of Faith Movement.¹⁴⁴

Harrison noted that the major focus on material blessing and temporal prosperity that is found in the Word of Faith theology is not new in the black churches, in that, the religious meetings of the slaves and the religious institutions built by their descendants in America have always had to be concerned with the material as well as social, political, and spiritual needs of their adherents. To limit ministry to the spiritual realm was a luxury they could not afford, given the legacy of slavery and their post-Emancipation experience of discrimination. It was the role of black churches and other religious institutions in their communities to take up the slack and meet the needs of the people.¹⁴⁵

With this in mind, Harrison posited that black Word of Faith Megachurches can extend help to meet temporal needs in ways the black churches could not during more oppressive times, noting that the black clergy in these churches most often are entrepreneurial and well educated with a staff of well-trained specialists in finance, accounting, economics and community development. They have access to resources that half a century ago were uncommon for many churches, but especially those in urban communities.¹⁴⁶

Shayne Lee echoed this sentiment in his profile of preachers who are proponents of the prosperity gospel entitled, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace*. In his chapter on Bishop T.D. Jakes, he observed that analogous to how the

¹⁴⁴ Milmon Harrison. *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 119.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

traditional black church played an important role in helping blacks make the transition from slave to citizen, a new black church attempts to help contemporary blacks smooth transition into a competitive hyper-capitalist society, in that leaders of the new black church smoothly adapt to the commercialization, technology, flash, style, and celebrity that characterize our post-industrialized world and creatively provide the type of therapeutic message that resonates in a self-indulgent culture.¹⁴⁷

For example, he cites Pastor A.R. Bernard of New York City's Christian Cultural Center who applies the business acumen, which made him a successful banker, to how he runs his church like a corporation;¹⁴⁸ Otis Lockett of Evangel Fellowship, a megachurch in Greensboro, North Carolina, which conducts classes on an assortment of topics by trained business professionals;¹⁴⁹ and Kirbyjohn Caldwell of the Windsor Village United Methodist Church, which has the Pyramid Community Development Corporation that is home to a multi-use complex bank, community college, office suites, pharmacy and conference center. Caldwell and Windsor Village also run several nonprofit organizations and hold empowerment seminars and power lunches attended by business executives of large corporations.¹⁵⁰

While the aforementioned scholars tout the ability of black megachurches to effect positive change in oppressed communities in ways far more expansive than traditional black churches, it should be noted that consistent community outreach cannot be observed in abundance at every black megachurch. Charmayne Patterson and Sandra Barnes in their research

¹⁴⁷ Shayne Lee. *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators in the Spiritual Marketplace*. (New York: New York University, 2009.), p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

indicate particular models of black megachurches that are more in line with the mission of the traditional black churches.

In her dissertation entitled, *Give us this Day Our Daily Bread: The African American Megachurch and Prosperity*, Patterson assessed the ways in which Prosperity Theology represents an extension of the traditions of the black churches and its emphasis on economic, social, and political empowerment. Through a comparative analysis of the ministries of Dr. Creflo Dollar, Senior Pastor of Atlanta, Georgia's World Changers Church International and Bishop Joseph Walker, III, Senior Pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, she concluded that, while an examination of Dr. Dollar's focus on individual prosperity puts him at odds with many traditionalists in the black churches, Bishop Walker's ministry more closely resembles that of a traditional black Church, in that, his use of Prosperity Theology may be useful in facilitating the goals of economic, social, and political empowerment historically advocated by the black churches.¹⁵¹ Demonstrating that there exists within black megachurch culture, the possibility to use prosperity theology as a tool of empowerment for the economically oppressed.

In her work, *Black Megachurch Culture: Models for Education and Empowerment*, Sandra Barnes focused attention on education-related dynamics in black megachurches for three given reasons. First, educational attainment has been the primary means to upward mobility in the black community and the black churches have been a central learning site. Secondly, the detractors are stunned by the black megachurches ability to attract and retain throngs of supporters in a manner somewhat akin to indoctrination. Third, the ways in which black megachurch pastors strategically harness the spiritual and the profane is intriguing and likely

¹⁵¹ Charmayne Patterson. " *Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread: The African American Megachurch and Prosperity Theology*. (Ph.D. Diss., Georgia State University, 2007), pp. 10-11.

different from that of both their white megachurch, and smaller black church counterparts.¹⁵² In this work, Barnes employed interviews with clergy, survey data from 16 black megachurches, and participant observation.¹⁵³

Among a variety of theological models within the black megachurch, Barnes found a model within those churches that are prophetic, in that one's salvation experience is expected to accompany commitment to causes associated with social action. These churches not only emphasize black concerns, but are usually involved in programs to combat social issues in historically oppressed groups in the United States and abroad. Church efforts are designed to instill personal responsibility among blacks collective empowerment in the black community.¹⁵⁴

2.8 Conclusion

In this review of literature, I have identified the key figures in the scholarship of the black churches, and the varied ways they have illuminated BCCE in their research. Additionally, the literature traces the social shifts in the historical development of the black churches and demonstrates that, even with radical changes in form over time, the churches have consistently engaged their communities to improve the everyday lives of the oppressed.

Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that from the religious meetings of the slaves through the Civil Rights Movement, BCCE initiatives served to create community infrastructures to promote human dignity, create opportunities for leadership development and education, and to organize non-violent direct action to fight disenfranchisement and the lack of equal protection

¹⁵² Sandra Barnes. *Black Megachurch Culture: Models for Education and Empowerment*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.), p. 2.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 107.

under the law..

The literature also demonstrates that community engagement by the black churches since the post-civil rights era has focused on economic issues and personal development, as black church community development corporations endeavor to create jobs and housing opportunities, and black megachurches offer opportunities for individual self- improvement on their menu of outreach services to the community.

The questions are then, to what extent has the focus of BCCE departed from the affirmation of human dignity and social justice to the creation of economic opportunities and personal development in the twenty-first century. Might this departure in focus indicate a shift in the theological motivation for BCCE?

This review illuminates that the three remaining models of BCCE are grass-roots movements which have continued since the Civil Rights Movement, community development corporations, which have continued since the post-Civil Rights Movement, and the community initiatives of megachurches, a phenomenon within the black churches at the dawn of the twenty-first century. These are the models that I will examine through local examples to assess the theological motivations of twenty-first century BCCE.

Chapter Three- Black Theology and Black Church Community Engagement

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reviewed works of scholarship from the disciplines of sociology, history, and Black Theology to demonstrate the many and varied ways that the black churches in the United States have engaged their communities across the shifts in the social location of black people from slavery to their present status. This served to illustrate that, from their founding to the present, black churches have continuously engaged their communities, fulfilling a mission of liberation in the ways that they have strived to affirm human dignity and advance social justice. Yet, with many scholars and ministers ruminating on the continued social relevance of the black churches and the status of their prophetic witness, this work seeks to examine the theological motivations driving the predominant ways in which the black churches continue to engage their communities in the twenty-first century.

Before moving into such an examination it is necessary to identify authoritative theological sources that examine the black churches from within with regard to how black people have understood their relationship to God; how black people have understood their obligations to brothers and sisters in the human family: and how black people have interpreted and appropriated scripture, all within the context of black suffering in the United States. As such this chapter reviews works of scholarship with respect to community engagement by the black churches from the perspective of Black Theology

The consensus of the scholarship is that the black churches were founded with a mission to liberate the oppressed, and as such; the liberation mission has been a black church distinctive.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, I reviewed selected works in Black Theology in search of evaluative

¹⁵⁵ This idea was explicated in section 1.2

criteria for the liberation mission of the black churches. These criteria are used to evaluate the work and motivation of the BCCE agents in the local models examined in this thesis. These works have been selected from across the intellectual development of Black Theology, as outlined by Dwight Hopkins.¹⁵⁶

3.2 BCCE in the First Generation of Black Theology

James Cone

James Cone's essay, "What is the Church?" published in his book, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism Liberation and Black Theology*, is an ecclesiological treatise in which Cone claimed that the church, as the embodiment of Jesus Christ, fails the world it seeks to serve when its focus is purely transcendent to the neglect of social ills. Just as Jesus came to liberate the oppressed, the body of Christ is therefore obliged to make a positive difference in the world by using its prophetic voice to speak truth to power and through the dismantling of evil social structures.¹⁵⁷ In this treatise, Cone maintained that the black churches over time have become guilty of solely concentrating on transcendent theological pursuits and personal piety, to the neglect of the community, and in so doing the black churches have begun to stray away from their liberation heritage.

Cone defined the church in relation to Christ, declaring, "The Christian Church is that community of people called into being by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The

¹⁵⁶ This selection processes was explained in section 1.4.

¹⁵⁷ Cone specifically references Luke 4:18-21NRSV ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Cone understands these words to be a treatise for Christ's mission in the earth, and the mantle to be taken up by the body of Christ.

beginning and end of the church's identity is found in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Christ is the subject of the church's preaching and he embodies in his person the meaning of its mission in the world."¹⁵⁸ With this in mind, Cone disfavored those churches that maintain a purely transcendent focus to the neglect of the oppressed, and the problems in society. He maintained that those churches that demonstrate their faith and Christian witness by working for the oppressed are the true ambassadors of Christ. He contended that the church of Jesus Christ is that community that can read the signs of the time, seeing God's struggle in the struggle of the poor, and that as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, Christians have a moral obligation to join the movement of liberation on the side of the poor, fighting against the structures of injustice.

Faith in Christ is a commitment, a deeply felt experience of being called by the Spirit of Christ to bear witness to God's coming liberation by fighting for the freedom of the poor now. He said, "The task of the Church is more than preaching sermons about justice and praying for the liberation of all. The Church must be the agent of justice and liberation about which it proclaims. A confessional affirmation of peace is not enough."¹⁵⁹ Cone argued that the Church must represent in its congregational life and seek to structure in society the peace about which it speaks. He concluded that churches that maintain a purely transcendent focus have a very poor witness, stating, "When a congregation does not even attempt to structure in its life and in the society the gospel it preaches, why should anyone believe what it says?"¹⁶⁰

Cone acknowledged that the black churches have a strong legacy of fighting for the oppressed.¹⁶¹ Yet, he expressed concern that many contemporary black churches have strayed

¹⁵⁸ James H. Cone. *Speaking the Truth : Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*. (Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, 1999), p. 115.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 125.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 125.

¹⁶¹ He cited for example, that, "...when white preachers and missionaries introduced their version of Christianity to African slaves, many rejected it, contending that God willed their freedom not their servitude. Separate independent

from their liberation heritage. In this way, he expressed fear that black churches, en masse, will begin to neglect the oppressed, in the same way white churches have, and that instead of deepening their commitment to the poor in their community and in the Third World, many will adopt the same attitude toward the poor as have the white churches from which they separated.¹⁶² He said, “Too many black churches are more concerned about buying and building new church structures than they are about feeding, clothing, and housing the poor. Too many pastors are more concerned about how to manipulate people for an increase in salary than they are about liberating the oppressed from socio-political bondage.” He summarized, that if black churches do not repent by reclaiming their liberating heritage for the empowerment of the poor today, it will be at the risk of their very Christian identity.¹⁶³

In summary, Cone saw the black churches falling away from their liberating mission as they took on a more transcendent focus to the neglect of those who were suffering in the congregation and in the society. To be like Christ, the black churches must repent from the sin of social neglect and return to their liberating mission.

Gayraud Wilmore

black congregations began to develop among slaves and free Africans in the north and south, because black people did not believe that a segregated congregational life, in which they were treated as second-class Christians, was reconcilable with their view of the Lordship of Jesus over the church.” James H. Cone. *Speaking the Truth : Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*. p. 121.

¹⁶² With regard to the Christian witness in race relations in America, Cone contended that established white churches have almost always focused on the specifically theological understanding of their identity.¹⁶² Cone claimed that this has led white Christians to maintain a conservative approach to politics, especially in racial oppression. For example, Cone pointed out that one can examine the attitude of white churches toward African slavery and find that, with few exceptions, their views functioned as religious legitimization of their social and political interests. He concluded that, “If the white churches expect to be taken seriously about their claim to be of God, then they must begin to act against the social order and ecclesial structures that do not affirm the humanity of people of color.” James H. Cone. *Speaking the Truth : Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*. p. 120

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 122

Gayraud Wilmore's chapter entitled, "Black Christians, Church Unity and One Common Expression of Apostolic Faith," is collected in the larger work, *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith*, which consists of articles and essays submitted to the World Council of Churches in 1986. It was specifically submitted for the institution's continuing discussion of the nature of the apostolic faith around the world today and how that faith should be confessed both universally and in particular situations.¹⁶⁴ Wilmore began his treatise by acknowledging that the shared experiences of black people in America have created a unified faith identity. He first observes that a continuing nexus to an African past has stamped a distinctive mood and mode upon the spirituality, music, and forms of worship of this segment of African-American Christians. Even further, the common participation of diasporic African culture, with a culture of poverty in rural slums and urban ghettos have given black Christians an awareness of mutual lifestyles and group identity. Added to this, the experience of racial prejudice and oppression has given them a sense of solidarity in suffering and struggle. Ultimately, even with considerable diversity within its varied institutions, these characteristics have convinced many scholars that it is accurate to speak of a black or Afro-American Church in North America.¹⁶⁵

With this notion, the Commission of Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, in response to initiatives from Geneva, encouraged black theologians and church leaders to articulate the ideas and beliefs that seem generally to be approved and shared by black

¹⁶⁴ These works were first shared at a special consultation was held on December 14 and 15, 1984 at Virginia Union University, Richmond Virginia, and reported to the National Council Commission plenary on March 22, 1985 in Atlanta, Georgia. Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Black Christians, Church Unity and One Common Expression of Apostolic Faith," in David T. Shannon and Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed. *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. iv.

¹⁶⁵ Gayraud S. Wilmore. "Black Christians, Church Unity and One Common Expression of Apostolic Faith." p. 9.

churches, including those continuing to exist within predominantly white denominations.¹⁶⁶

Wilmore responded with this chapter, briefly highlighting some of the factors that may shape the appropriate context for addressing the Council's queries, to serve as a stimulus for an exploratory conversation later.¹⁶⁷

In the second section of his chapter, entitled, "Black Theology as Apologia and Critique," Wilmore described the mission of Black Theology and identified sources from Black Theology that can be used for an ecumenical statement of the Christian faith. He then identified the ways through which the black theological perspective can be discerned from black churches' community initiatives. Lastly, he juxtaposed theological differences in black and white churches as reflected in their practices.

Wilmore began by describing Black Theology as an apologia for black belief in the justice and righteousness of God, and then, usually by implication and direction, a critique of the white church. As such, Black Theology is understood to have been lived out from the beginning of the black churches as protest of the white church and has served as, "an exhortation to blacks to be more faithful to the Gospel than their masters and mistresses, or a protest against the abuses and injustices of the white church, the white-dominated state, and the social institutions of the nation."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ In particular, black church theologians and church leaders were invited to consider the following questions, "to what extent do black Christians hold the same faith professed by other Christians in the United States and in other parts of the world? To what extent do they believe and practice a variant faith which is, nevertheless, rooted and grounded in the Apostolic tradition, as far as anyone can construct that today? What distinctive contributions do the Afro-American Churches have to make to the quest that has been accelerating since the founding of the WCC in 1948, for the visible unity of one holy catholic and apostolic Church and the one expression of the faith handed down from Jesus and the Apostles?" (Wilmore, "Black Christians, Church Unity and One Common Expression of Apostolic Faith," pp. 9-10.

¹⁶⁷ Wilmore, "Black Christians, Church Unity and One Common Expression of Apostolic Faith," p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

A very important contribution of Black Theology is the identification of sources from the black experience from which one can understand the Christian faith as it is lived in the black churches. Wilmore enumerated them beginning first with the writings, addresses and sermons of black preachers, church leaders, theologians and philosophers, from which one will draw ideas of liberation and the equality of all people under God. Next, he highlighted the folklore, proverbs, spirituals, hymns, and gospel songs that are indispensable resources for understanding the belief structures of poor people who considered themselves just as much in succession to the Apostles and fathers of the early church as their white counterparts. Lastly, he turned to the churches themselves, citing the liberating influence of black folk religion on black churches in the present, particularly in Baptist, Methodist, and Holiness-Pentecostal traditions. With this, Wilmore concluded that, any consideration of Black Theology that fails to include data from these sources will be unavailable to identify the strands of popular religion that may not have been woven into the official theologies of the churches but are essential for understanding the operative theology of the people.¹⁶⁹

After establishing the agenda of Black Theology, and identifying sources to understand Christian faith and witness, Wilmore then discussed the ways in which the programmatic priorities of Black Theology can be discerned from the black church perspective. Historically speaking, black churches were rescue missions and survival stations on an underground route to freedom and dignity. With this, Wilmore posited, “The theology that thundered from the pulpits on Sundays was less concerned about how to understand the first three articles of the Nicene Creed than about faith, hope and love and their relevance to obtaining the next three meals.”¹⁷⁰ Black churches were also missionary outposts on the frontier of abject poverty and white

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

hostility. As such they sent out deacons and deaconesses, teachers, scout leaders, social workers, and community organizers to encourage a dispirited people, advocate for the dispossessed, and lead religious and secular movements for freedom and social justice. Wilmore concluded that by examining these priorities of the churches we could arrive at an understanding of the peculiar angle from which they viewed the Gospel and the significance they gave to various aspects of faith and order.¹⁷¹ Faith in the black churches was lived out in the many ways it functioned to ameliorate the plight of the oppressed, and to affirm human dignity within the community..

Wilmore illuminated distinctions in the faith and witness of the black churches by highlighting several historic theological and practical differences between black and white churches. For example, he observed that white laity exercised control over most of their ministers and in the mainline churches charismatic and autocratic preachers were regarded with suspicion and disfavor. Black churches preferred strong charismatic leaders, and black preachers faced no inference with the freedom of the pulpit.¹⁷² Even further, he observed that white churches generally felt that religion and politics should not be mixed, while black churches usually had no such squeamishness. For example, where white churches were reluctant to speak out against slavery, some black churches eagerly promoted the Civil War as a Holy crusade.¹⁷³ Additionally, Wilmore observed that, white Christians drew a sharp dividing line between the secular and the sacred. As such their churches were used for worship and not much more. Black Christians recognized no sharp division and their churches were cultural centers that embraced and coordinated many aspects of community life.¹⁷⁴ The divergent priorities between black and white churches appear to be sociological differences; however they point to important

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

¹⁷² Ibidem.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p.14.

theological causes and effects that should not be ignored. Wilmore concluded that the perspective of traditional black Christianity can be seen by focusing on these and other priorities of the black churches which tell us what they regard as critical of faith and order.¹⁷⁵

What can be theologically inferred from these differences in practices in the black and white churches and, in particular, about the moral obligation of black churches to their communities, as highlighted by Wilmore? First, black Christians have seen it as an obligation of their faith to speak out against injustice. Hence, preachers from their traditions have never been censored from addressing discrimination and oppression or from mobilizing the community to action, from the pulpit. Additionally, black Christians have felt morally obliged to engage in the struggle against political oppression as a vocation of their faith and witness, therefore offering no squeamishness about mixing faith and politics in black churches. This was particularly true when political objectives were oppressive and worked to crush the flourishing of God's children. Lastly, the black churches have felt a moral obligation to nourish the body as well as the spirit. As such, their churches were open through the week to educate, entertain, enlighten, and to affirm the human dignity of their oppressed congregants.

First Generation scholars in Black Theology, James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, demonstrate that the black churches have advanced a liberating mission to fight for the oppressed and affirm human dignity. Wilmore highlighted the liberation mission of the black churches as he identified historic social practices that distinguish the black churches from the white churches. Cone has concluded that The Church, the Body of Christ, is morally obligated to live out the mission of Christ to bring liberty to the oppressed. While the historic black churches can be credited for their liberation praxis, Cone feared that they have since fallen into the trap of taking

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

on a solely transcendent focus, and that to correct this, repentance is needed. The black churches must return their focus to addressing the needs of the oppressed in their local communities and beyond.

The second generation of scholarship in Black Theology pushed questions and considerations about the black churches' liberating mission even further, in at least two significant ways. The first was to refocus scholarship to consider the ways that women's liberation has been neglected, with the development of womanist theology. The second was to create scholarship in the sub-disciplines of religion and ministry from the perspective of Black Theology. Again, Pastoral Theology from the perspective of Black Theology, is the most relevant of these sub-disciplines for this project, in that, the focus of Pastoral Theology is vocation as service to congregation and the community. In the next section, two works shall be reviewed, in reflection upon the advancements of the second generation of scholarship in Black Theology. Delores Williams' work, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* for a Womanist assessment of the liberation mission of the black churches as it is fulfilled in the lives of women and the community at large. James Harris work, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective* will be reviewed for an assessment of the black churches' obligation to the community from the perspective of Pastoral Theology.

3.3 BCCE in the Second Generation of Black Theology

Delores Williams

Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, was the first major theological work from the Womanist perspective. In this work, Williams sought to shape a theology committed to black women's particular issues, which converge at the trisection

of racism, sexism and poverty. To do this she needed the theological language, and to devise a methodology, that the academy, African American women, and the African American community would understand. Even further she desired to find a theological voice as a black woman, and not be crowded out by the voices of white female and black male theologians.¹⁷⁶ To do this she uses the biblical story of Hagar to create a hermeneutical lens to interpret African American women's experiences. In reading Hagar's story, Williams found that her circumstances and struggles were reminiscent of black women in America.¹⁷⁷

Interestingly, Williams observed that God's response to Hagar's struggles in the Hebrew scriptures is not liberation. Rather, God participates in Hagar's and her child's survival on two occasions.¹⁷⁸ Deliverance, in Hagar's story, is not given by God. It finds its source in human initiative. Thus it seemed to Williams that God's response to Hagar and Ishmael's situation was survival and involvement in their development of an appropriate quality of life, that is, appropriate to their situation and heritage, because they would finally live in the wilderness without the protection of a larger social unit.¹⁷⁹

As such, Williams concluded that a female-centered tradition of African-American biblical appropriation could be named the "survival/quality of life tradition of African American

¹⁷⁶ Delores Williams. *Sisters in The Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1993), p. xii.

¹⁷⁷ Williams observed that, a very superficial reading of Genesis 16:1-16 and 21:9-21 revealed that Hagar's predicament involved slavery, poverty, ethnicity, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, rape, domestic violence, homelessness, motherhood, single-parenting and radical encounters with God." (Williams, p.4.) All of these have been reoccurring themes in black women's experiences of suffering in America.

¹⁷⁸ (1)When she was a run-away slave, God met her in the wilderness and told her to resubmit herself to her oppressor Sarah, that is, to return to bondage. (Genesis 16:7-15) Here, Williams along with feminist scholar Elsa Tamez interpreted God's action to be on the behalf of the survival of Hagar and her child. (2)Then, when Hagar and her child were finally cast out of the home of their oppressors and were not given proper resources for survival, God provided Hagar with a resource. God gave her new vision to see survival resources where she had seen none before. (Genesis 21:15-19) (3) Finally, in the Hagar story there is the suggestion that God will be instrumental in the development of Ishmael and Hagar's quality of life, in that Ishmael will be able to provide for them as a divinely skilled archer. (Genesis 21:20-21) (Williams, p. 5.)

¹⁷⁹ Williams, p. 5.

Biblical appropriation.”¹⁸⁰ She said, “In black consciousness, God’s response of survival and quality of life to Hagar is God’s response of survival and quality of life to African-American women and mothers of slave descent struggling to sustain their families with God’s help.”¹⁸¹

It is with this hermeneutical lens that she views and critiques the black churches’ limited commitment to women’s flourishing within the church body, as well as its limits in reaching out to the larger community. In so doing, she separated the “ideal” black church, from African American denominational bodies. She made this separation, first, because her critique of sexism in the black churches was groundbreaking.¹⁸² As such, she wanted to be clear that the black church she critiqued was a social reality, not the venerable institution that Williams claims many believe, “... to be the core symbol of the four-hundred-year-old African-American struggle providing black people with spiritual and material resources for survival and freedom.”¹⁸³ The separation of the ideal black church and African American denominational church bodies is further necessary because the merging of the black church and African-American denominational churches hides what Williams called “a multitude of sins” against black women prevalent in the African American denominational churches on a daily basis. Each “sin,” as Williams identified them, serves as a critique of the black churches’ failure to engage women, as well as the socio-economic oppressed, within their communities to promote their survival and quality of life. She highlighted the following:

-The sexism that denies black women opportunity in the churches’ major leadership roles;

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem.

¹⁸² Williams contends that her critique of sexism in the black church is the first to be documented in a scholarly manner. Williams, p. 204.

¹⁸³ Williams, p. 205.

- The immoral models of male leadership at the helm of too many of the black denominational churches;
- Collusion that often exists between some black male preachers and the political forces in America oppressing black women and all black people;
- The sexual exploitation of black women in the denominational church by some black preachers;
- The tendency of the proclamation and teachings of the denominational churches to be so spiritualized and heaven-directed” that women parishioners are not encouraged to concentrate on their lives in this world and to fight for their own survival, liberation and productive quality of life;
- The failure of African-American denominational churches on a consistent and large scale, to pool their resources in order to deal effectively with the poverty, drug-addiction, homelessness, hunger and health problems such as AIDS sweeping through the black communities in the United States;
- The leadership in the denominational church encouraging homophobia;
- Responding to the AIDS crisis with denial;
- The emotional exploitation of black female parishioners as ministers provoke emotional reactions to proclamation and ministry rather than thoughtful questions and responses;
- Building and purchasing elaborate church edifices, while thousands of black people live in dire poverty...
- Failure of the denominational churches to pool their resources in order to develop a powerful, effective and extensive prison ministry working in both female and male prisons on a consistent basis to help black prisoners shape goals and begin to make and realize dreams for their lives.¹⁸⁴

Like first generation Black Theology scholar James Cone, Williams used the theological language of “sin and repentance” to describe the failures of the black churches to fulfill their moral obligation to women and the larger community, and to discuss how these failures might be corrected. Using her unique hermeneutical lens, crafted from the Biblical story of Hagar, one may understand that the black churches are morally obligated to promote the survival and quality

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 207-209.

of life of all people without regard to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or social economic class. By highlighting particular areas of sin, she demonstrated that this moral obligation must be fulfilled through the correction of the oppressive patterns of behavior in the male-dominated African-American denominational church bodies, and through real strategies and programs that empower people to survive and create opportunities for the oppressed to improve their quality of life. This can only happen as the black churches reconsider values of sexism and classism, which they have assumed in the process of becoming Americanized. These values are foreign to the black churches' historic mission of liberation, and work against their fulfillment of their obligation to promote the survival and quality of life of women and others oppressed.¹⁸⁵

James Harris

In his work, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective*, James Harris made the claim that Pastoral Theology is liberation theology because it is, “grounded in praxis, in that, it deals with developing and implementing policies and programs in the church and community that convey the meaning of Christianity in practical life situations.”¹⁸⁶ He further claimed that, because of the black churches' legacy of community engagement they are the most likely place to see liberation methodologies institutionalized and implemented on a comprehensive level.¹⁸⁷ As such, he examined Pastoral Theology in the black churches to assess their effectiveness in the praxis of liberation theology.

Harris grounded his work in the theme of liberation as expressed by several first generation scholars in Black Theology. He outlined the positions of two of James Cone's major works, *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed*, in both of which Cone posited

¹⁸⁵ Ibidem, pp. 218-219.

¹⁸⁶ James H. Harris. *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991.), p. ix.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 56-57.

that liberation manifests itself in the struggle for justice and freedom, and the black experience in the United States is the model of that struggle. The occupation of the church then is to work on behalf of the oppressed. Further, he discussed what Wilmore saw as the agenda for Black Theology, that is, to affirm the real possibility of freedom and humanity for black people, and to negate every power that seeks to demand and rob black people of the determination of their own destiny.¹⁸⁸ He then turned to Major Jones who maintained that the concept of self-respect was ultimately critical in Black Theology. His position was that Black Theology was self-affirmation with the understanding that God wills blacks to be free, equal, and at peace with themselves, and enables blacks to be free “from traditional fear of whites, so that they can articulate and act upon their feeling.”¹⁸⁹ In summary, first generation scholarship in Black Theology called for real work to be done by the church in oppressed communities. Harris said, “If the gospel gives blacks the power to “break the chains” of oppression and Black Theology is the method of analyzing the gospel for that purpose, then we need to move forward toward doing liberation.”¹⁹⁰

The problem is that while black theologians have articulated cogently a theology of liberation, these same theologians, along with the black churches, have fallen short of carrying it out. Harris resolved that while the formulation of liberation theology is a necessary precondition to systematically effecting change through Christian practice, practicing liberation theology is much more difficult than formulating it.¹⁹¹ By way of constructive critique, then, Harris identifies the following ways by which the black churches can practice liberation theology in the local community and in society at large:

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 61 Drawn from Wilmore, *Black Religion Black Radicalism*, p. 297.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

- 1) Sexism against black women should be addressed by Black Theology and the black churches. This means that qualified women should be given the same leadership opportunities as men, and that theology and the church must eliminate exclusionist language, attitudes and practices in order to fully benefit from the talents of women.
- 2) Encourage members to financially support the liberating ministries and missions of the church. A tithing church will be able to influence public policy issues such as housing for the poor and equal-employment opportunities. It would spend less time and energy raising money to meet the ordinary demands of ministry and mission, and actually *do* ministry by using its financial resources to develop ways to stem the tide of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, divorce, and family violence.
- 3) Black churches can also adopt public schools, into which they can send volunteers to “testify” to young blacks about the value of a quality education. Churches could provide “education mentors” to work as counselors in order to help children increase education achievement, develop self-esteem, and enhance moral and intellectual property.
- 4) Black churches need to pool their financial resources by withdrawing funds from institutions that do not address the development needs of the black community... The fiscal integrity of the church and community depend on Biblical and ethical principals such as working together, loving one another, and caring for the poor.
- 5) Each black congregation should develop ways to assess the needs of its constituents and those who live within a certain radius of the church.
- 6) Black Theology teaches self-respect and self-esteem in spite of social and political condescension to and oppression of blacks. Black pastors should put this into action by developing programs and policies to transform the status of the poor. They can do this by sharing historical and biographical stories of black accomplishments. Blacks have to regain the confidence that they can persevere despite modern manifestations of oppression and injustice. These lessons on determination, freedom, and faith can be correlated with biblical stories that express similar virtues.¹⁹²

Much like Williams, Harris’s constructive critique of particular aspects of the black churches’ failure to engage the oppressed in the community included correctives for both sexual and socioeconomic oppression. Their critical recommendations for liberation praxis in the black churches shall provide tremendous insight in the examination of the twenty-first century models

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 66-67.

of BCCE to be considered later in this work, as will the research of Keri Day and Jonathan Walton, who represent developments in the present generation of scholarship in Black Theology. Day's work, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America*, and Walton's *Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* shall be reviewed in the next section.

3.4 BCCE in the Third Generation of Black Theology

Keri Day

In her work, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America*, Day, used a multi-disciplinary approach, employing scholarship of black sociologists, cultural theory on black poverty, philosophical and theological insights on liberation, as she raised critical historical questions on the effect of interlocking oppressions such as race, class, gender, and sexuality on black women to evaluate the social implications of black women's poverty in the United States. She then offered an understanding of thriving that can address their suffering and alienation under the systemic structures of advanced capitalism.¹⁹³ In particular, she examined the role of the black churches in black women's thriving.¹⁹⁴ She offered that while, "Black Churches attempt to be contexts of transcendence wherein poor black women can find hope and meaning; these churches often do not possess a sophisticated

¹⁹³ Keri Day. *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America*. (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 2012), pp. 10.

¹⁹⁴ Day used "thriving" to refer to poor people developing the economic and cultural resources needed to participate on a par with their non-poor peers. Day maintained that, "economic well-being depends upon both cultural forms of respect and the restructuring of our political economy so that thriving is possible." So that economic justice can be attainable, Day contended that black churches should participate in a project of thriving with and for poor black women. Day, p. 5.

understanding of economic institutions and their exploitative practices. This inhibits what they are able to accomplish in the long term.”¹⁹⁵

Day contended that black churches and religious institutions, can effectively participate in a project of thriving with and for black poor women, but to do this she offered a four point strategy to which they should commit. The first is that black churches and religious institutions must critically revisit their anti-poverty strategies for the poor, including faith-based initiatives.¹⁹⁶ Day’s critique of faith-based initiatives was that they do not address larger systemic issues that exacerbate black women’s poverty. Furthermore, these programs carry an underlying assumption that black and poor women are in need of moral reformation in order to improve their socio-economic condition.¹⁹⁷ Lastly, faith based initiatives tend to reinforce the market-driven language of individual success and responsibility, blaming the poor for their condition. Day concluded that while faith based initiatives may employ strategies that seek to empower poor black women to improve their economic situations; black churches and religious institutions must continue to be critical of system structures that keep black women in poverty. Those

¹⁹⁵ Day, p. 10.

¹⁹⁶ In 1996, under the Clinton administration, welfare reform legislation included a central provision known as Charitable Choice. This provision made it possible for churches and other organizations to receive government funds in order to meet the needs of the disadvantaged families or at-risk persons within their communities. Later under the Bush administration, Charitable Choice was expanded to include an additional set of “faith based initiatives” that strengthened the role of religious organizations in public assistance.” (Day, 32-3) Scholarship on faith-based initiatives can be found in the following works: Lewis C. Daly. *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring*. Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press, 2009. Robert J. Wineburg. *Faith-Based Inefficiency : The Follies of Bush's Initiatives*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007. Amy E. Black, David K. Ryden. *Of Little Faith: The Politics of George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004. Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers, Paul Weber. *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*. Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Carl S. Dudley. *Community Ministry: New Challenges, Proven Steps to Faith-Based Initiatives*. Bethesda, MD : Alban Institute, 2002. Martha Minow. *Partners, Not Rivals : Privatization and The Public Good*. Boston, MA : Beacon Press, 2002.

¹⁹⁷ For example, Day highlighted churches advertising moral development as an aspect of their outreach programs to women. Additionally, in a campaign speech by former president Bill Clinton at a meeting of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, he suggested that if preachers discouraged teenage pregnancy, poverty could be virtually eliminated. Of this, Day said, “The underlying assumption with these examples is that if poor black women undergo a transformation of values or a moral reformation, their socioeconomic circumstances will improve, if not be solved.” Day, pp. 42-43.

churches and religious institutions that continue to carry-on faith-based initiatives should correct and adapt the language and assumptions attached to these programs that work over and against the liberation of the poor.¹⁹⁸

The next point, in Day's project for "thriving" is that black churches and religious institutions should revive a multiethnic, class-based movement for economic justice that draws upon the ideals of the Poor People's Campaign.¹⁹⁹ Day observed that as the Poor People's Campaign sought the inclusion of blacks in alliance with poor whites, this initiative redefined the poverty question, American power, and the concept of basic opportunity in fundamental ways, in that the powers that be were forced to confront the pervasiveness of poverty in the United States. With the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. only months before the intended launch of protests, the Poor Peoples Campaign suffered leadership struggles and it was ultimately unsuccessful. Beyond the leadership struggles, however, Day was also critical of the gender politics of the campaign.²⁰⁰ With the exception of this, she posited, "The central insight of the Poor People's Campaign was that poverty is caused by a lack of economic power and that poor

¹⁹⁸ Day, p. 44.

¹⁹⁹ Under the leadership of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference launched the Poor People's Campaign, a massive protest consisting of strategic sit-ins at key government offices in Washington, DC to demand that the government give the poor better access to jobs, healthcare, and decent housing. Day, p. 100. The Poor People's Campaign has been researched in the following works; Charles Fager. *Uncertain Resurrection; the Poor People's Washington Campaign*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969. Walter E. Afield, Audrey Gibson. *Children of Resurrection City*. Washington, D.C., Association for Childhood Education International, 1970. Jill Friedman. *Old News: Resurrection City*. New York, NY: Grossman Publishers, 1970. Gerald McKnight. *Last Crusade : Martin Luther King, Jr., The FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign* . Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

²⁰⁰ In their agenda, leaders of the campaign failed to study how welfare regulates and controls the bodies and lives of women in America, and further, because welfare policy is deeply connected to domestic violence among women, in general, the leadership of the Poor People's Campaign needed to address how hegemonic masculinities reinforce such violence against women." Day, p. 105. Day suggested that The Poor Peoples Campaign could have experienced greater success had it critically reflected upon and modified its traditional understandings of gender and sexual policies." Day, p. 105.

people [across all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds] need to be mobilized politically to realize the nation's promises of economic opportunity."²⁰¹

Next, Day advocated that black churches and religious institutions must examine, and critique, unhealthy prosperity gospel theologies that blame the poor by providing holistic visions of prosperity and well-being. Over and against the messages that have pervaded the church that God rewards the faithful with material wealth, and that the materially poor are not faithful enough, Day recommended that the black churches should offer a theology of prosperity that is more in line with the theme of hope in the historic black churches.²⁰² This corrective prosperity theology would, first of all, affirm the life transforming power of faith; then secondly, locate affirmative faith within the contexts of the factors of government, economics, relationships, and opportunity.²⁰³ Ultimately, this prosperity gospel must affirm that our well-being and sufferings as persons are the result of many interdependent factors, including both God's lively vision for humanity and repressive social structures. Hence, Day surmises, it is not always individuals who fail; more often it is the system that fails individuals.²⁰⁴

The final point in Day's strategy to aid black churches and religious institutions to promote poor black women's thriving is that they should advocate public policies that focus on asset building for the poor across racial communities. Black churches have a long-term tradition of self-help and communal uplift. Black churches should extend this by determining how private capital within black communities can be employed to help the long-term growth of the poor.

²⁰¹ Day, p. 102.

²⁰² Day maintained, "Hope and black cultural renewal have always been important to the mission of the Black Church. This is an essential first step for blacks in order to empower them to transcend the racist logic and practices of white privilege. However, hope for 'the least of these' within black communities (the black poor, especially black women) is often eclipsed by an insidious religious worldview that blames the poor for their own poverty. This religious worldview has gained ground over the last few decades, and this worldview is part of the prosperity gospel's theology." Day, p. 108

²⁰³ Day, p. 124.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem.

Even further, black churches can reach out to their communities to strategize as to how black capital is being used and how it might benefit its poor members. Day offered that, "by promoting socially conscious capitalism among black businesses and capitalists, black churches can develop a theology of holistic prosperity that considers the thriving of all members within society."²⁰⁵

Twenty years after second generation Black Theology scholar Delores Williams demonstrated the ways in which the black churches failed, in their programs, ideologies, and theology, to promote the survival and quality of life for black women, Day has demonstrated the ways that the black churches continue to miss opportunities to support women's thriving. Both are constructive critiques which offer positive recommendations as tools for the black churches to begin to fulfill their obligation to women. Day's research, however, is characteristic of present day scholarship in Black Theology, in that she engages a multidisciplinary approach to examine women's crises in black communities, as she continues the Womanist conversation and the adverse effects of the church on women's flourishing, and develops practical approaches for the black churches to begin to address these problems.²⁰⁶

Jonathan Walton

Another very important work that reflects the present generation of scholarship in Black Theology is Jonathan Walton's, *Watch This: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*. In this work, Walton investigated the cultural mores and practices of Black televangelists to give

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.145.

²⁰⁶ Four of Dwight Hopkins' criteria in his recommendations for the present generation of scholars in Black Theology are the development of interdisciplinary methods, the continued affirmation of womanist theology, the practical application of Black Theology to the church and community, and more scholarship on the church and the community. Hopkins, "A Black Theology of Liberation," pp. 28-29. The sections reviewed of Day's work fulfill each of these.

an ethical and cultural critique of African American religious broadcasting as well as to promote dialogue between the church and the academy as he identified theologies and ideologies that are transmitted through this particular medium that work to the detriment of fulfilling justice and human flourishing.²⁰⁷ He also examined the theologies and practices of black mega ministries, as each of the televangelists he investigates have memberships in the thousands.²⁰⁸ Importantly, this work deals with the most pervasive mode of black church engagement to date. Whereas the black churches' engagement has been generally confined to work done in their immediate communities; black religious broadcasters engage viewers nationally and internationally through the transmission of their theology and ideology.

With the motive of generating fodder for discourse, as Walton concluded his investigation of the black televangelists, he highlighted common themes that raise concerns. He began by demonstrating that the black televangelists use their platform to make their ideas authoritative using a three-pronged approach. First, there is the primacy of the "Word." Through constant appeals to scripture, televangelists' views of God, the church, and society are made compatible with the divine order. As a result, Walton claims that, "what could be considered merely a broadcaster's cultural worldview becomes reified as the 'Word of God.'"²⁰⁹ Symbols of prosperity serve as the second authoritative source. The televangelists are able to authenticate the worldview that they promote through their apparently decadent lifestyles, in such a way that congregants and viewers might embrace the dominant themes of televangelists as an effective

²⁰⁷ Jonathan L. Walton. *Watch This: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Evangelism*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. xv.

²⁰⁸ Walton investigates the ministries of Rev. Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II, Bishop T. D. Jakes, Bishop Eddie L. Long, and Pastors Creflo and Taffi Dollar.

²⁰⁹ Walton, pp. 200.

strategy for living.²¹⁰ Lastly, the ability to broadcast, in and of itself, is an authoritative source. Walton claimed, because of television's reality-making capacity, the media can create the sense that what is seen and heard is objective reality. As such, it is hard to deny televangelism's ability to codify social norms.²¹¹ Having established the potential authoritative force that televangelism is, Walton then moved to examine the potential destructive effects of the strategies and pervasive myth systems circulated that televangelism offers to African Americans.²¹²

The first cultural myth embraced by black televangelists identified by Walton is the uncritical acceptance of the American myth of success as the defining reality of American existence. With this, themes of self-choice, controlling one's own destiny, and seizing economic opportunities available in America's capitalist economy are all homiletic staples. This myth, however, flies in the face of the fact that the vast majority of the resources in the American economy remain in the hands of a very few.²¹³ The distribution of wealth, as it pertains to race, is particularly unbalanced, and one's understanding of this state must be situated within the reality of America's history of racism and economic inequality.²¹⁴ As a result, Walton concluded that, "African American religious broadcasting promotes the myths of equal opportunity and black victimology at a time when black people are skating on increasingly thin economic ice as a result of both economic factors and continued racial injustice in America."²¹⁵

Walton next identified an ethic of prosperity and spirit of consumerism as a destructive force transmitted by black televangelists. A conclusion of his investigation was that the "... few

²¹⁰ Ibidem.

²¹¹ Ibidem.

²¹² Ibid., p. 201.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 202.

²¹⁴ "In general, each generation of African Americans begins life with fewer material assets and has been forced to confront barriers that preclude economic development." Walton, 205.

²¹⁵ Walton, p. 206.

messages on fiscal responsibility that are intermittently offered as ancillary points are drowned out by the far more plentiful and powerful messages promoting class materialism.”²¹⁶ This becomes a theological challenge for parishioners and viewers who see the televangelist as a model of faith as demonstrated by material blessings when they do not likewise receive the same forms of material blessings modeled by the televangelist.²¹⁷

Walton then moved to discuss how the American myth of success precludes a focus on social injustice to cause the televangelist to focus on a priestly role to the neglect of the prophetic role. Walton drew the definition and functions of these two roles from Peter Paris’ work, *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity*. According to Paris, a priestly class of black preachers nurtures the community according to their religious responsibilities to God and commit themselves to the preservation and expansion of the faith. Priestly leaders believe the structures of society to be fundamentally good and attribute injustice to the moral indiscretions of a few as oppose to inherent flaws in the structures of society. Rather than challenging the society at large, priestly leaders seek to integrate parishioners into the culture as productive loyal citizens. This is problematic, because as the priest ignores the reality of oppressive social structure any attempt at self-development is done under the condition of bondage.²¹⁸ The prophet, according to Paris is a social reformer who sees the fundamental flaws in society, and is called to work to save society by working to restructure it to their theological and political conception of a just society.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ “The number of advertisements for conferences with images of mansions in the background, television broadcasts that prominently display luxury goods, and even church websites that feature high end automobiles as the dominant visual focal point imply that economic empowerment is not about real wealth creation but rather about conspicuous consumption, hyperconsumerism, and commodity fetishism.” Walton, p. 207

²¹⁷ Walton, p. 207.

²¹⁸ Walton, p. 211. From Peter J. Paris. *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 19.

²¹⁹ Walton, 212 From Peter J. Paris. *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 20.

Walton concludes that the prophetic role appears to be absent in black televangelism to the detriment of racially and economically oppressed viewers who face oppressive social realities on a day-to-day basis.

An important result of black televangelists' neglect of the prophetic role is that they have spiritual authority without political authority. This is evinced by the numbers of African Americans who vote in stark contrast to the conservative social and political ideas espoused by leading black televangelists and megachurch pastors.²²⁰ Of this data, Walton concluded, that while church members and viewers embrace the spiritual authority of these figure, they largely reject their politics.²²¹ While it might be considered unfortunate that the televangelists do not use their media to promote the social justice, Walton surmised that the fact that their followers are able to separate their teachings from their own political realities is a positive, as, "it reveals the critical thought of African Americans around diverse sets of issues that structure their existence."²²²

Walton next discussed the myth of the "Strong Black Man" that is reinforced in African American religious broadcasting. Walton defines the Strong Black Man as the savior of the race. The Strong Black Man is the imaginary hypermasculinist hero and patriarchal messiah figure of African American racial uplift discourse. He further claimed that, "The Strong Black Man is predicated on the assumption that African American socialization and progress depend on Black

²²⁰ For example, polling data shows that the majority of working and middle-class African Americans, rather than believing the myth of black victimology, are quite clear about the prevalence of racism in America." Walton, 213.

²²¹ Walton, p. 214.

²²² Ibidem.

men taking charge of their community.”²²³ The problem with the Strong black Man myth, for Walton, is that it exchanges one form of oppression, racism, with another, sexism.

The Strong Black Man myth is harmful in various ways. The myth of the Strong Black Man has resulted in black churches ignoring the immoral behaviors of male leadership in order to maintain a positive public image of leadership.²²⁴ A second harmful consequence of the myth of the Strong Black Man is homophobia, as a benchmark of hegemonic masculinity is not being gay or bisexual.²²⁵ Finally, as hypermasculinity is defined by the ability to “conquer and subdue” it carries with it the theme of domination of black women.

Walton’s critique of the harmful effects of the myths and strategies of black televangelists is very much in line of the teachings of both, Cone who warned black churches of taking on a purely transcendent focus, and Williams who cautioned the black churches to not accept black masculinity as normative in church operations and theology.

3.5 Evaluative Criterion for BCCE

The review of scholarship done in this chapter demonstrates that across the generations and categories of the intellectual development of the discipline, scholars have maintained that BCCE has been motivated by a mission to liberate the oppressed by affirming human dignity and advancing social justice as a means of witness, that is, being the church in the world. As such,

²²³ Ibid., p. 215.

²²⁴ Walton said, “. . . to defend this more positive image of black masculinity, communities of faith have engaged in a conspiracy of silence concerning moral indiscretions among the black male clergy. Many believe that calling certain behaviors into question makes congregants guilty of participating in the same sorts of vicious and racist attacks that made the myth of the Strong Black Man necessary in the first place. Such silence fosters a willful ignorance among parishioners that enables male clergy to act with impunity.” Walton, 219.

²²⁵ Walton, p. 220.

liberating service to the community is the very thing that made the church the church. This theological motivation within the black churches has been the driving force behind their work to address the secular and social needs of their communities consistently through every shift in the social location of black people from slavery through the twentieth century. Each scholar reviewed has the expectation that the black churches must fulfill their obligation to liberate and they are suspicious and critical of the areas and ways in which the black churches do not fulfill this obligation. As such, scholars from each generation of Black Theology offer conditions for liberation work in the black churches. I shall now highlight these conditions by generation and then consider them altogether to identify evaluative criteria for BCCE in the present.

In the first generation, Cone grounded the mission to liberate the oppressed in his Christology. The church must seek to be the body of Christ and to do the work of Christ in the world. As Christ came to set the captive free, so must the church work to free those who are captives of discrimination and socio-economic oppression. As such, Cone was suspicious of the purely transcendent theological focus historically typified in white churches, but lauded the historic black churches for living up to this obligation by serving as liberation stations in times of severe oppression. Yet, he was concerned that the black churches may be turning away from this obligation in the process of becoming Americanized.

Wilmore understood the mission of the black churches to address the needs of the oppressed in their communities as grounded in the historic programming priorities of the black churches. The black churches have distinguished themselves from the white churches by freeing their preachers to speak against injustice from the pulpit. They have used their houses of worship as community centers for secular activities during times of segregation, to promote human flourishing. Ultimately, they refused to separate political objectives from their theology. Rather,

the black churches have served as bases of operations to mobilize for protest against oppressive laws and systems. To turn away from these distinctions then, is to separate from the liberating mission of the black churches.

In the second generation, Williams highlighted the ways in which the black churches have failed to extend the mission to liberate to support women's survival and quality of life. Harris, further, posited ways in which the churches may commit to the praxis of liberation by addressing the needs of the oppressed in their communities.

Day, a scholar in the present generation of developments in Black Theology sees the churches as obligated to exercise the liberation mission as they aid in women's thriving through their programs and initiatives and offered considerations for how the churches may arm themselves strategically and intellectually to do so. Walton claimed that black televangelists have a tremendous opportunity to advance the liberation mission through their media ministries to promote messages for the socio-economic health and well-being of the community and was highly critical of the harmful myths that they perpetuate, instead.

Based on my assessment, one or both of the works reviewed from the three generations of the intellectual development of Black Theology support six main criteria that must be addressed by the black churches if they are to engage the oppressed in their communities in ways that conform to the liberating mission of the black churches. They are as follows:

- The black churches and religious organizations must be politically aware and educated concerning the adverse effects of oppressive social structures.
- The black churches and religious organizations have a moral obligation to speak out against injustice.
- The outreach programs of black churches and religious organizations must affirm human flourishing, as such, these institutions must be aware of the immediate needs of their local constituents.

- The black churches and religious organizations must be willing to combine with other organizations when necessary to fight oppression.
- The outreach programs of the black churches and religious institutions must use their funds in ways that promote community uplift.
- The outreach programs of the black churches and religious organizations must promote equality of all people

The black churches and religious organizations must be politically aware and educated concerning the adverse effects of oppressive social structures.

The black churches were founded, in part, to address the oppressive constructs in which black people found themselves. The founding of the black churches of the antebellum north began with an acute awareness that the mistreatment of black parishioners was unholy and unjust. The creation of the hidden churches of the enslaved in the south was encouraged by the need to affirm the worth of the enslaved as God's children, under the most degrading circumstances. In this way, the awareness of oppressive religious and social systems led to the founding of the black churches.

With due consideration to this, the scholarship reviewed affirms that the black churches continue to have a moral obligation to be armed with knowledge of the inner workings of oppressive systems in order to make serious attempts to deconstruct them through their programs for the community. Cone sees this as not just an obligation of the black churches, but as the natural vocation of the body of Christ. He said, "that the church of Jesus Christ is that community that can read the signs of the time, seeing God's struggle in the struggle of the poor, and that as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, Christians have a moral obligation to join the movement of liberation on the side of the poor, fighting against the structures of injustice."²²⁶ Wilmore sees this obligation as a main historic distinction between the black churches and the white churches.

²²⁶ Cone, p. 125.

Where white churches felt that religion and politics should not be mixed, the black churches have had no reluctance to incorporate a political agenda on behalf of the oppressed in their preaching and programming.²²⁷ Yet, in exposing the sins of the black churches, Williams pointed out that uninformed and uninspired black male preachers very often work in collusion with the political forces in America oppressing black women and all black people.²²⁸ In her assessment of the role of faith-based initiatives in supporting women's thriving, Day concludes that black churches and religious institutions must continue to be critical of systemic structures that keep black women in poverty.²²⁹ Walton attributes the black televangelists' inability to confront oppressive social structures to their assumption of the American myth of success. This is a disservice to their viewers and members, in that; social inequalities are not taken into consideration in their strategies for successful living.²³⁰

With due consideration to the scholarship, with each BCCE model examined in this thesis I have considered the extent which each group is politically aware and educated concerning the adverse effects of oppressive social structures. With this criterion, I have sought to answer the following: Have the organizations identified the oppressive social structures that are prominent in their respective communities? In what ways have they educated their communities on these issues? Have they organized to act on these issues?

The black churches and religious organizations have a moral obligation to speak out against injustice.

²²⁷ Harris, p. 13-14.

²²⁸ Williams, p. 145.

²²⁹ Day, p. 44.

²³⁰ Walton, p. 201-202.

As I have demonstrated through the literature review in chapter two, historians and sociologists have observed and marked the many ways in which the black churches have identified and spoken out against injustice. This has been done out of a sense of mission and divine vocation, from the founding of the churches through the Civil Rights Movement. The scholarship in Black Theology contends that the work of speaking out against social injustice is a moral obligation of the black churches. This includes not only informing the community of issues of social injustice, but also mobilizing them, and instructing them in the ways they can to fight against them.

Cone sees this commitment to stand up against oppression as a vocation of the church, as it seeks to be the body of Christ in the world. He further claimed that the black churches in America best lived out this obligation during slavery and racial segregation, as the greatest pronouncements against oppression came from the black churches.²³¹ Wilmore, drawing on this same legacy, identified the exercise of a free pulpit among the historic practices of the black churches which distinguish them from white churches. Ministers of the black churches were free to preach against injustice. One theological assumption to be drawn from this historic practice is that black preachers have felt morally obligated to preach against oppression in society, as did the black congregations that gave them the liberty to so do. Scholars reviewed in subsequent generations have continued the position that the black churches are morally obligated to speak against injustice and cite particular instances where the black churches have tended to stray away from this historic practice. For example, second generation Black Theology scholar Williams highlighted the tendency of the proclamation and teachings of the denominational churches to be so “spiritualized and heaven-directed” that women parishioners are not encouraged to

²³¹ Cone, p. 120-125.

concentrate on their lives in this world, nor to fight for their own survival, liberation and productive quality of life.²³² Furthermore, Day advocated that black churches and religious institutions must examine and critique the unhealthy prosperity gospel theologies that blame the poor by providing holistic visions of prosperity and well-being, and that they should advance a theology that is aware of repressive social structures.²³³ Walton understood the black televangelists' silence on matters of social injustice as a rejection of the prophetic role that the black churches and preachers are obligated to fulfill to advance a more just society.²³⁴ In regard to the literature on this criterion, I sought to learn the following: In what ways have the agents at each BCCE model spoken out against social injustice? To what extent does each model involve the community in the fight against injustice? How effective is each model in creating positive change?

The outreach programs of black churches and religious organizations must affirm human flourishing, as such, these institutions must be aware of the immediate needs of its local constituents.

The consensus of the scholarship reviewed is that the black churches have a moral obligation to go beyond meeting spirituals needs to address temporal needs in ways that improve the everyday lives of poor people. Concerning this, Wilmore observed that beyond Sunday morning worship, black churches have been cultural centers that embraced and coordinated many aspects of community life.²³⁵ In pointing out the reluctance of the black churches to adequately respond to the AIDS crisis, Williams indicted the them for missing the opportunity to minister to a

²³² Williams, p. 207.209.

²³³ Day, p. 124.

²³⁴ Walton, p. 212.

²³⁵ Wimore, p. 14.

segment of the suffering population, beyond their spiritual needs.²³⁶ To better address the needs of the people in their local communities, Harris recommended that each black congregation should develop ways to assess the needs of its congregants and those who live within a certain radius of the church.²³⁷ Again, the main agenda of Day's work was to highlight ways that the black churches and religious institutions can contribute to women's thriving outside of the church, which is undergirded with the assumption that these institutions are obliged to do so.²³⁸ Black televangelists have the opportunity to use their pervasive medium to transmit their personal cultural ideas into homes across the globe. Walton was highly critical of those ideas that work to the detriment of fulfilling justice and human flourishing, which assumes a moral obligation for televangelists to use their medium to address social concerns.²³⁹ With consideration to this criterion, with each model of BCCE, I have considered the ways in which the models have identified and addressed the needs that are particular to their communities.

The black churches and religious organizations must be willing to combine with other organizations when necessary to fight oppression.

Just as the black churches came together in ecumenical arrangements to become more effective in advancing the cause of Civil Rights, the scholarship in Black Theology consistently maintains that the black churches must continue to come together to effect positive change in the fight for justice. For example, this idea is presented in Cone's essay in his use of ecumenical language, referring to the churches as the body of Christ in describing the churches' vocation to

²³⁶ Williams, p. 205.

²³⁷ Harris, p. 66.

²³⁸ Day, p. 45.

²³⁹ Walton, p. xv.

work for the oppressed.²⁴⁰ Williams decried the failure of the black churches to pool their resources in order to deal effectively with poverty, drug-addiction, homelessness, hunger, health problems and other issues that pervade black communities in the United States on a consistent and large scale.²⁴¹ Harris recommended that the black churches withdraw funds from institutions that do not address the development needs of the black community and pool their financial resources, stating, “The fiscal integrity of the church and community depend on Biblical and ethical principals such as working together, loving one another, and caring for the poor.”²⁴² The major theme of Day’s work is to demonstrate that the black churches should play a direct role in the thriving of women, by helping them to develop plans for economic self-sufficiency.²⁴³ For this criterion, with each BCCE model examined in this thesis, I identified the extent to which each model has united with other organizations in service to the community.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious institutions must use their funds in ways that promote community uplift.

This reoccurring theme in the scholarship reviewed comes often as an indictment of the black churches for using their funds for internal development to the neglect of the community. For example Cone stated, “Too many black churches are more concerned about buying and building new church structures than they are about feeding, clothing, and housing the poor. Too many pastors are more concerned about how to manipulate people for an increase in salary than they are about liberating the oppressed from socio-political bondage.”²⁴⁴ Williams cited the building and purchasing of elaborate church edifices, while thousands of black people live in dire poverty

²⁴⁰ Cone, p. 120.

²⁴¹ Williams, p. 205.

²⁴² Harris, p. 66.

²⁴³ Day, p.10

²⁴⁴ Cone, p. 122

as one of many “sins” committed by the black churches.²⁴⁵ In identifying some ways in which the black churches can practice liberation theology in the local community, Harris recommended that the churches encourage members to financially support the liberating ministries and missions of the church, claiming that a tithing church will be able to influence public policy issues such as housing for the poor and equal-employment opportunities.²⁴⁶ Even further, Day advocated that black churches should reach out to their communities to develop strategies by which black capital might be better used and how it might benefit its poor congregants.²⁴⁷ Walton condemned the espousal of prosperity theology by the black televangelists as detrimental to their viewers, given that the viewers’ realities seldom match the black televangelists’ displays of ostentatious wealth.²⁴⁸ With each BCCE model examined in this thesis I have considered the extent to which their funds have promoted community uplift. Further, I have sought to discover how the presence of each BCCE model in the community made the community more economically stable.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious organizations must promote the equality of all people.

The liberation mission, with which the black churches were founded, to affirm human dignity of and advance social justice, requires the church to promote the equality of all people under God. This includes women, the LGBT community, the poor and marginalized, and those outside of the faith and cultural tradition of the black churches.

Gender and Sexuality

²⁴⁵ Williams, p. 207-209.

²⁴⁶ Harris, p. 66-67.

²⁴⁷ Day, p. 145.

²⁴⁸ Walton, p. 207.

There is a caution in the works reviewed against the ways the black churches may actually oppress from within, particularly with regard to gender and sexuality. Among the sinful practices of the black churches that Williams exposed in her work, she identified; the sexism that denies black women opportunity in the churches' major leadership roles, as well as, the encouragement of homophobia by leadership in the denominational church.²⁴⁹ For liberation praxis to be done by the black churches, Harris recommended that sexism against black women should be addressed head-on by Black Theology, as well as, the black churches. Specifically, he posited that qualified women should be given the same leadership opportunities as men, and that theology and the church must eliminate exclusionist language, attitudes and practices in order to fully benefit from the talents of women.²⁵⁰ Day recommended that the black churches should serve as the platform to promote women's thriving. This means that beyond serving as contexts of transcendence wherein poor black women can find hope and meaning; the black churches must arm themselves with an understanding of economic institutions and their exploitative practices so as to develop programs that will empower black women to make long term improvements in their lives.²⁵¹ Again, two harmful consequences of the Strong Black Man myth transmitted in the preaching of Black televangelists, identified by Walton, are the rejection of homosexuality and the domination of women.²⁵²

The Poor and the marginalized

²⁴⁹ Williams, p. 145. Major works on the Black Church and homophobia include; Kelly Brown-Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church : a Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, 1999. Horace Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not : African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*. Cleveland, OH : Pilgrim Press, 2006. Gary Comstock, *Whosoever Church : Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations*. Louisville, KY : Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

²⁵⁰ Harris, p. 66-67.

²⁵¹ Day, p. 10.

²⁵² Walton, p. 19-20.

Scholarship in Black Theology advocates that the programs of the church be grounded in the black churches' legacy of answering the call of God to liberate the poor and the oppressed. In this way, the work of the black churches has been to create a community that is affirmed in their connection to God and in their worth as human beings, without regard to social status. Of the black churches historic mission to liberate the poor and oppressed, Wilmore observed, that the black churches were, "missionary outposts on the frontier of abject poverty and white hostility. As such they sent out deacons and deaconesses, teachers, scout leaders, social workers, and community organizers to encourage a dispirited people, advocate for the dispossessed, and lead religious and secular movements for freedom and social justice."²⁵³ Cone expressed concern that many contemporary black churches have strayed from their liberation heritage and was fearful that instead of deepening their commitment to the poor, many have adopted the same attitude toward the poor as have the white churches from which they separated.²⁵⁴ Williams addressed the need of the black church to ameliorate the condition of the poor and marks the classism, as well as the sexism that has infiltrated the black church as a byproduct in the process of becoming "Americanized."²⁵⁵ Lastly, Day drew on the black churches legacy of liberation to advocate that the black churches should develop programs to determine how private capital within black communities can be utilized to help the long-term growth of the poor. This kind of program, she claimed, would be an extension of the black churches a long-term tradition of self-help and communal uplift.²⁵⁶

Those Outside the Faith and Culture

²⁵³ Wilmore, p.12.

²⁵⁴ Cone, p. 120.

²⁵⁵ Williams, p. 218-219.

²⁵⁶ Day, p. 145.

Across the generations of scholarship in Black Theology, there is persistent insistence that the black churches must promote the equality of all of the children of God, including those outside of the faith and culture of the black churches. This includes immigrants, those of other religions, and the oppressed around the world. Cone maintained that it is the obligation of the church to work on behalf of the oppressed. He observed and condemns the neglect by the black churches of the poor in the community, without regard to ethnicity or church affiliation, as well as the poor in the Third World.²⁵⁷ Wilmore recalled that whenever political objectives were oppressive and worked to crush the flourishing of God's children, black Christians have felt morally obliged to engage in the struggle against political oppression as a vocation of their faith and witness.²⁵⁸ Williams lifted the Biblical story of Hagar, who was an outsider to the faith and cultural traditions of Abraham, and offers that God's response of survival and quality of life to Hagar is God's response of survival and quality of life to African-American women and mothers of slave descent struggling to sustain their families with God's help." The black churches may also apply this hermeneutical lens to modern day "Hagars" in their communities who are outside of the faith and cultural traditions of the black churches, and extend help to them in their struggles to survive. In identifying ways the black churches can practice liberation theology in the local community and in society at large, Harris suggested that, "Each black congregation should develop ways to assess the needs of its constituents and those who live within a certain radius of the church."²⁵⁹ Such an undertaking would be done without regard to church affiliation, class or ethnic backgrounds. A critical point in Day's project for "thriving" is that black churches and religious institutions should revive a multiethnic, class-based movement for economic justice reminiscent of the Poor People's campaign, with the recognition that, "poverty is caused by a

²⁵⁷ Cone, p. 120.

²⁵⁸ Wilmore p. 13-14

²⁵⁹ Williams., p. 66-67.

lack of economic power and that poor people across all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds need to be mobilized politically to realize the nation's promises of economic opportunity."²⁶⁰ The influences of black religious broadcasters move beyond their immediate communities to engage viewers nationally and internationally therefore, Walton raised concern regarding the potential destructive effects of the strategies and pervasive myth systems circulated by their broadcasts among the poor around the world.²⁶¹ With this criterion, with each BCCE model examined in this thesis I examined the extent to which each group serves and promotes the equality of women, the LGBT community, the poor and marginalized, and those outside the faith and culture of the black churches.

3.6 Conclusion

The theories drawn from the empirical work to be done with local examples of models of BCCE are examined in light of these criteria in an attempt to learn the extent to which twenty-first century black church agents continue to be motivated by the obligation to liberate the oppressed by affirming human dignity and advancing social justice as a means of witness. In the next section, I shall discuss the research methods I have employed in gathering data from the local examples of prevalent models of BCCE.

²⁶⁰ Day, p. 102.

²⁶¹ Walton., p. 201.

Chapter 4- Methodology: Examining the Prevalent Twenty-First Century Models of Community Engagement

4.1 Introduction

This thesis examines three prevalent models of black church community engagement (BCCE) in the United States of America since the year 2000, in an effort to discover the theological motivations underpinning their outreach. The review of literature, done in chapter two, demonstrated that the three predominant models of BCCE in the twenty first century are grass-roots organizations where black churchpersons use non-violent direct action to advance a particular social justice cause; community development corporations, where churches filter grant monies from government and philanthropic entities to create economic opportunities for their local communities; and megachurch initiatives where congregations use the revenue of their large memberships to effect positive change in their communities. With these particular models indicated in the literature as predominant models of current BCCE, I next confronted the task of choosing local sites of each model to research, and a research design to employ for data collection and analysis.

After strategically searching for sites that would provide rich data to generate theory and that would produce results that were generalizable, I selected the Christian Community Commission (CCC) of New Haven, Connecticut as an example of the grass-roots model of BCCE, The Beulah Land Development Corporation (BLDC), also of New Haven, Connecticut, as an example of the community development corporation model of BCCE, and the First

Cathedral (FC) of Bloomfield, Connecticut to exemplify the megachurch initiatives model of BCCE.²⁶²

The Christian Community Commission (CCC) was founded in 1994 by an ecumenical group of African American ministers in the New Haven, Connecticut to address gang violence through street rallies, prayer walks, and community meetings with elected officials. Since this time, their mission has expanded to address substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness and racial discrimination. While many churches, ministers, individuals from the community and civic organizations have participated in the CCC's efforts over the years, the organization has been lead by Pastor Donald Morrison from its inception.

The Beulah Land Development Corporation (BLDC) is a subsidiary of the venerable Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church of New Haven. Founded as the first church of the Pentecostal denomination in the City of New Haven in 1923, the congregation has been located in the predominantly African-American Dixwell-Newhallville neighborhood for the entirety of its existence. The church's present Senior Pastor, Bishop Walter Brooks, founded the BLDC in 1994 with the mission to positively transform crime-ridden sections of the neighborhood through housing development. Since this time the BLDC has expanded its mission to include educational and financial opportunities to the local underserved population through job training, courses on financial credit repair, the creation of home ownership opportunities, and senior housing development.

The First Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut was founded as the First Baptist Church in 1968. The present senior pastor, Archbishop Leroy Bailey, has led the congregation since

²⁶² Strategies for site selection are explicated in section 4.2.

1971. During his tenure, the church has grown to claim a membership of 11,000. Their massive 40 acre-church campus is anchored by a 4,000 seat sanctuary, flanked by numerous classrooms and meeting spaces. The congregation primarily engages the community through the availability of its space and resources and through its outreach initiatives including, a counseling center, job fairs, massive food and clothing drives, and health fairs, as well as, cultural and educational opportunities for children in nearby inner-city Hartford.

Data from these sites was collected and analyzed employing a constructivist grounded theory approach. I have concluded that constructivist grounded theory was the best approach for data collection and analysis for this thesis for several reasons. It yielded a systematic way to generate theories for the mission and work of the agents of BCCE that is grounded in their own words and actions.²⁶³ It allowed for mixed-methods of data collection so that the theories generated by the agents of BCCE were supported from multiple sources.²⁶⁴ Further, grounded theory adapts readily to studies of the diverse phenomena that was observed in the various meetings and services, examined through texts, and collected from the interviews of BCCE agents at each site researched.

The remainder of this chapter shall proceed as follows. In the first section, I discuss the criteria by which I selected sites to represent their respective models of BCCE that would produce rich data and yield generalizable results. In the second section of this chapter, I further explicate why I have chosen the constructivist grounded theory research design for this thesis, in

²⁶³ Charmaz states, “ If you attend to your [subjects] language, you can bridge their experience with your research questions. Then you can learn about their meanings rather than make assumptions about what they mean.” Charmaz, 2006. p. 35.

²⁶⁴ In section 4.4, I explain how I collected data through interviews, textual analysis and ethnography, through a grounded theory approach. Codes are then identified from across the data to support categories and generate theories.

light of other potentially fitting research designs. In the third section of this chapter, I discuss data collection through interviews, textual analysis, and ethnographic observations. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss data analysis.

4.2 Research Site Selection

Choosing local sites of BCCE to research was quite challenging, as the options seemed limitless. Therefore I established specific criteria for site selection.²⁶⁵ To begin with, I needed to find sites that were relevant to my thesis, that is, I needed sites where my research questions could be generally addressed. This limited me to independent black church institutions that were located near urban areas that have worked in observable ways to better their local communities over time. This led to my second criterion, observable phenomena. I needed sites where the phenomena I was interested in would appear in abundance, to the extent that it would generate rich information. Therefore, it was helpful to find sites that had multiple approaches to the serve their communities, thus providing ample research opportunities. The next criterion was generalizability. While it is difficult to generalize from single cases, I needed to find sites that were representative of their respective models of BCCE to the extent that they would produce results that could generally be found at most other sites of the respective models. Furthermore, I needed sites that would produce believable descriptions. That is to say, sites where the leaders and participants were open to being researched to the extent that I could produce believable results. In particular, this would require that they were willing to be researched through

²⁶⁵ Considerations for site selection in qualitative research are further explicated in the following works: John W. Cresswell. *Research Design: Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications, 2012. John Lofland, et.al. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, CA: Thompson/Wadsworth, 2006. Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004. Matthew B. Miles. *Qualitative Data Analysis : An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications, 2013.

interviews and observations over an extended period of time. The next criterion was research feasibility. I needed sites that were feasible for long-term research. Therefore, I resolved to select sites to which repeated travel would be practical over a two-year period to conduct interviews and observations. The final criterion was to find sites where the leadership would agree to the ethical guidelines for my research. I needed to find sites that would corroborate with the ethical guidelines of the thesis agreed upon by the University Ethics Committee and myself. I shall now discuss how the three sites that I selected fit these criteria.

Relevance to the Thesis

Again, the aim of this project is to uncover the theological motivations for community engagement by black church organizations in the twenty-first century. Each of the sites selected for this thesis have, and from their founding have had, predominantly black staffs and memberships. Each site, through their various activities and services actively engages and serves the underprivileged in their communities in demonstrable and observable ways. Therefore, my research questions may be generally addressed at these sites.

Observable Phenomena

Each of the sites selected were chosen because they had the potential to generate rich data to provide thick description. The leaders at each of the sites willingly collaborated with interviews and granted me access to their staff, volunteers and membership for further interviews. Additionally, each of these sites had websites, and numerous local newspaper articles, pamphlets, booklets, and souvenir programs for textual analysis that were made readily

available to me. Even further, each of the sites offered numerous programs, services, hold regular meetings, and public events, all of which I was welcomed to attend over a two year period.²⁶⁶

Generalizability

The CCC fits the general mold of most other black church grass-roots movement groups, in that, it consists of an ecumenical group of male and female clergy who engage their civic leaders and the local community through direct social action to address issues of urban decay, substance abuse and street violence.²⁶⁷ Therefore the implications of the theological motivations for BCCE to be drawn there might well be representative of the grass-roots model.

The BLDC is quite comparable to many other black church sponsored CDCs. This is demonstrated in Michael Owens research of several black church associated CDCs operating in New York City. Observing the variances of partnership arrangements and services to the community among CDCs, Owens notes that what community development corporations hold in common is that they are each (1) sponsored by black churches as instruments of outreach to positively affect their local communities; (2) aiming to address issues in urban social crises; (3) dependent on grants from the federal, state, and local government, and philanthropic organizations. These core elements are, likewise demonstrated by the BLDC.²⁶⁸ Therefore, the

²⁶⁶ Data collection is detailed in section 4.4.

²⁶⁷ These elements are generalizable across black church grassroots groups as demonstrated by Mary Sawyer's research in, *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice*. In this work, Sawyer profiles dozens of black church grass-roots organizations, based in local American urban centers, and identifies the following common elements among them: (1) They are each based in urban areas, where they address issues of crime, poverty and drug abuse among other varying social justice issues. (2) They are ecumenically arranged so that members of the clergy come together from across denominations. (3) They engage local officials to address political issues on behalf of the marginalized. (4) They are each religiously motivated to achieve social justice within their communities. (5) They are gender-inclusive, in that, men and women work together as equals on their varying initiatives. Mary Sawyer. *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity press International), pp. 105-111.

²⁶⁸ Michael Owens. "Doing Something in Jesus' Name: Black Churches and Community Development Corporations." *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post Civil Rights America*. R. Drew Smith, ed. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.

implications of the theological motivations for BCCE to be drawn there could be representative of the CDC model.

First Cathedral is in the minority of megachurches, in that; it is based in the northeastern region of the United States. However, it is very similar to most other megachurch models in the following ways. The congregation exceeds 2000 worshippers on a weekly basis. It is based in suburban Bloomfield on the outskirts of Hartford, Connecticut. True to its founding in the Baptist denomination, it proclaims an evangelical theology. Lastly, its rapid growth occurred, and has been maintained under the charismatic leadership of Archbishop Leroy Bailey. Therefore, the implications of the theological motivations for BCCE to be drawn there can be representative of the megachurch initiatives model.²⁶⁹

Validity and Reliability

A primary concern with conducting grounded theory research, and for any qualitative research paradigm, is that the researcher has considerable agency in the data collection and analysis.²⁷⁰ Therefore, I needed to collect sites where I could conduct valid and reliable research. At each site I was able to employ the following strategies for validity and reliability.²⁷¹ First, I

²⁶⁹ In his research through the *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, Scott Thumma has identified the following common elements among 1600 megachurches in the United States. (1) They sustain a weekly attendance of 2000 persons or more in their weekly worship services. (2) They maintain a conservative and evangelical theology. (3) Over 70 percent of megachurches are located in the southeastern region of the United States. (4) They are located in the Suburban areas of very large cities. (5) They experience rapid growth under the tenure of a charismatic pastor. (6) The senior minister has an authoritative style of preaching and administration. (7) Megachurches host a multitude of social, recreational, and aid ministries. With the exception of its location in the northeastern region of the United States, The First Cathedral has all of the other core criteria discovered in Thumma's research of 1600 American megachurches. Scott Thumma. "Megachurch Definition." Hartford Institute for Religion Research.. <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html> Accessed June 20, 2014.

²⁷⁰ Kathy Charmaz. "Grounded Theory in Historical Perspective: An Epistemological Account", A. Bryant, K. Charmaz, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), pp. 31-57.

²⁷¹ These strategies are recommended in James McMillan, Sally Schumacher. *Research in Education 6ed*. New York: Pearson, 2006.

employed prolonged and persistent fieldwork. I collected data at each of the local sites over a two-year period. This strategy allowed interim data analysis and corroboration, thus ensuring match-up between findings and participants' reality. Another strategy that I employed was multi-method data collection. I collected data through interviews, ethnographic observations, and textual analysis. In this way, the theories generated were corroborated across the data. Also, I employed participant language verbatim accounts as I mechanically recorded data through voice recording of interviews and collected videotapes of worship services to ensure literal accounts of the participants' words. Additionally, I employed a participant review strategy, in that; all interviews were reviewed by the interviewees for accuracy of representation. Finally, I shared data collected through ethnographic observations and textual analysis with the leaders of each site to ensure that their words and actions were interpreted accurately and truthfully.²⁷² I have employed all of the above strategies to support the validity of the data collected.

Believable Descriptions

Each of the sites selected for this thesis should produce believable descriptions, as they have opened themselves to be examined through a variety of corroborating methods. I was permitted to interview several persons who serve across the roles of involvement within each institution. In addition to public events, I was allowed to access meetings and worship services at each institution. Furthermore, in addition to the data to be found on their websites and in local newspaper articles, leaders and workers at each institution handed over other written materials

²⁷² This activity is referred to as "Theoretical Sampling" in Grounded Theory. In the process of refining categories of emerging ideas from the data into theoretical constructs, it was very possible to find conceptual gaps in the data. In this event, it was necessary to conduct theoretical sampling, that is, I returned to the field to collect data to fill in those gaps. The purpose of sampling is not to increase the size of the original sample, but to refine ideas, so as to make them more definitive and insightful. Kathy Charmaz. "Grounded Theory Objectivist and Constructivist", Norman Denzin, Yvonne Lincoln, eds. *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000) p. 519.

including booklets, pamphlets, and flyers for analysis. This, combined with the fact that I have had access to this data over a two-year period will support the believability of the descriptions of data collected.

Ethics

Each of the sites selected fully consented to being researched following the ethical guidelines agreed upon by the University Ethics Committee. As such, all interviews have been transcribed and resubmitted to the interviewees for approval. I attended private events, such as meetings and worship services to make ethnographic observations with the permission of each organizations' leaders. At public events, I simply made the leaders aware that I was present to collect data. Lastly, all written materials collected for data were drawn, from each institution's public website, were given to me from the leaders of the local sites, and gathered through local periodicals.

Feasibility

I knew that each of the sites selected were feasible for long-term research. Because this thesis required in-depth research over an extended period of time, it was important to choose models that I could easily access from my home base, New Haven, Connecticut. Both, the Christian Community Commission, and the Beulah Land Development Corporation are based in New Haven, Connecticut. The First Cathedral Church is based in Bloomfield, Connecticut, which was only a 45 minute drive away. With their close proximity, I was able to travel to these venues repeatedly to gather data, thus making my data as rich as possible for generating theory.

Ultimately, it was the criteria of producing believable results and feasibility, access in particular, that determined the sites chosen. A primary factor in eliminating other potential local

sites that might have exemplified the predominant models of BCCE was the unwillingness of the leaders at those sites to grant me unlimited access to research their work.²⁷³ The leaders at each of the sites selected agreed to give me free access to collect data for my research until the conclusion of the thesis. With such access I was confident I would be able to collect rich data and produce believable and generalizable results from the sites selected. Now that I have discussed the site selection process, in the next section, I will discuss how I have concluded constructivist grounded theory would be the most appropriate research design for this study.

4.3 Research Design

Qualitative Methodological Approaches

A number of qualitative research designs could have potentially served as the investigative framework for this thesis. Potentially fitting qualitative research approaches that were considered, in addition to grounded theory, included narrative research, phenomenological research, and ethnography. I gave serious consideration to each of these research approaches to address my research questions. I shall now briefly discuss each one and share why I chose to forgo them. I will then give a brief overview of grounded theory, and discuss why it was chosen this approach for my research.

Narrative Research Approach

With the narrative research approach, the researcher studies the lives of individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology. The end result is that the narrative combines views from the participant's

²⁷³ For example, at one potential site the leader of the organization would only allow me to interview him and no one else. At another site, the leader of the organization did not feel comfortable with me attending their meetings.

life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative.²⁷⁴ The procedures for implementing the Narrative approach for research consist of focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering (or using life course stages) the meaning of those experiences.²⁷⁵

The major appeal of this approach to address the research questions in this thesis was that it would lend itself to a deep exploration of the lived experiences of BCCE agents. The general scope of narrative research, however, is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals. Therefore, the scope of this research design would not have been broad enough to examine organizations and institutions at large, as would be required for this study.

The Phenomenological Approach

With the phenomenological approach, the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. The procedure involves studying subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning.²⁷⁶ This approach appears to be a useful way to understand common experiences of several BCCE agents. Three major problems with employing the phenomenological approach for this thesis, however, became apparent. First, it would be impossible to name the phenomena to be explored. While all of the agents at each of the institutions researched engage local urban communities, they do so in multiple expressions, to

²⁷⁴ Jean Clandinin, Michael Connelly. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000.

²⁷⁵ John Cresswell. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), p. 54.

²⁷⁶ Clark Moustakas. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.

include; donating food and clothes, providing shelter, organizing rallies and meeting with elected officials to address street crime and gang violence, utilizing grants from government agencies to create opportunities for homeownership, offering classes on credit repair, hosting employment fairs, health fairs, and more. As such, this thesis required a research designed where a diversity of action and interaction could be examined. A second problem with the phenomenological approach for this thesis is that this approach assumes an objective reality across individual experiences. Uncovering theological motivations of BCCE agents for their work necessitates that they have agency to construct their own reality. Therefore, it is important to remain open to the possibility of multiple realities for their theological motivation. Finally, the purpose of the phenomenological approach is to reduce individual common experience with a phenomenon to a description of its universal essence.²⁷⁷ In my research, I am not seeking philosophical understanding for 21st century BCCE; rather, I am attempting to uncover theological motivation for it and to understand the extent to which it is the same theological motivation that promulgated community engagement in the historic black churches. A phenomenological approach to data collection would not serve these purposes.

Ethnography

Ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of a culture-sharing group. With ethnography, the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group.²⁷⁸ As a process, ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most

²⁷⁷ Creswell, p.58.

²⁷⁸ Creswell, p. 68.

often through participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people, and observes and interviews the group participants.²⁷⁹

Ethnography is a most useful research design for description and exploration of a subject especially when the literature on the subjects researched is deficient.²⁸⁰ I did not choose ethnography as a research design however, because with this approach, the ethnographer has the task of describing and interpreting the actions and interactions of the research subjects, thereby exercising tremendous agency and influence over the research produced. However, the goal of this thesis was to uncover and evaluate the theological motivations of BCCE agents, requiring a research paradigm where BCCE agents have agency to give their own descriptions and meanings of their service to their respective communities. It is important to note, that while ethnography shall not serve as the overall research design for this thesis, it shall be employed as one of the methods of data collection, as will be explicated in section 4.3.²⁸¹ Next, I shall discuss grounded theory, and the constructivist approach.

Grounded Theory and the Constructivist Approach

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss formally introduced grounded theory in 1967 in their work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.²⁸² Grounded theory methodology advocates creating new theory consisting of interrelated concepts rather than traditional testing of existing theories.

²⁷⁹ Ibidem.

²⁸⁰ Ibidem.

²⁸¹ The application of ethnography as a method of data collection in constructivist grounded theory shifts rigid data collection and analysis from the traditional ethnographic approach toward theoretical development by raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation, which may be refined by returning to the field, thereby giving the research subjects agency in the theories to be generated. Charmaz, 2006. p. 22.

²⁸² After the publication of their work, *Awareness of Dying* (1965), where Barney and Strauss conducted research to examine the social interactions of those who were aware that they were terminally ill, they subsequently published the strategies they employed in their research in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), to serve as a manual for how the qualitative researcher might systematically generate theory from data.

It consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.²⁸³ Many scholars have expanded and appropriated Glaser and Strauss’s work in grounded theory, making it a well-documented and standardized approach to qualitative research.²⁸⁴

I have opted to employ a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, in particular, for reasons I shall now explain. To begin with, the constructivist approach to grounded theory does not vary greatly from traditional grounded theory as it pertains to the mechanical application of data collection and analysis. Therefore, moving forward in this chapter, the methods of data collection and analysis may be referred to as coming from either the “grounded theory approach,” or the “constructivist grounded theory approach,” interchangeably.

The constructivist approach to grounded theory, however, emphasizes the research participants’ experience with how they construct their view of reality. Knowledge, and hence the grounded theory, are constructed by both researcher and research participant, and aim at interpreting the empirical evidence within the research context. Kathy Charmaz has been a leading proponent of constructivist grounded theory.²⁸⁵ She argues that traditional approaches to

²⁸³ Kathy Charmaz. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. (London: Thousand Oaks: 2006), p. 5.

²⁸⁴ Grounded theory is a pervasive research paradigm that is used across many disciplines and fields of research inquiry. In the work, *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009 by Janice M. Morse, Phyllis N. Stern, Juliet Corbin, et al., scholars trace two generations in the development of Ground Theory, beginning with the early works of Barney and Glaser to postmodern and constructivist adaptations to the methodology.

²⁸⁵ As demonstrated by publications, not limited to: Kathy Charmaz. “Grounded Theory Objectivist and Constructivist Methods”, Normans Denzin, Yvonne Lincoln, eds. *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2000), pp. 509-531. Kathy Charmaz. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2006. Kathy Charmaz and Anthony Bryant eds. *SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. London: SAGE, 2007. Even further, her work in grounded theory has been critically reviewed by Philip Bumard. *Nurse Researcher*, Vol. 13 Issue 4, (2006) p. 84. Barney Glaser. *Historical Social Research*, Supplement 19, Issue 32, (2007) p. 93. Antony Barney. *Historical Social Research*, Supplement 19, Issue 32, (2007), p. 106. Valeda Dent, Geoff Goodman. *Oral Tradition*; , Vol. 28 Issue 1, (March 2013), p. 55. Peter Ashworth. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*. Vol. 11 Issue 2, (2011), p. 1.

grounded theory assume an objective external reality and hence take a positivist and objectivist stance.²⁸⁶ She, on the contrary, advocates a constructivist approach to grounded theory that assumes multiple social realities. Charmaz does not support the view that theories are discovered but rather that the studied world needs to be portrayed in an interpretive way because interviewee and researcher embark together on the process of constructing reality.²⁸⁷ It is for this primary reason that I have chosen the constructivist grounded theory approach.

To assume an objective reality in the theological motivations of agents of the black churches engaging their communities in the twenty first century, would be to assume that every agent involved in BCCE has the same understanding of their connection to the Holy, their moral obligations to others as a result of that connection, and what it means to be a black in America, as well as, serving the community through a black church institution. Even further, the assumption of an objective reality in this context oversimplifies the complexity of black church institutions, the needs of their surrounding communities, and the effects of social political and economic structures on these communities.

A constructivist approach, according to Charmaz, “necessitates a relationship with respondents in which they can cast their stories in their terms.”²⁸⁸ As such, the theories constructed in this thesis will be generated from the voices of the agents of BCCE, so as to ascertain their particular, theological motivations for their work. Therefore, I employed the

²⁸⁶ For example, in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), Glaser and Strauss recommend that the researcher should begin data collection with a “blank mind”, without reviewing the existing literature. As such, theory is constructed as it is discovered in the data. Their assumption is that every person will see the same thing in the data and discover the same theories. Charmaz offers that this perspective is characteristic of an objectivist paradigm. Charmaz, 2000, pp. 509-531.

²⁸⁷ Charmaz, 2006, p. 9.

²⁸⁸ Charmaz, 2000, p. 525.

constructivist approach to grounded theory, as I collected data from the local BCCE organizations, in my search to ascertain the theological motivations of twenty-first century BCCE. Now that I have explicated how research sites were selected, and have identified a design under which to conduct my research, I shall now discuss data collection.

4.4 Data Collection

In this section, I discuss the methods employed for data collection. Data was collected from each of the three research sites over a two-year period.²⁸⁹ At the Christian Community Commission I conducted 27 interviews with 8 subjects; observed 32 events; and reviewed 42 documents for textual analysis. At the Beulah Land Development Corporation, I conducted 22 interviews with 6 subjects; observed 44 events; and reviewed 61 documents for textual analysis. At the First Cathedral, I conducted 26 interviews with 6 subjects; observed 35 events; and reviewed 50 documents for textual analysis. For the remainder of this section, I shall discuss data collection through interviews where I employed in-depth probing to explore meaning. Then I shall discuss data collected through textual analysis, with a brief discussion as to why I chose to forgo elicited texts for extant texts. Lastly, I shall discuss data collection through ethnographic observation, at worship services, meetings and community rallies.

Interview Process

Certainly, it was essential to interview agents of BCCE in each local model that was researched. Direct testimonies concerning their work and mission provided rich data from which to generate theory concerning the twenty-first century mission of BCCE. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews served as one of the methods of data collection in this study. Before each

²⁸⁹ Itemized lists of the data collected are disclosed appendices B, C and D.

interview, the interviewee was given a consent form, on which they had the option of disclosing their names or remaining anonymous.²⁹⁰ All data gathered from the respondents was collected with explicit permission and voluntary participation of the respondents. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with each respondent and was audio-recorded with their written permission. Each respondent was interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted over a two-year period. Each respondent signed a consent form before the interview started. Each respondent was asked a predetermined set of questions according to their role in the organization, as approved by the University ethics committee.²⁹¹ The interview questions arose from my observations of the three contexts, guided by my research, and shaped by what I was seeing in the field.

A particular challenge to note is that while grounded theory interviews are open-ended and flexible, institutional review boards and human subjects committees increasingly demand that researchers submit detailed descriptions of their research plans and complete instruments for review.²⁹² In developing interview questions, Charmaz suggests that the researcher choose questions carefully with the intention of fostering the participant's reflections. She states, "Interviewers use in-depth interviewing to explore not to interrogate."²⁹³ The interview questions created for this thesis and approved by the ethics committee of the University of Exeter, were open-ended enough to elicit rich reflection from the respondents, without going beyond the approved interview script. On occasion, respondents were encouraged to give more in-depth answers to derive more meaning from their responses. For example, I often had to probe interviewees to ascertain their meaning of "blackness." While for many interviewees blackness

²⁹⁰ Anonymous respondents are identified by their role, i.e. parishioner, volunteer. A list of interviews by date may be found in appendices B, C and D.

²⁹¹ Interview questions may be found in appendix A

²⁹² Charmaz, 2006, p. 30.

²⁹³ Charmaz, 2006, p. 29.

referred to the common history and cultural heritage of people of African descent in America, for others it referred to worship style or skin color. This kind of probing was necessary throughout the interview process for clarity for when I returned to the data for analysis. It was absolutely necessary to be clear about the interviewees' meaning and intentions to illuminate, and to eliminate any assumptions of, or speculations about their thoughts and ideas.

Textual Analysis

Each of the local sites of BCCE examined provided several pieces of written material to review. I received these materials directly from officials of the local BCCE sites that were examined. No elicited texts were gathered during data collection for this study, only extant texts.²⁹⁴ Elicited texts involve research participants in producing written data in response to a researcher's formalized questions, employing such tools as surveys or questionnaires. Data collected from elicited texts very often resemble interview data, but lack the depth brought about by interview probing. Therefore, I preferred to ask questions through interview rather than elicited texts in this study to create more fertile ground from which to generate theory.

Extant texts consist of documents about the subject(s) researched, which the researcher had no hand in shaping. They provide a rich source of data, as they are relatively available, and accessible. Charmaz observes that people construct texts for specific purposes and they do so within social, historical, cultural, economic and situational contexts. Analysis of extant texts through a grounded theory approach may open up these contexts and generate the construction of theory.²⁹⁵ Extant texts include public records, government reports, organizational documents, mass media, literature, autobiographies, personal correspondence, Internet discussions, and

²⁹⁴ Extant texts consist of varied documents that the researcher had no hand in shaping, such as newspaper articles and pamphlets. Charmaz, 2006, p. 35.

²⁹⁵ Charmaz, 2006, p. 35.

earlier qualitative materials from data banks.²⁹⁶ Each of the local sites of BCCE provided an abundance of extant texts to include, books authored by organizational leaders, program booklets, manuals, newspaper articles and flyers. Moreover, through websites, blogs, and online newspaper archives, the Internet has made extant texts more accessible than ever. This is particularly true when studying established religious institutions, as religion has been an integral part of the Internet since the popular inception of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s.²⁹⁷ Each institution researched maintains a website, and over the years, their work in the community has been highlighted in local and state periodicals.

Ethnography

Ethnography may be employed as a method of data collection within grounded theory using the following steps: (1) Seek data (2) Describe observed events (3) Answer fundamental questions about what is happening, (4) Develop theoretical categories to understand it. (5) Return to the field to gather further data and to refine the emerging theoretical framework.²⁹⁸ This is precisely what I did over a two-year period as I observed several meetings, worship services, and community rallies at the three BCCE sites. Because I chose to forgo ethnography as the overall research design for this study, it is necessary that I further explicate how ethnography was employed as a method of data collection from a constructivist grounded theory approach.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁹⁷ Douglas E. Cowan, "The Internet," Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), p. 459. Further scholarship on the use of the internet in the research of religion includes: B. Brasher. *Give Me That Online Religion*. San Francisco, CA; Josey Bass, 2001. H. Campbell. *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005. J.K. Hadden, Cowan D.E. eds. *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises*. London: JAI Press/Elsevier Science, 2000. M.A. Smith, P. Kollock. eds, *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge, 1999. A.N. Markham, N. Baym eds. *Internet Inquiry: Conversations About Method*. London: Sage, 2009.

²⁹⁸ Charmaz, 2006, p. 20.

One important way in which the constructivist grounded theory approach to ethnography differs from traditional ethnography is that the researcher is cautioned to focus more on social processes than the setting itself. As such, grounded theory ethnographers study what is happening in the setting and make a conceptual rendering of these actions from the very beginning of their field work.²⁹⁹ Therefore, for example, in worship services I focused primarily on the liturgy and the participation of the clergy and congregation during corporate worship, with the sanctuary merely serving as the backdrop for the corporate worship process. At street rallies, I paid attention to the speeches of the presenters, the formation of the marchers, their signs, songs and prayers as they marched, and the intentionality of their marching route. The community through which they marched, although important and not neglected in data collection was a secondary focus behind the phenomenon of the street rally.

Another aspect of the constructivist grounded theory approach to ethnography is that the ethnographer must increase their involvement in their research inquiry, in that, despite pressures they might face to be full participants in their research settings, the ethnographer must select the scenes they observe and direct their gaze within them.³⁰⁰ In this sense, grounded theory dispels the positivist notion of passive observers who merely absorb their surrounding scenes.³⁰¹ Because all three of the sites researched have daily operations, I had to be intentional about which activities would be observed. Therefore, at each site I observed three categories of phenomenon. These included meetings or planning sessions where leaders and volunteers came

²⁹⁹ Charmaz points out that a potential problem with most ethnographic studies is seeing, “data everywhere and nowhere, gathering everything and nothing.” The constructivist grounded theory approach to ethnography differs from traditional ethnographic approaches in that it gives priority to the studied phenomenon or process rather than to a description of a setting. Charmaz offers that concentrating on a basic social process may help the researcher to gain a more complete picture of the whole setting than the former approaches common in earlier ethnographic work. Charmaz, 2006, p. 22.

³⁰⁰ Ibidem.

³⁰¹ Ibidem.

together to set goals and objectives for their community activities. Also included were activities, where the organizations directly engaged the communities, for example, the CCC had an occasion where they gave out donated bikes to underprivileged children, and the BLDC held a reentry session for citizens returning to the community after having been incarcerated. Lastly, I attended worship services and prayer meetings at each site, to ascertain the theology that supported their community initiatives. At each site, I made several trips over a period of two years to observe each of these types of phenomena.

Furthermore, ethnography from a constructivist grounded theory approach allowed me to return to the field to raise questions about the observed phenomena, thus giving agency to the research subjects to define their processes. For example, I attended a planning session by the CCC to conduct a prayer rally against gun violence, to be held on the Green in downtown New Haven. At this session, there was a heated debate concerning whether the clergy would extend an altar call for those in attendance at the rally to receive Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Traditional ethnographic approaches would have called for me to record the discussion as it was, but following the constructivist grounded theory approach, I subsequently probed the various factions to discuss their soteriology and its relationship to community engagement. In this way, constructivist grounded theory methods move ethnographic research away from the rigid and artificial separations in data collection and analysis of former ethnographic approaches toward theoretical development by raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation, which may be refined as one returns to the field. Grounded theory methods

preserve an open-ended approach to studying the empirical world yet add rigor to ethnographic research by building systematic checks into both data collection and analysis.³⁰²

Finally, the fact that I continued to observe these several events over a two-year period yielded data that was both full and comprehensible. This is another mark of the constructivist grounded theory approach, which entails going back to data and forward into analysis. I returned to the field to gather further data and to refine the emerging theoretical framework. This logic helped me to surmount several potential ethnographic problems including: (1) accusations of uncritically adopting research participants' views; (2) lengthy unfocused forays in to the field setting; (3) superficial, random data collection; (4) reliance on stock disciplinary categories.³⁰³ As I have now discussed data collection I shall now proceed to data analysis.

4.5 Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory methodology provides guidelines for data analysis consisting of coding and memo writing, culminating in the generation of theory. Each of these steps toward generating theory shall be discussed.

All of the interviews were transcribed, all ethnographic observations were written up, all extant texts were gathered, and all of the data was organized by the institution and date collected. With all of the data gathered, I analyzed it to identify codes to capture what is in the data in order to learn how people make sense of their experiences and act on them.³⁰⁴ Coding is the first step of data analysis, as it helps to move away from particular statements to more abstract interpretations of the interview data. Constructivist grounded theory methodology

³⁰² Ibidem.

³⁰³ Ibid., pp. 23-25.

³⁰⁴ See section 4.4 for explication of data collection methods.

advocates using several coding techniques to examine an interviewee's accounts at different levels. I chose to begin data analysis with line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding, provided a good starting point to identify initial phenomena and produce a list of themes of importance to the research subjects. In this process, I attached conceptual labels to almost every line in the texts, capturing what was said. Codes were assigned to participants' words and statements to develop concepts, constituting the start of the analytic process.³⁰⁵

A further step in coding may involve focused coding or selective coding. Focused codes are applied to several lines or paragraphs in a transcript and require the researcher to choose the most telling codes to represent the interviewee's voice.³⁰⁶ I preferred the line-by-line approach to focused coding. Because this thesis is of an exploratory nature, every piece of data counted, and as such, every line was treated.

I, then, revisited my original thoughts recorded during data collection represented through memos, and reflected upon them for the overall analysis. Memo-writing is encouraged throughout data analysis in grounded theory, as they keep the researcher involved in the analysis and also helps the researcher to increase the level of abstraction in one's ideas.³⁰⁷ I continuously wrote memos as ideas were sparked during data collection at each of the three sites. These memos enabled reflection on the interviews, observations and given codes to enter into a dialogue about the collected data. It was helpful to return to initial perceptions about the research contexts for clarity, and to spark ideas as I began to code the data.

³⁰⁵ Anselm L. Strauss, Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* 2nd edition. (Newbury, CA: Sage, 1998), p. 77.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem.

³⁰⁷ Memos are a set of notes that support the researcher by providing a record of thoughts and ideas. Charmaz offers, "Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process." Charmaz. 2006, p. 72.

After coding the data, I identified many issues that were of importance to the respondents. The codes or concepts that shared the same or similar characteristics were pulled together into more abstract categories, which were interlinked for the basis of a theory. These theories have been outlined in the subsequent chapters of this study and shall be considered in light of the of Black Theology criteria for advancing the liberation mission through BCCE outlined in chapter 3 to assess the extent to which BCCE in the twenty-first century continues to advance a liberating mission.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified the local sites of BCCE that served as the research settings for data collection and discussed how they were selected. I have identified the constructivist grounded theory as the research paradigm under which the data has been collected and analyzed. I have discussed methods of data collection, to include interviews, textual analysis, ethnography. Lastly I have discussed how the data was analyzed through the grounded theory approach. In the next chapter, I shall share the theories that were generated as I researched the BCCE sites. I shall begin with the Christian Community Commission of New Haven Connecticut. Theories generated from the Beulah Land Development Corporation and The First Cathedral shall follow subsequently.

Chapter 5: Christian Community Commission of New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A.: A Grass Roots Model of Black Church Community Engagement

5.1 Introduction

“And we should never be told that we are too black or that we are too black-conscious, because to tell us that we are too black conscious you are taking away our history, our suffering, our pain that birthed the church. The black church was birthed out of suffering and pain and a desire to hold on to God through faith.” - The Reverend Donald Morris-Executive Director of the Christian Community Commission

The Christian Community Commission, Inc. (CCC) is a non-profit community religious organization with headquarters at 681 Dixwell Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A. This predominantly Christian evangelical ecumenical group, led by a local voluntary aggregation of clergy, engages the local community through grass-roots tactics to advocate for the improvement of social conditions of the marginalized as a theological imperative. Before explicating the theories uncovered as to what motivates their service, a brief discussion of the organization’s history, structure, site, functions of community engagement, and funding of initiatives, is in order.

History

The CCC was conceived by a small group of local African American ministers who gathered weekly to discuss ways to get local church congregations to address the problem of gang violence. The organization was officially incorporated in the State of Connecticut in June 1996, with an overall mission of finding ways to develop and encourage collective participation by churches to demonstrate a proactive involvement within the neighborhoods of inner city New Haven. The organization began with four congregations that took on the immediate task of trying

to increase a spiritual awakening by organizing neighborhood prayer walks and local community events.³⁰⁸

From its conception as an informal think-tank of a small group of clergy who gathered to meet to discuss distressing community issues, the CCC has grown to include a more sophisticated Board of Directors, of which Reverend Donald Morris, who has been with the organization from the beginning, is the Executive Director. Since its founding CCC, local congregations from various denominations, clergy and community leaders from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as, the city government and government officials have partnered with the organization in its many initiatives. These have included street rallies to protest acts of injustice on the municipal level, prayer walks and street corner services to counter street crime and gang violence, and outdoor festivals where national recording artists have performed for the community free of charge.

In its most recent development, the CCC has begun to carry out an initiative called “Promise Land.” Through this initiative the CCC has adopted the most troubled neighborhood in the City of New Haven, Newhallville, with the intention of addressing crime and gang activity through an established presence of care and concern.³⁰⁹ This adoption includes locating the central office of the CCC in this neighborhood to establish a consistent presence and regular outreach through prayer walks. From this spacious storefront location Promise Land offers free resources including family counseling, social agency referrals, property beautification, youth activities, supplemental food, medical treatment, and prayer.³¹⁰

Structure

³⁰⁸ The four Congregations were New Growth Church of God in Christ, Pitts Chapel Free Will Baptist Church, English Chapel Free Will Baptist Church and Wayfaring Ministries. (Personal Communication, July 10, 2014)

³⁰⁹ The Promise Land Initiative is explicated in section 5.3.

³¹⁰ The central offices of the CCC is a leased property owned by the Pitts Chapel Free Will Baptist Church, whose Senior Pastor of 25 years, Bishop Elijah Davis, has been an occasional participant in CCC outreach initiatives.

The operations of the CCC are overseen by a Board of Directors composed of local ministers and lay persons who offer their services voluntarily, and meet monthly to implement, execute and discuss the funding of the initiatives of the CCC. Reverend Donald Morris, Executive Director of the Board of Directors oversees all of the CCC's initiatives and serves as the organization's official spokesperson to the media and the community. The President of the Board of Directors is Apostle Eugene Brunson. He is the pastor of the Wayfaring Ministries Church in nearby Hamden, Connecticut, and has been with the CCC since it's founding.³¹¹ The Vice President, Bishop Oscar Clark also serves as Senior Pastor of the Gospel Temple Church of God in Christ in the Newhallville section of New Haven. Dee Dee Morris, the wife of the Reverend Donald Morris, serves as the Recording Secretary. Pat Meador is the Treasurer of the CCC's Board of Directors, working closely with E. Marie Bell, who has volunteered for sixteen years as the CCC's grant writer. The Promise Land Initiative Board of Volunteers includes: Erick Wells, Ronnie Brooks, Timothy King, and Wayne Phelps, with Reverend Donald Morris and Apostle Eugene Brunson serving as the clergy coordinators. Lastly, a very important subgroup of the CCC is "The Brotherhood," a group of male volunteers who serve as positive black male role models to the community through their initiatives for young men.³¹²

Over the years, the CCC has had participation from various community leaders including, former Mayor John DeStefano; current Mayor Toni Harp; Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro; Kermit Carolina, Principal of Hillhouse High School; and Attorney Michael Jefferson, as well as support from business owners and local pastors. The CCC has also been supported by a robust

³¹¹ Hamden, Connecticut adjoins New Haven on its southern side at the Newhallville neighborhood. As such, this portion of the suburban town faces many of the same issues as the inner city.

³¹² The Brotherhood is the subject of a theory for the CCC's motivation for community engagement work, which is explicated in section 5.4.

number of volunteers from local churches and community who have participated in the organization's programs of service to the community.

Site Description

The CCC occupies half of a moderately sized store front, rented from the Pitts Chapel Free Will Baptist Church of New Haven. The space has offices for Reverend Morris, and his wife who serves as secretary. On the first floor there is about 2000 square feet of meeting space and an additional 800 square feet of meeting space in a furnished basement. The meeting spaces are used for CCC meetings, clergy breakfasts and the mentoring program. The building is centrally located in the predominantly black Newhallville neighborhood and has off street parking.

Mission

According to Reverend Morris, in the early 1990s , many of the churches and clergy persons had adopted the politically conservative position that when young people were killed while participating in a street crime, or illicit gang activity they, and their families, deserved the blame for their wrong doing. This thinking neglected of the impact of social structural issues on marginalized youth in the American urban crisis. Of this Morris said,

People would say 'oh, those were just bad boys,' And I think a lot of the churches had adopted that thinking that the young men who were killed were just bad boys and that is why they were in the places where they were. That's why something bad happened to you. I've heard many preachers say this much at the eulogies of young people who were gunned down in the street. Many of the churches and ministers were satisfied with knowing that the devil will get you if you do bad, and so I think parishioners accepted the fact that if you live a life outside of God's purposes, God's commands, this will be the wrath of God that will confront you. This was telling church-going, God-fearing

members who were losing their children to somehow mourn and cry, but if he's passed on, ask yourself, did you do a good job in your own home? Guilt was on a lot of church-going members because of how their children were the gang members on the street, on the down low, in the midnight hours. A lot of people, good people's children whose families were destroyed by violence and drugs, and the only address of this matter that came from the church was to blame the young people and their families that raised them, when really there were so many other factors involved. So there was a need for the Christian Community Commission to come alive at this point and this time. (Personal Communication, July 10, 2013)

In this way, the CCC was founded with the theological imperative to correct the oversimplified responses of local churches that had solely blamed the young people who died in gang violence, and their families for their death, justifying these deaths as God's answer to sin. As well, it was founded as to awaken the churches to identify, and be critical of elements of, the social structure that facilitate the evil that results in gang violence, such as, unequal access to legitimate opportunity structures, and broken family structures. With this theological imperative, the stated mission of the CCC for the last 18 years has been, "... to increase a greater spiritual awareness within the neighborhood, build unity amongst area churches, and to create alternative ways to draw young families to Christ."³¹³

Functions of Community Engagement

Prayer Walks

The most consistent function of the CCC has been to sponsor prayer walks. A prayer walk is a corporate march through a neighborhood, while a minister leads the crowd in prayer through a bullhorn. Prayer walks usually involve the singing of hymns and spirituals accompanied by hand clapping and rejoicing. The route of the prayer walks are pre-determined and usually culminate in a designated place where the crowd stops to listen to members of the clergy give a sermon, or perhaps some layperson who may give a testimony of their faith.

³¹³ "Christian Community Commission-About us", www.thepromiseland.info/ABout-Us---The---CCC--Inc-.html, Accessed on April 4, 2013.

Because most of the prayer walks are triggered by an untimely death due to street violence, very often the stopping point of a prayer walk will be at or very near a murder site. The purpose of the prayer walks is to witness to passersby the need to change their lives for the better through the power of faith in Christ. In that spirit, prayer walks usually conclude with an invitation to anyone in earshot to receive Jesus Christ as their savior. These events are usually led by Reverend Morris, Apostle Brunson, and a small group of clergy who are available to participate at the given time of the prayer walk. They typically draw a crowd of 50 to 200 persons. These crowds are primarily composed of the parishioners of participating ministers in addition to members of the community at-large.

Bike Rides

“The Brotherhood” usually carries out this function of the CCC. This voluntary group of men rides through crime-ridden sections of the City of New Haven, stopping along the way to interact with young people who may be in need of a positive male influence. They will ask them about their schooling and future aspirations. From these conversations young people have been given gifts of bicycles, groceries for their families, summer jobs, and have become mentees of the Brotherhood volunteers.

Mentoring Program

The Brotherhood also sponsors a mentoring program exclusively for young boys age 8-15. The rationale behind the gender exclusivity of this program is that many of the young boys of color in the City of New Haven are being raised in single-parent, female-headed households. As such the Brotherhood volunteers mentor them to provide them with a positive and consistent

male influence³¹⁴ In the mentoring program, the young boys are assisted with their school work, and participate in recreational activities with their mentors.

Advocacy

Another community outreach function of the CCC is to advocate for the underprivileged. When a member of the local community suffers a social injustice, very often they cannot afford an attorney to help resolve their issue. In many instances they will contact the leaders of the CCC who will meet with them to work out a plan to address their concerns. This may involve launching a march of CCC leaders and volunteers, meeting with the local police or elected officials, or getting in contact with the media to publicly address the issue.

Festivals

For many years the CCC held an annual festival of gospel music. This event was free to the public and attended by thousands with several positive outcomes. First it gave locals the opportunity to enjoy a concert with some of their favorite national recording artists who they may not have been able to afford to see at a for-profit concert. Second, many choirs and musical groups from local churches were invited to perform, thus giving them the opportunity to showcase their talents outside of their local congregations. Further, vendors were allowed to set up tables to sell their goods, to the benefit of local small business owners in the community. Ultimately, the gospel festivals served as a community reunion where people came together from across the city for peaceful purposes.

Funding

³¹⁴ Their rationale for gender exclusivity is further explicated in section 5.4

Although the CCC's operating budget has been enhanced through occasional unexpected philanthropic donations through the years, the organization draws consistent funding from four primary sources. First and foremost, the organization has partnered with local churches from its inception. Churches in partnership make monthly contributions to the CCC of one hundred dollars or more. Individuals, also, partner with the CCC, making monthly donations of various amounts.³¹⁵ Furthermore, over the years the CCC has procured grants from local, state, and federal government agencies and other non-profit organizations to support their initiatives. Lastly, since the year 2000, the CCC has held an annual ticketed fundraiser banquet, an event they call, "The Christian Leadership and Human Service Award Day." At this event, which consistently draws a building-capacity crowd, 12 local clergy members and community workers are recognized for their service, and thousands of dollars are raised to support CCC initiatives through this activity.

Theories

In my examination of the CCC, I have uncovered three profound theories that serve to explain what motivates their service to the community. First, through their efforts, the members of CCC commit themselves to "survival praxis." Surrounded by physical and social threats to their lives and human flourishing, from violent street crimes to socio-economic oppression, the CCC fights back with street rallies to condemn violence and promote peace; while advocating for the oppressed and economically-disadvantaged; and advancing initiatives to instill dignity and pride to those often overlooked by society.

³¹⁵ The number of partners and exact amounts were not disclosed.

Secondly, the CCC is committed to a “ministry of presence” as Christian vocation. In addition to prayer-walks, where CCC members see themselves as bringing Christ to people on the street, the organization has adopted and set up their base of operations in the Newhallville community, with the determination that the only way to ameliorate the neighborhood’s problem with street crime and gang violence is through occupation and regular and consistent engagement with residents.

Lastly, with the overwhelming absence of at-home-fathers and male leadership in the community, the CCC strongly believes that the best way to preserve the future of the community is to steer the remaining young men and young fathers in a positive direction. This belief inspires the initiatives of the CCC’s Brotherhood. These initiatives have a “reaching” component, where young men and fathers are engaged directly on the street, and a “teaching” component where they are given significant life-lessons through the mentoring program and through teaching sessions and workshops on fatherhood, conflict resolution and job finding skills. Each of these theories shall now be explicated, concluding with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the CCC as a grass-roots Black Church Community engagement model.

5.2 Theory (1) - Praxis of Survival

As indicated in the review of literature in chapter 2, and the review of liberation criteria for community engagement by black churches in the United States by scholars of Black Theology in Chapter 3, the black church has long had both the theological and sociological function of sustaining and affirming human dignity in black communities. During the era of slavery, black churches harbored fugitive slaves as they made their way north along the Underground Railroad. In the twentieth century, in response to lynching and inhumane treatment

of blacks casually dismissed by local governments, black churches decried the injustices of segregation and absence of equal protection under the law, launching the Civil Rights Movement. Black churches validated their congregants by affirming their talents and abilities and providing opportunities for leadership development, all the while offering a sustaining hope that God was just and that times would get better.

In these general ways, the black church has exercised a praxis of survival. The CCC takes up this mantle of survival praxis for the twenty-first century on the local level as it works to draw attention to and correct theological assumptions about street violence; standing before government officials and law enforcement to advocate for the oppressed, and through initiatives that promote the human flourishing of the marginalized. A primary motivation for community engagement done by the CCC is to continue the praxis of survival that has been a hallmark of the black church in the United States.

Addressing Street Violence

As previously mentioned, a primary motivation for the founding of the CCC was to correct the theological assumption that one became a victim of street violence as punishment for being in the criminal element. Along this line of thinking, those whose lives had been tragically cut short were often vilified in memoriam. A regular function, then, from the outset of the CCC's organized activity has been to hold street rallies in the wake of a person's death from street violence. When a person was murdered in the City of New Haven, the CCC would call together a collection of pastors, churchpersons, community leaders and city residents to a coordinated march through the streets of the area where the victim's life was taken.³¹⁶ It is not unusual for people in the community and passersby to join the CCC while they are in route. The march always climaxes on or near the murder site. Once there, those gathered commence to sing hymns and spirituals. People in the crowd are invited to share a testimony with regard to how the

³¹⁶ The times of these rallies are announced in local churches, flyers are distributed through the community, and anyone is welcome to attend.

victim's death has impacted the community and their personal lives. Frequently, members of the victim's family attend to offer eulogies and anecdotes, by way of humanizing the victim.

Rev. Morris, Apostle Brunson and other designated ministers will offer prayers and sermons calling for justice on behalf of the victim and making appeals to local officials to create legitimate opportunities for inner-city youths to prevent street crimes. Since their founding, the CCC has held over 100 rallies to address street violence in the New Haven area. These rallies have had the effect of drawing attention to social ills that lead to street crime, giving voice in a public forum to members of the community affected by the loss, and comforting families shocked by the sudden and tragic death of their loved one, while affirming the dignity of both the victim and the victim's family.

Very often, the circumstances surrounding a victim's murder has inspired CCC initiatives and advocacy goals. For example, in July of 2007, a 9-year old boy named Keyshawn Webb was watching children's programming with an 8 year old neighbor when a stray bullet entered his home killing him instantly. There were no witnesses of the shooter inside the home, and because no one in the neighborhood was able or willing to identify a shooter, the perpetrator was never apprehended. The phenomena of not reporting crime out of fear of reprisal from the perpetrator in American urban centers, termed "no snitching," has been a primary reason crimes have gone unpunished.³¹⁷

³¹⁷ Very often crime witnesses refuse to cooperate with law enforcement out of fear that law enforcement will not be able to protect them from reprisal from the perpetrator(s). The "no snitching" phenomena has been explicated in the following works: Kwasi Akwamu. *Stop Snitching: Does It Really End Crime in the Black Community?*. Detroit, MI: Urban Guerrilla Entertainment, 2010. Ethan Brown, *Snitch: Informants, Cooperators and the Corruption of Justice*. New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2007. C.E. Kubrin. "Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: Identity and the Code of the Street in Rap Music". *Journal of Society for the Study Social Problems*. 52, (2005), pp. 360-378. E.W. Morris. "Snitches End Up in Ditches and Other Cautionary Tales". *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*. 26(3), (2010), pp. 254-272. Alexandra Natapoff. *Snitching: Criminal Informants and the Erosion of American Justice*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009. Duck Waverly. *No Way Out: Precarious Living in the Shadow of Poverty and Drug Dealing*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

To combat these phenomena in the murder of Keyshawn Webb, Rev. Donald Morris and the CCC organized a rally of more than 200 people outside of Webb's home. At this rally Morris sermonized that the process of making city streets safe was going to be a monumental task, but not impossible, offering, "In the Bible the giant was huge but David said, 'I can take him.'" Morris further surmised that key to winning this monumental fight was to address the unofficial street policy of "no snitching." Morris offered, "Whenever someone gets shot, and you know who did it, Tell It!"³¹⁸ In response to the problem, the CCC launched a local campaign against the no snitching policy by passing out free T-shirts with the slogan "TELL IT!" wherever the CCC traveled to campaign against street violence. While there have been no measurements to determine how successful this campaign has been in curbing the no snitching phenomena, which is a systemic, this effort by the CCC delivered to the local community the moral imperative to report street crime for the greater good of the community.

Another example of an act of street violence that inspired CCC initiatives and advocacy goals occurred in March of 2011, when Mitchell Dubey, a 23-year-old white man, with no criminal record, was shot to death at point-blank range in his apartment by a burglar. Dubey was renting an apartment with college students at 29 Basset Street in the Newhallville section of New Haven. The CCC mourned the murder of Dubey and the state of violence in the community. On this occasion, Morris offered, "Most of our citizens are law abiding, want tranquility, want a

³¹⁸ Kral, Georgia. "Truman Street Message: Tell It!", *New Haven Independent*, July, 4,2007. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/truman_street_message_tell_it/. Accessed on July, 15, 2013

place for their kids to grow up, for elderly parents to walk without the fear of being shot down or mugged or robbed. And that's not asking a lot."³¹⁹

As a result of Dubey's tragic death, the CCC publicized concrete goals that they would take up with local and state officials to curb violence in the community. These included, creation of a violent offender registry; raising the mandatory minimum sentence from two to five years for anyone convicted of carrying firearms illegally; and creating an "Anti-Gang" injunction that would bar "high-risk offenders" from certain activities, such as loitering in certain areas and associating with others on the list.³²⁰

Although, many ministers in the New Haven area have never participated in the CCCs rallies and initiatives against violence, including some whose congregations are situated in the city's most troubled areas, the CCC has worked hard to involve every minister in the area in their plans. The CCC has encouraged all ministers to recognize the systemic problems that work to produce street violence and to pray for an end to street crimes. For example, in May of 2011, the CCC held, "A Community Day of Prayer," outside of a local elementary school where all area churches, ministers and parishioners, were invited to pray about the violence in the community. When many ministers and their parishioners failed to attend the public gathering, the CCC launched another initiative where they invited every minister and congregation in the city to pray for an end to street violence for five minutes every Sunday during their morning worship service in the month of October 2011. Of this Morris says, "Our thing was even if they would not or could not participate with the group, we wanted to instill the need for churches to

³¹⁹ Ramiah, Uma. "Newhallville Presses on Toward Promise Land", *New Haven Independent*, March 29, 2011. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/dubey_was_one_of_many_victim/. Accessed on July 15, 2013.

³²⁰ Ibidem.

focus on what's going on in the street. If they talk to God about it long enough, sooner or later God is going to require them to do something about it.” (Personal communication, July 24, 2013)

Advocacy for the Oppressed

A major mark of black oppression in America has been the lack of equal protection under the law and access to adequate legal representation. In the past, poor blacks have had access to very few lawyers in their community, even if they could afford one. As a result, they turned to their ministers for advocacy instead. These circumstances are the reason that many leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were Christian ministers.³²¹ Consulting one's minister concerning political and legal matters has been common until the present day for many black Christians. This phenomenon has been a constant and regular feature of the CCC's service. It is not uncommon for members of New Haven's urban community to call on the CCC to represent them for them in civil matters and legal proceedings. Armed with charisma, the ability to drum up local support through street rallies, political connections in city hall, and the power of prayer, Reverend Morris and the CCC Executive Board are seldom turned down for a meeting with the local authorities, to advocate for fair treatment for some economically marginalized member of the local community. CCC volunteer Leslie Radcliffe offers;

“The CCC has met with prosecutors, like if it came to a particular case where it seemed like someone was not getting the treatment that they were supposed to be getting as far as fair trials and things like that. So they were like you are going to bring all of your legal experience we are going to bring all of our spiritual experience. What you gonna do? ‘Because greater is He that is in us.’” (Personal Communication, July 31, 2013)

³²¹ The historic social and political advocacy role of black clergy is expanded in the following works: Kevin R Anderson. *Agitations: Ideologies and Strategies in African American Politics*. Anderson. Fayetteville, AR : University of Arkansas Press, 2010. James Henry Harris. *The Courage to Lead: Leadership in the African American Urban Church*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, NY, 2001. C. Eric. Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham, NC; London : Duke University Press, 1990. Peter Paris. *The Social Teachings of the Black Church*. Philadelphia, PA : Fortress Press, 1985.

Radcliffe shared a particular situation in which she was involved in bringing attention to an instance of injustice at Yale University to the CCC.

There was a situation when I worked at Yale school of Medicine where a supervisor put his hands on a coworker and beat her. She threw a cup of water at him and he let loose all of his martial arts experience on her, which landed her in the hospital. Before she even got out of the hospital, the med school was terminating her for what she did. And so I called on Minister Donald [Morris]. And I told him this is what has happened. And I was shaken because this was not right. The young lady who was fired was black and the supervisor was Filipino. And the very following day Minister Donald and all of the other pastors of the CCC met together and decided that this was not acceptable. Calls were made and it was either you meet with us or we will meet with you outside on the streets. We've rallied 27 churches. You'll either meet with us or we will have our people meet with you outside and you don't want 27 churches outside your place. And so they met with us, and they were able to convince them that she did not need to be fired, but transferred to a different position in the University and that's what happened. (Personal Communication, July 31, 2013)

Another CCC volunteer recalls a time when a local woman was about to lose custody of a child with special needs after anonymous and false accusations were made against her to the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services (DCF). After what the CCC volunteer describes as a "rushed" investigation, DCF was prepared to remove the child from the home. The mother called on the CCC to serve as an intermediary between herself and the DCF investigators at a final parental rights determination meeting. Morris advocated for this mother and invited the CCC volunteer to come a long as a "female presence" to comfort the distraught mother. At the conclusion of the meeting, the DCF investigators decided to give the mother an opportunity to prove herself with supervised visits over a six-month period. At the time the CCC volunteer shared this experience, the mother had permanent custody of her child, and was providing her with excellent care. (Personal Communication, January 14, 2014)

A rather explosive instance of the CCC's advocacy for underserved members of the community occurred in 2011 when two black women were arrested and charged with getting into

a physical altercation with a pregnant woman. The two women were a mother, Robyn Handy, and daughter, Rojanna Handy. On September 20, 2011 Rojanna's car was scheduled to be towed by the City of New Haven for lack of tax payment. When a representative, of the city's contracted towing company, Crown Towing, arrived to tow Rojanna Handy's car she rushed outside and offered him an on-site cash payment if he would release her car. The towing company representative agreed to release the car for a payment of \$158. Handy made the payment in exchange for a record of receipt, which the tow company driver wrote on the back of a business card. The tow company representative never turned Handy's money over to the City of New Haven. The payment was never credited to her tax bill. On October 24, 2011, Crown Tow Company returned to the Handy residence, on behalf of the City of New Haven and claimed the car for unpaid taxes. Robyn and Rojanna Handy immediately showed up at the Crown Towing company office to discuss the matter. The Handy women inquired about the towing of Rojanna's vehicle and presented the hand-written business card receipt to demonstrate payment. The receptionist at Crown Towing, who happened to be pregnant, took the business card from the Handy women and denied that a payment had ever been made. The Handy women were then determined to report their circumstances to the police and asked that the card, their only proof of payment, be returned to them. The receptionist refused and attempted to close the gate, forcing the Handy women out of their office. When the Handy women made a physical attempt to remain inside the gate until the business card was returned, the receptionist physically shoved the mother of the duo from obstructing her path. At that point both of the Handy women began to shove the receptionist.³²²

³²² The receptionist denied instigating the fight until the New Haven Police Department discovered the truth, after obtaining video footage from Crown Towing Company's security camera.

When the local police responded to the altercation and conducted an initial investigation, they found the Handy women's business card ripped in several pieces and discarded in the receptionist's trashcan. The police kept the business card pieces as evidence on the Handy women's behalf, but arrested the mother and daughter for assaulting the pregnant receptionist.

The Handy women contacted the CCC on this matter and the very next day Morris and CCC volunteers gathered outside of the Crown Towing Company office to protest the injustice against the Handy women and demand that the City of New Haven end their exclusive towing contract with that company. This protest included sermonizing by Morris through a bullhorn about injustice. Before concluding the protest with prayer, Morris said of the mysteriously torn business card, "If you try to dispose of evidence and tear it up and try to conceal it, there is something suspicious. It is tampering with evidence. It is foul play and we want an investigation."³²³ The protest drew the attention of the local media and the community at large to what happened to the Handy women, forcing a serious investigation of what truly transpired.

Revealed by the investigation was the fact that not only was Rojanna Handy victimized by the towing company, but many others as well. At the center of the perpetration was a single Crown Towing company representative who swindled Rojanna Handy and others out of cash payments in lieu of tax credits. The driver was fired from the towing company, and arrested, and the Handy women were vindicated. Reverend Morris, pleased with the conclusion of the investigation, stated, "I'm happy that the police department really investigated this situation. I'm glad this was handled in the way it should have been handled."³²⁴ Without the intervention of the

³²³ MacMillan, Thomas. "Protestors Call For Crown Towing Probe", *New Haven Independent*, October 25, 2011. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/arrested_women_cry_fraud/. Accessed on November 14, 2013.

³²⁴ Ibidem.

CCC, it is highly unlikely that the Crown Towing Company would have been investigated and the illegal towing practices of one of their drivers would not have been discovered.

Beyond individual advocacy, the CCC advocates for the underserved population at large. For example, in February of 2011, in response to gun violence in New Haven the local police union president, Louis Cavaliere, advised New Haven residents to purchase guns and be prepared to arm themselves in order to be safe. Immediately the CCC responded citing Cavaliere's statement as irresponsible and insubordinate to the local police whose job it is to assure the safety of every citizen armed or not. Of Cavaliere's statement Morris offered,

“What kind of message is that sending to our already fragile and marginal youth? We work hard to teach respect of our police officers to our residents. This totally undermines anything we have to say. If you show one sign of weakness in your message to criminals or would-be criminals, then they will seize the opportunity and use it against the community.”³²⁵

In another example of community advocacy, members of the CCC gathered at a construction site in the Westville section of New Haven to protest the exploitation of undocumented Mexican immigrants by the Metropolitan Development Company in a building project that included 293 apartment units along the West River. Beyond the moral issues concomitant with exploitation of the undocumented workers, who were making as little as \$3 an hour, the construction company's practices were further exacerbating the unemployment crisis in the city.³²⁶ Established New Haven minority residents, who were the most underemployed, saw the construction project as a missed opportunity to hire local skilled laborers. At the protest, Morris declared, “We are fed up with developers coming in the community and not employing people who represent communities

³²⁵ Ross, Andy. “Can Newhallville Become a Promiseland”, *New Haven Independent*. March 1, 2011. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/promise_land/. Accessed on November 11, 2013.

³²⁶ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unemployment in the City of New Haven is three points higher than the national average. *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. http://www.bls.gov/regions/new-england/summary/blsummary_newhaven.pdf. Accessed on May 1, 2015.

of color.”³²⁷ The Metropolitan Development Company did not hire more local workers by the completion of the project, however the drawing of attention to their labor exploitation practices brought to bear by the CCC resulted scrutiny of their future hiring practices by city government officials.

With regard to another instance of social injustice, the CCC has spoken out against the disproportionate number of unwarranted cavity searches endured by black men imposed by the New Haven Police Department. At a protest against the cancellation of a public meeting to address this issue, Rev. Morris stated, “A black man, or anyone, being taken anywhere where they’re secluded and be asked to take his pants down and have a cavity search is very, very inhumane, and we’re just out here today to say that won’t be tolerated.”³²⁸ Once again, the attention that the CCC brought to this public issue resulted in policy that significantly reduced cavity searches of local citizens by the New Haven Police Department.³²⁹ Grounded in their faith commitments the CCC has advocated for the underrepresented to preserve their dignity and to assure their survival.

Promotion of Human Flourishing

A historic function of the black churches has been to affirm the human dignity of parishioners. This has occurred in the ways that the churches have encouraged and celebrated peoples’ talents and abilities within the church, even while they endured inhumane social

³²⁷ Bass, Paul. “Mexican Brothers... You Are Being Used.” *New Haven Independent*. March 5, 2007. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/mexican_brothers..._youre_being_used/. Accessed on November 11, 2013.

³²⁸ Tuhus, Melinda. “Cavity Searches Decried”, *New Haven Independent*. April 14, 2008. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/cavity_searches_decried/. Accessed on November 11, 2013.

³²⁹ *Ibidem*.

circumstances outside of the church, to make marginalized people feel as if they are “somebody.” This practice continues in the black churches as I discovered while researching the CCC.

A prime example of the exercise to instill “somebodiness” is the CCC’s Human Services Awards Day. At this annual formal and ticketed event, which also serves as a fundraiser for the CCC’s programs and initiatives, 10-12 members of the local community, who might not otherwise be recognized for their gifts, talents and contributions are celebrated for their services.

Honoring members of the community has had the effect of instilling a sense of worth and value to people who might otherwise be overlooked in the larger society. A CCC volunteer, who serves the organization through typing and designing programs, was honored four years ago at this event. When interviewed she described her experience, being simultaneously overwhelmed, empowered, and affirmed.

I received an award from the CCC. I was only making up the programs and flyers for them, but they honored me for my service to the CCC. Before the banquet started the honorees were sitting in the room. There were 11 pastors and little-old-me. And I told my sister there are all of these great men and women of God and then there is me. And she told me, “Just accept the award in honor of what Christ is doing in you. Know that it’s not about you. Accept the award on behalf of Christ.” And that helped me to feel better when I got up in that room, not because we were equal, but because we were all children of God, and we were all servants. They had offices and titles, but I had a job, too. And the prayer that went up in that room gave meaning to me, because I was still new in my walk in Christ at the time. That was my first upper room experience. Regardless of my title God qualified me. He’s got no respect of persons because He put me in here. (Personal communication, March 3, 2015)

Another prominent way in which the CCC has served to affirm the human dignity of the local underserved community, is to instill a sense of pride in the community through “community clean-ups.” A “community clean-up” is an organized effort of members by the community to pick up litter in the neighborhood and to trim grass and shrubbery and plant flowers to beautify the spaces where they live. The CCC’s community clean up days are a

collaborative effort between residents, churches and local businesses. Very often the CCC is able to bring in community dignitaries and leaders to volunteer.

In a recent clean-up day in the Newhallville section of New Haven, volunteers included prominent New Haven citizens such as New Haven Public Schools former Superintendent Reggie Mayo, Assistant State's Attorney Devon Joyner, Larry Conaway, assistant principal at Wilbur Cross High School, state Supreme Court Justice Lubbie Harper Jr., and Newhallville Alderman Charles Blango. One local resident who effused his appreciation for the hard work of the volunteers observed, "This is so great for the land and for our morale in general I just can't thank you enough." (Personal communication, June 13, 2013)

Ultimately, the CCC has worked to meet the everyday needs and desires of members of the community. For example, a number of children in the local community come from households where their parents cannot afford to purchase bicycles. Therefore the CCC annually facilitates the donation of new and used bicycles that are given to underprivileged children on designated "bike giveaway" days. The CCC also sponsors an annual Fish Fry with a local politician, Alderman Charles Blango, where over 500 people gather in a local park for free food and fellowship. Every year as children prepare to return to school at the end of summer, the CCC works with local churches to prepare 150 book bags filled with a year's worth of school supplies. A single-parent of three elementary school children who received school supplies at the CCC's 2014 book bag giveaway shared, "I just thank God for using these people in this way to be a blessing to me and my family. I don't have a lot of money, but I want my kids to have everything they need to get their education. This is just a blessing to me." (Personal communication, August 17, 2013)

In conclusion, the preponderance of evidence supports the theory that a primary motivation of the CCC's service to New Haven's inner-city community is to insure that the community survives. Through their services to the community the organization has worked to instill human dignity to the marginalized. The CCC has worked to decry and prevent street crime and gun violence and to promote safety in the community. Every life spared strengthens families, churches and the community for the future. The need to preserve the community in this way is so deeply felt by the CCC that they advocate for safety using their own bodies, committing to a ministry of presence.

5.3 Theory (2) - Ministry of Presence

Many CCC volunteers feel that their service to the organization gives them the opportunity to live out their Christian faith and commitment. According to one volunteer, working with the CCC, "... Going into the street moves us from what we read and study and teach to, you know, actually living out our faith to impart to those souls we can not necessarily get inside our churches." (Personal communication, August 17, 2013) Volunteers of the CCC consistently maintained that sustaining a visible presence in the community was vital to the effectiveness of their Christian witness. Of this, Apostle Brunson said, "The ones I can't touch in my church on Sunday morning, or the ones I can't touch on Bible Study, when I leave here, I can touch people exactly where they are. As I walk, I take the Word with me to engage them." (Personal communication, July 26, 2013) CCC outreach workers see the work that is exclusively done in the church as "all talk" religion, and that it is only when one leaves the church to seek the lost that one is most like Christ. Leslie Radcliffe says of this idea,

You have to acknowledge His son, Jesus Christ and show evidence of it. You can't just talk about it you must be about it. You have to be just like him. He spent a lot of time

with the lepers and the thieves and the rest. So to be a Christian is to be Christ-like and to do what Christ did. You got to go to the people. (Personal communication, July 31, 2013)

Although much of their work is outdoors, via street rallies to address gun violence, or protests to advocate against injustices, the most regular and consistent facet of the CCC's presence in the community has been community prayer walks and street corner services. Beyond this, in a more robust attempt to effect change through their presence in the community is the Promise Land initiative where the most troubled neighborhood in the City of New Haven has been "adopted" by the CCC as an area of concentrated focus for their efforts. These exercises in the ministry of presence shall now be discussed.

Prayer walks and Street Corner Services

From its inception, the CCC has maintained a constant presence in the community through their prayer walks and street corner services. The prayer walks and street corner services are primarily tools for evangelism and giving members of the community hope for their everyday struggles which include homelessness, joblessness, and substance abuse. According to Morris "It is an opportunity to bring the church to the corner." (Personal communication, Jul 17, 2013)

In the prayer walks and street corner services, members of the CCC march along a predetermined route that concludes on a chosen site, all the while praying to God, some aloud others quietly, about the plight of the community. Morris or a designated minister, will then stand with a portable public address system or bullhorn to lead the informal liturgy. Early in worship, the CCC members and volunteers sing uplifting, jubilant songs, often peaking the interest of passersby who may stop and join in the jubilation. A most powerful aspect of the street corner services is the testimonial period. During this period members of the crowd are

offered the opportunity to share how their faith in God has empowered them to overcome some great obstacle in life. Of the impact of the testimonies, Morris offered,

“The testimonies of the saints are greater than the pastor’s words sometimes, especially in the streets. Don’t get me wrong the Pastor’s words should still go forward, but people listen for a woman’s voice who says, I used to be on drugs, I used to be out in the street, but God cleaned me up and saved my life.” (Personal communication, July 24, 2013)

The testimonial portion of the street corner services very often has the effect of drawing the attention of those who can hear the services from their homes. Many people frequently come out of their homes to participate in these services.

Women will lean from their household windows saying, “Who’s that saying they’ve been abused, or who’s that saying they’re raising three kids on their own yet managing to survive, and who’s that guy saying he was in prison?” That’s the church, they hear. The Bible says the spirit bears witness with the spirit. They are hearing and being drawn by the Spirit of God! (Personal communication, July 24, 2017)

The street corner services always involve sermonizing from Morris, Brunson or another designated minister. As the preacher gives the sermon, the crowd responds enthusiastically with shouts of affirmation, “Hallelujah,” and “Amen.”

The street corner services conclude with an invitation for anyone in the crowd or within earshot to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, and for anyone who desires prayer to break debilitating habits. Apostle Brunson shared an instance where he believes a woman’s life was saved by an invitation for prayer at a street corner service.

There was a drug addict and we was walking by her house and she was in the house getting ready to use crack-cocaine. When she heard our voices she ran out of the house and came down the street where we were and told us, “I was in that house right there getting ready to use crack-cocaine, but I heard when y’all came by my house and I heard y’all singing, and I heard y’all talking about the things of God, I heard y’all inviting people to be saved.” And on that day that lady gave her heart and life back to God and at that point she never used drugs again. (July 26, 2013)

The invitation to receive Jesus Christ as one’s savior in CCC prayer walks and street rallies, has not been without contention. In a March 2014 meeting to plan what would be the

CCC's largest street service yet, there was a heated debate as to whether it was appropriate to extend an invitation at the event for people to receive the Christ as their savior. The meeting was held at the Church of the Redeemer, a predominantly white congregation in the United Church of Christ denomination that has partnered with the CCC in some of their initiatives, largely through donations, volunteers for community clean up days, and providing meeting spaces larger than the CCC's office headquarters.

The purpose of the meeting was to plan a prayer rally to be held on the downtown New Haven Green, where hundreds would come together in prayer with the agenda of using the churches to address street violence, homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and the lack of activities for youth. Over sixty area ministers gathered in a room off the main sanctuary to meet after light refreshments of sandwiches, cookies, and tea. Once the meeting began, a clergy person at the meeting recommended that people of all faith backgrounds should be involved in the prayer rally, so as to be inclusive of the larger religious community in the city. This idea was generally well received and affirmed by those in attendance, until another minister proposed that the rally would be a great opportunity to "evangelize sinners" and to "win souls to Christ Jesus our Lord." (Personal communication, March 10, 2014) This idea, too, seemed to be generally affirmed until the minister from Redeemer Church said, "If this is going to be an interfaith gathering than I believe it would be absolutely inhospitable to our sisters and brothers from other faiths to force the Gospel of Jesus Christ upon them. That would not be the time nor the place for such a thing." (Personal communication March 10, 2014) A heated debate ensued, but Morris tabled the idea for another meeting, with the promise of further discussion once clergypersons from non-Christian traditions responded to their invitation.

In the end, the rally drew hundreds of attendees, many of whom brought lawn chairs and remained for the entire service. Although ecumenical, the event was not an interfaith gathering, as practitioners of non-Christian faiths did not respond to the invitation. At the conclusion of the event, rather than an explicit offering to receive Christ, a general invitation for prayer was given with individual ministers standing in front of a platform offering one-on-one prayer for individuals who came forward. “This is what we do,” said a local pastor who regularly volunteers with the CCC at the end of the service. “This is how most people around here know us. We are the believers who don’t mind stepping out of our comfort zone to help someone who is lost. This is what it’s all about and God gets all the glory.” (Personal communication, May 4, 2014)

The Promise Land Initiative

The most pronounced example of the CCC’s commitment to the ministry of presence in the community is the Promise Land initiative. With this initiative, the CCC has taken up residence in one of the most crime ridden sections in the City of New Haven, the Newhallville neighborhood, in the attempt to reduce crime by maintaining a regular presence in the community through constant and consistent community outreach.

Reverend Morris conceived the idea of the Promise Land initiative as a direct response to critical conversations with members of the community. Before the initiative, the CCC would do community outreach all over the City of New Haven. They would spend a day or weekend doing prayer walks and street corner services, offering direction to social services and limited financial assistance to needy persons they encountered in the various neighborhoods. They would even approach gang members and drug dealers to dissuade them from their illegitimate enterprises.

However, Morris soon realized that these ventures into city neighborhoods only temporarily addressed the problem.

We would go back to some of those neighborhoods, to some of the people who knew us and knew me. Some of the gang members or some of their family members would say, “Well Pastor Morris, you guys are doing a great job. It’s been a blessing. It’s been quiet for the last few days, or it’s been quiet all day long.” Then they would tell me how crime would go back to its normal form later on that night or the next day. After all that we did, all that we spoke, it would go back to the way it was before we got there. And the gang members would say, “I know y’all trying to do the work of God out here. We understand it. We know where we at. When you leave, then what?” (Personal communication, July 17, 2013)

After praying about the effectiveness of the CCC’s community outreach, Morris believed that God “dropped into his Spirit” the idea to remain in the Newhallville section of the city to create long-lasting change. As a result, he relocated his office from Goffe Street to Dixwell Avenue, in the heart of Newhallville, and targeted a specific area of eleven city blocks in the neighborhood, which he termed the “Promise Land.”

What is the Promise Land in the Word of God? It is the land of milk and honey. We believe that is what Newhallville, to us, is spiritually. It is the land of milk and honey. It’s an undeveloped geographical area that is full of promise, but lacks moral and spiritual intervention on a consistent basis. Therefore we are here, visibly in the community, on the street, nonstop, reaching out, with a developed plan to improve the area. (7, July 13, 2013)

After establishing a presence in the neighborhood through the relocation of its offices, the CCC then set to the task of learning how to best serve the people in the targeted area. To do this they went to every home in the targeted area and asked people to fill out surveys of how the community might best be served by the CCC. In so doing they discovered a broad range of needs in the community. One CCC volunteer shared,

As we passed out the surveys and some of the results stated that the needs in the community were jobs; people were concerned about the gangs and the violence. In fact, that was the number one issue. People were also concerned about how there was nothing for the children to do in the community. We also discovered many medical issues. A lot

of people didn't have insurance or food or various different services, and they were humble enough to put it in writing. (Personal communication, September 11, 2013)

The CCC also noticed how unique the neighborhood was, in that, while Newhallville was the most crime-ridden area of the city, a significant number of residents were homeowners who had lived in the neighborhood for several years. Despite the fact that, the neighborhood was adjacent to Yale University, it was not positively affected by one of the wealthiest institutions of higher learning in the world. Of this E. Marie Bell observed,

It hurts that Yale University is right in the vicinity of Newhallville and when you are a part of Yale you are given a map and its outlined in blue to say, okay this is the area you don't enter[speaking of the Newhallville section of New Haven]. And it's given to the students and the staff and everyone. It's very unfair to the community. And so a goal of the Promise Land was to make a difference in the community and to take away the blight from it and bring it back to its livelihood. (Personal communication, August, 29, 2013)

The Promise Land Initiative launched officially in the winter of 2011. Through this initiative the CCC has formed strong cooperative alliances with a number of area churches, schools, businesses, and nonprofit social, medical, mental health, and family support groups – as well as the police department. Further, the initiative has worked to make residents and businesses in Newhallville more aware of the many New Haven support groups, services, and organizations available to them. These resources provide family counseling, supplemental food, medical treatment, and youth services. All of this is facilitated with the rationale that a campaign against violence of all kinds must be supported with useful services that residents can access on an ongoing basis.

Young people have been a particular target of the Promise Land Initiative. Establishing residency in the neighborhood has allowed for the creation of a mentoring program for young boys in the neighborhood.

Right now we are mentoring fifty boys between the ages of 8 and 12 years old. They love basketball so I got our brothers [from the Brotherhood] over with what they love to do, but they can't play ball unless they pray publicly, right there on the court. They need bikes? We got a connection with bikes, so we give the kids bikes. They may get stolen 2 or three days later, but that's the community." (Personal communication, July 13, 2013)

True to the tradition of the CCC, there are regular Prayer Walks and Street services in the targeted area to reach out to the members of the community. In so doing, Morris and volunteer ministers and laypersons continue to share their faith in Christ with individuals in the streets as a measure of crime prevention. Morris said,

People say, well aren't you afraid? Well why would we be afraid? We didn't come out here to fight nobody. We came out here to love. We didn't come out here to accuse nobody. We didn't come out here to tell you you're wrong. You already know you're wrong. We are just telling you that in order for us to live you can't continue to live life this way. And in order to change your life, you've got to have a relationship with God. (Personal communication, July 13, 2013)

The CCC's commitment to a ministry of presence is particularly accented by the service of a subgroup of men who regularly patrol the neighborhood as exemplars of strength and black male positivity. This illuminates that along with the ministry of presence, another theory of what motivates the work of the CCC is the belief that it will take strong men to strengthen the community. This theory shall now be explicated.

5.4 Theory (3) - Save the Man, Save the Community

"Our service to women is leadership. Leadership. God says, I'll make the woman a helpmeet. Women are designed to help. If that leadership is out of place, who is she going help? She don't have any direction. And so therefore she has a specific role and responsibility. She is a helpmeet. She is designed to help her husband- that man, in achieving the over all. The man's design is to lead and to cover. So when the man is out of place, the church becomes that place for the woman to teach her foundationally. That's the purpose for the church." (Personal communication, November 14, 2013)

After describing the CCC's programs which predominantly target young boys and men, I explicitly asked Rev. Morris, what programs the CCC offered women. The aforementioned quote was his response. It may be observed that, from its founding, the CCC has endeavored to improve the community by addressing the plight of the urban inner-city male, by concentrating their efforts on rescuing young men from participating in illegitimate opportunity structures which inevitably lead to gun violence and/or incarceration. If young men in the community can be preserved from this "fate" and become God-fearing, educated and gainfully employed, then they can become dependable husbands and fathers who anchor both their families and their communities, making both institutions more secure. The idea is that by saving the men, one saves the community.

The agenda to save young men from criminal activity may be considered a valuable one since the present status of African American men in urban centers across the United States is quite disconcerting. From 1980 to the present, the number of people incarcerated in America more than quadrupled from roughly 500,000 to 2.3 million people. African Americans, who are only 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population make up 43 percent of the U.S. prison population. One in six black men had been incarcerated since 2001. If current trends continue, one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during their lifetime.³³⁰

Contributing factors to this disproportion include, inner-city crime prompted by social and economic isolation, the War on drugs policies initiated by the Reagan administration and perpetuated by the Bush administration that remain in effect today. The disproportionate numbers of African Americans in U.S. prisons is further exacerbated by racial profiling, and a lack of financial ability to obtain adequate representation in court. As a result of many Black

³³⁰ "Criminal justice Fact Sheet", *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*. <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet> (Accessed on June 2, 2015)

American men's criminal records, they experience discrimination in employment, housing, educational opportunities, and the right to vote, all in a manner very similar to what their grandparents experienced when segregation and Jim Crow laws were legal in the United States.³³¹

Young black men are not only more likely to spend time in prison, but they are also more likely to succumb to gun violence. For most young adults, aged 20 to 24, the number one cause of death is car accidents, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control. For black men in that age group, the top cause of death is gun violence. They are four times more likely to be shot and killed than they are to die in a car accident.³³²

Unfortunately, the statistics for the City of New Haven concerning the plight of young African American men support the national data. As of January 1, 2014, of the 16,594 persons imprisoned in Connecticut 6,934 were African American men and 4,336 were Hispanic men.³³³ Beyond this, of the 24 people who were killed by gun violence in the city in 2010, 22 of them were African American males ages 18-39.³³⁴ Of the 20 people who were killed by gun violence in 2013, 18 of them were African American males ages 18-39.³³⁵

³³¹ The connections between these factors that have led to a disproportionate number of black men in the United States prison population have been drawn in the activist scholarship of Michelle Alexander in her work. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: New York Press, 2012. In this work Alexander concludes that mass incarceration today serves the same purpose as pre-Civil War slavery and the post-Civil War Jim Crow laws: to maintain a racial caste system.

³³² "Leading Cause of Death by Age Group, Black Males," (2013) *Center for Disease Control* <http://www.cdc.gov/men/lcod/2013/Blackmales2013.pdf> . Accessed on June 2, 2015

³³³ Abdul, Karim-Shaid. "New Haven Legal Experts Share Concern About Inequality in Connecticut Justice System", *New Haven Register*, *New Haven Register*. August 20, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140830/new-haven-legal-experts-share-concern-about-inequality-in-connecticut-justice-system>. Accessed on June 2, 2015.

³³⁴ Bass, Paul. "24 Murdered. None White", *New Haven Independent*. January 12, 2011. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/another_year_no_white . Accessed on June 2, 2015.

³³⁵ Scinto, Rich. 2013 "New Haven Homicides: Most Victims Young, Black", *New Haven Register*. January 4, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140104/2013-new-haven-homicides-most-victims-young-black>. Accessed on June 2, 2015.

The CCC has taken on the task to save young black men in inner city New Haven from becoming one of these statistics. In so doing, they hope to preserve the community for a brighter future. The umbrella initiative for their outreach to young men is entitled, “The Brotherhood.” The Brotherhood consists of a group of professional black men from the Greater New Haven area who volunteer their time to reach out to young black men and serve them as mentors, tutors and models of black male positivity. They carry out their service in two primary modes that I have termed “reaching” and “teaching.”

In their reaching mode, brotherhood members literally go out to the community donning yellow T-shirts that read “The Brotherhood” across the front, so as to identify themselves. Every Monday a group of these men get on bicycles to ride through the community stopping along the way to engage young men in conversations in which they admonish them to be respectful to their mothers and to study hard in school. In this way, Brotherhood volunteers serve as “surrogate uncles” who provide guidance to young men whose fathers are in prison or absent.

In the teaching mode of the Brotherhood’s initiatives, the men run a mentoring program for young boys that includes tutoring, games and field trips. Beyond this, they sponsor regular workshops to help teenagers and former convicted felons to find employment, and to give parenting skills to young men with children. Going further, the Brotherhood sponsors an annual two-day conference, called, “The Brotherhood Leadership Summit”, in which about 300 men from the community gather for a series of panel sessions and group discussions led by local clergy, educators, and business professionals. I shall now explicate both the reaching and teaching modes of The Brotherhood’s initiatives to save the local black community by saving young black men.

Reach Young Black Men

The members of the CCC strongly believe that many of the problems in the inner city can be directly attributed to the lack of positive male role models. The members of the Brotherhood endeavor to address this by being observably present in the community, serving as a living resource of Black male positivity. The Brotherhood takes to the street to reach out to young men primarily through two major initiatives “Men’s, We Care Tours” and weekly group Bike Rides through the community. I shall now describe each initiative.

The “Men’s, We Care Tour” is a series of seven rallies held annually between May and September in New Haven’s high crime neighborhoods. These rallies consist of preachments from local clergy, testimonies from young men who survived acts of violence, or who have served time in prison for street crime, participation from local musical artists, and giveaways from the Brotherhood, usually food and T-shirts.

“We’re out in the community every Monday and people know we love them, know there’s someone to care about them. We’ve been doing this for years now, more sustained and consistent now, and I’m convinced that the way we are talking to whole families is working. Without this, violence would be a lot worse.” (Personal communication, June 16, 2014)

At the rallies there is always a direct appeal to young men to look to the Brotherhood if they are in need of role models. For example, at a rally in July of 2014, Apostle Brunson explicitly said to the group of young people present,

It’s not all your fault. The fault is with us too, your elders. We must do better, and we are. These men here, these are positive role models. We want you to come close to us. We want to look you in the eye not to go to war with you, but to look in to your soul, to help you see what is happening to us. Our community is broken, our grief is often so normal, we don’t even know we’re grieving. Our machine is broken. We need not to complain and blame the white man or the city for this or that, but to take control ourselves and we’re doing it, and our men must lead.” (Personal communication, July 28, 2014)

The idea behind this appeal is that a major component of addressing drug abuse, gun violence, and street crime in the inner city is through plugging the hole created by absent fathers with surrogate fathers in the community.

The men of the Brotherhood yield themselves as surrogate role models to inner city youth out of their faith commitment, that is, the men of the brotherhood see their outreach to young people as a witness for Christ. This is particularly true for Brotherhood members who have a compelling story of how their faith in Christ positively transformed their lives, which they gladly and regularly share at the rallies.

At a May 2014 rally, eleven different men took turns sharing street life survival stories. Many of them had siblings and close friends they lost to the streets. Four of them had done time in prison for drug dealing and possession. Three of them still had pieces of bullets lodged in them. Yet, all of them stood on a Dixwell Avenue Street corner, holding themselves out as examples of the transformative power of God.

“But I tell you we all reached a point where we just couldn’t go on on our own. I mean we became so beat up, so heavily downtrodden; there was no one to talk to. So who do you talk to when there’s no one else? We’ve gone from serious transgressions to deep transformations. It didn’t happen to us in jail, but out in our lives afterwards. Now we want to reach out to these kids. (Personal communication, May 12, 2014)

While the “Men’s We Care Tours” are seasonal and spread through the summer months, the Brotherhood maintains regular visibility through the weekly bike rides held every Monday throughout the year, weather permitting. Each Monday evening Brotherhood members don their bright yellow shirts and ride through the City of New Haven, periodically stopping to speak to young people and families with words of encouragement and admonition along the way. These

rides began with the mission to make non-violent males visible throughout the city, and to help turn troubled young people's lives around.

A CCC volunteer and Brotherhood member maintained that the bike rides have been very useful in making connections with the community. "It's not so much that we're crime fighters. We're just out here saying there's a better way. Black males need to be visible saying, 'We're not going to tolerate violence. We're not going to tolerate disrespect.'" (Personal communication, October 6, 2013).

On these rides, The Brotherhood embodies positive black male surrogacy on patrol. The men meet each Monday at 5:30pm at CCC headquarters with their bikes in tow. They form a circle to pray and then mount their bikes with Morris leading the path. Every few blocks the men will stop to engage someone in a conversation. They may stop to ask a young child what they learned in school, or help some elderly woman bring her groceries up the stairs to her front porch. In one instance, a brotherhood bike rider, who is also a high school teacher, saw one of his students walking with his pants sagging down his behind. He called out to him to pull his pants up, and the young man pulled up his pants and buckled his belt. On occasion the men are stopped by people in the neighborhood for help. (Personal communication, November 14, 2013)

The surrogacy role the Brotherhood endeavors to fulfill as they reach out to inner city youth goes beyond pep talks, admonitions and questions of concern to include acts of protection and provision. For example, a few years ago, there was rumor in the Newhallville community that a certain corner store was illegally selling cigars to under aged boys which they would then gut of the tobacco, and refill them with formaldehyde-drenched marijuana to sell on the street. Like a concerned group of uncles, the bike riders rode directly to the corner store to confront the

store's owner and make the police aware. Immediately the store began to reinforce the age requirement to purchase tobacco products, and requiring purchasers to show ID.³³⁶

On another bike ride, the men were followed by a Brotherhood member driving a Chevrolet pickup truck carrying a brand new ten-speed bike that they promised to a 6 year old boy on a previous ride. After they rode out to government housing projects near the West Rock section of New Haven to deliver the bike to the young boy, they found that his 9-year-old brother did not have bike. An hour later a brotherhood member returned with a bike for his 9 year old brother, purchased at his own expense. The acts of care and concern demonstrated by the Brotherhood are grounded by their teaching initiatives.³³⁷

Teach Young Black Men

Society is failing young men and they are failing their families. Safety and respect for others begins in the home with strong male role models, especially the fathers. But the vast majority of the burden to bring up our children is falling on our mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and aunts. They need our help. (Personal communication, September 11, 2013)

The Brotherhood believes that the lack of the consistent presence of fathers and other positive black men in the African American community has also led to a lack of teaching and mentorship necessary to navigate manhood. The Brotherhood attempts to fill in this gap through conferences and information sessions as well as through their mentorship program.

³³⁶ Ibidem.

³³⁷ Bass, Paul. "Brothehood Rides Again", *New Haven Independent*. October 16, 2007. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/the_brotherhood_rides_again/. Accessed on June 2, 2015.

Since 2007, Brotherhood volunteers have served as mentors to young boys primarily from the Newhallville community from the ages of 8-13. The boys may be referred to the Brotherhood by their teacher, minister, or their parents, usually a single mother hoping to find a positive male influence for their son. The young men gather from 5-7 p.m. on Wednesdays and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturdays at the CCC headquarters where they are given a brief lunch and inspirational admonishments from Morris or another brotherhood volunteer.

Regularly the boys are told to “stay positive” or to “keep a positive attitude” and to aspire to be productive so that they can be an asset to the community. If they are having difficulty with a particular subject in school, they bring their homework and get assistance. The boys personally engage Brotherhood volunteers about their favorite sports teams, difficult subjects in school, how to deal with peer pressures, and questions about their mentors’ professions. Weekly activities are held to keep the boys active. The most popular activities are fishing trips, and a summer basketball league for boys ages 10-14.

With the fishing trips, the boys, many of whom seldom would, if ever, leave the city limits, are driven to area lakes and exposed to the country-side. One volunteer spoke of a young boy’s pride upon catching a fish at the most recent fishing trip.

You should have seen his face when he reeled that sucker in. He started jumping up and down saying , “Look, look, I did it.” He came back the next week and told us how his grandmother hooked up the fish and made a slamming dinner.” Just like that we taught this kid the pride a man feels when he provides for his family. (Personal communication, September 11, 2013)

The timing of the Brotherhood’s “summer” basketball program is quite intentional. New Haven endures a very cold winter that often begins early in the fall and extends late into the

spring, making the weather the greatest crime deterrent during this time of the year. Gun violence and street crimes begin to surge as the weather gets warmer, so the summer basketball program was conceived as a positive alternative for young teens to keep them from the criminal element. Every summer, the Brotherhood has a roster of 65-80 boys who come out. Those who participate learn more than how to be a good basketball player. Morris says,

We don't just teach them the rules of the game or how to do a lay-up. We teach them how to be a part of a team, the importance of practice, and regular exercise. These are lessons they can take with them the rest of their lives. (Personal communication, August 21, 2013)

The Brotherhood mentor volunteers see themselves as fulfilling a vital gap. One volunteer said of his work with the mentorship program,

“These little dudes need us out here. You know the stats. Black boys have higher rates of suspension, expulsion, placement in special education, and dropout than other groups. Some of these boys are angry. Not even ten years old and they are angry at the world. They need us out here ‘cause we understand them. We been where they are and know how to reach them. They can only learn so much in the classroom. Some stuff only a man can teach them, and that’s why we here.” (Personal communication, August 21, 2013)

The need for positive black men in the community has also prompted dialogue and teaching initiatives for adult black men in the community as well. The Brotherhood has sponsored workshops to address the issues that confront young black men in the inner-city in particular, to include, fatherhood classes, which are geared toward young single fathers who may not have grown up with their own fathers. In these classes young men learn practical skills from how to change diapers to necessary social skills, such as how to navigate conflicts with the child’s mother in a way that serves the best interest of the child. The general tone of these classes is that the skills acquired there are “real manhood” skills. “Don’t get me wrong,” Morris says.

“Thank God for our sisters who care for their children. But it is the absence of fathers in our

homes that leads to all kinds of problems. It creates a trickle-down effect. Men must be men first and then they can become fathers.”(Personal communication, July 24, 2013)

Having a felony record very often makes a person virtually unemployable. This leaves the disproportionate number of black men who are released from prison jobless. In need of funds, some return to illegitimate opportunity structures thus entering a vicious cycle of prison recidivism. To meet this crisis the Brotherhood has gathered men in the community together to hear from former convicted felons who have successfully navigated finding legitimate employment. While the workshops do not completely resolve the crisis, some of the speakers have started contracting and construction businesses, as well as janitorial services, and have offered job opportunities to workshop attendees. Those in attendance who do not receive jobs are, at the least, inspired by successful models of former convicted felons, and perhaps are given ideas of legitimate opportunities to pursue.

The major teaching initiative of the CCC Brotherhood is the Annual Brotherhood Leadership summit. Hundreds of men from the local community gather at this event for a four day series of teaching sessions that culminate in a corporate worship service. Each year, the teachings at each session of the Leadership Summit are bound by a common theme. For example in 2013 the theme was “Removing Violence From our Community.” Each panel session and lecture was focused on ways men could promote safety within the city.

At one panel session, a group of about 25 men from their 20s to their 70’s sat for two hours to strategize effective ways to end violence in the community. “It starts with yourself,” said an elder in the room. “You have to learn to maintain a sense of peace within yourself before you can promote peace within the community.”

Another man, around 30 years old said, “And when we know we have ourselves together, we got to connect with brothers in the street. Let them know we ain’t afraid of them. Let them know they’re our brothers and we care ‘cause we can relate.” Another man juxtaposed, “Excuse me my brother, but we can’t wait until these guys get on the street, we gotta start early, like with after school programs in the elementary school, because the street mentality is starting sooner and sooner in these young cats.” This received a round of applause from the room with verbal affirmation. At the conclusion of this session, almost all of the men agreed to volunteer to work with the youth in the Brotherhood Mentoring program. (Personal communication, November 8, 2013)

The closing worship service, held at the Trinity Temple Church of God in Christ, drew a crowd of nearly three hundred people, mostly men. The program was punctuated by rousing selections from an all-city men’s choir aggregated specifically for the occasion, culminating in a sermon by the Rev. Samuel Ross-Lee, Pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in New Haven. In his message he suggested to the congregation that to end violence in the streets of New Haven, they must teach young men to help one another, and to not compete with one another, observing the first homicide in the Bible occurred when Cain placed himself in competition with his own brother, Abel. “If they had worked together, they could have combined Abel’s sacrifice of meat and Cain’s sacrifice of vegetation to make a balance meal. Brothers, there must be balance in our community if there will be peace.” (Personal communication, November 8, 2013)

The “Save the man, Save the community” motif as observed in the CCC has positive intentions in that the efforts of the organization to support young inner-city men is grounded in a love of God and a desire to end suffering in urban families and the community. Furthermore, as

the members of the brotherhood yield themselves as positive black male surrogates, they are countering images of black men as criminal, unintelligent and socially indifferent.

On the other hand, this motif leans toward patriarchal oppression to the neglect of service to women in the community. The traditional gender roles that have been assumed in the larger society have never been realistic for economically oppressed groups, where both husband and wife have had to work to support the greater good of the family. Therefore, programs to address the needs of women in the community, beyond preparing men to lead them, are of vital importance. I shall now assess the functions and motivations of the community engagement work of the CCC by the criteria for continuing the liberation mission of the black churches, as outlined and explained in section 3.5

Section 5.5- The CCC and Evaluative Criteria from Black Theology for BCCE

The black churches and religious organizations must be politically aware and educated concerning the adverse effects of oppressive social structures.

The leaders of the CCC are astute observers of local politics and business practices. In particular, the data demonstrates the ways that the organization has had the courage to address instances of discrimination in the City of New Haven's government and businesses, and to bring awareness of these issues to the community at large through the local media. The data also demonstrates that a major service of the CCC is to address street crime and gang violence. Yet the group attempts to do this by encouraging spirituality and personal morality. For example, in incidences of violent deaths, the group has moved fast to organize prayer walks and street corner services, where CCC leaders preach to people that, if they have a relationship with God, God is able to turn their lives around and save them from drugs and a life of crime.

While some personal responsibility must be taken in incidences of violence, even if this requires a divine intervention, what must not be ignored is that the problem of street crime and gang violence in New Haven is also a byproduct of deindustrialization, joblessness, and the declining economy. While these factors are alluded to in their speeches and sermons at street corner services, the CCC could potentially be more effective if they used their partnerships with congregations, businesses and the city government to focus on job creation, and preparation of people in the community for the job market.

The black churches and religious organizations have a moral obligation to speak out against injustice.

The CCC has been quite thorough at meeting this criterion. The data shows that in instances involving injustice, they are well prepared to organize street rallies to draw the attention of the local media to such acts, which have included, the abuse of power by the police and discriminatory business practices in local commerce. Morris, in particular, is an often sought after spokesperson on issues that affect New Haven's urban community.

This fact raises the concern that, despite having an executive board, Morris is the sole face of the CCC in the local media. In every news article on the work of the CCC in the community examined in this study, Morris is almost always the singular spokesperson against acts of injustice. Of this, Morris observes, "We have failed in developing leadership that can take over this organization. We have failed in developing leadership that is visible enough to take on the future." (Personal communication, July 17, 2013) Would the CCC continue to be effective in speaking out against injustice without Morris? The CCC must develop other leaders who are

willing to speak out against injustice in order to ensure that the organization remains vocal on issues that are vital to the community's thriving.

The outreach programs of black churches and religious organizations must affirm human flourishing, as such, these institutions must be aware of the immediate needs of their local constituents.

As the data demonstrates, the CCC is vibrant with human flourishing activities to address various needs within the community. They affirm community workers and leaders through annual celebrations. Furthermore, as the organization is aware of marginalization in the community, they have provided bicycles and school supplies for underserved children, and sponsored street festivals and other recreational opportunities. Additionally, they have adopted the troubled Newhallville neighborhood through the Promise Land initiative in an attempt to curb street violence with consistent community outreach.

It must be observed, however, that the CCC attends to the needs of boys and young men through mentoring and workshops, while leaving a gap in similar services directed to girls and young women. As previously stated, Morris sees the group's service to men as indirect service to women, in that, the group endeavors to develop strong men for the households in the community. For greater impact, the CCC should consider creating more direct services for girls and women. As there are many single-women headed households in the community, perhaps the CCC could take a survey of how these families might best be served by the group.

The black churches and religious organizations must be willing to combine with other organizations when necessary to fight oppression.

As an ecumenical organization, the CCC is dependent on this criterion of Black Theology for its existence. As a rule, any Christian church can partner and participate with the CCC. Although Morris is the front-person for the CCC, there is regular interdenominational cooperation from pastors and parishioners for all of its programs. Additionally, people from other faiths, or who practice no faith, have volunteered or participated in CCC activities and events for the greater good of the community. On occasion the group has cooperated with the City of New Haven and civic leaders to carry out its initiatives.

Cooperation outside of the black community has been limited, with the exception of Church of the Redeemer United Church of Christ of New Haven, a predominantly white congregation that has supported the CCC through donations, community festival volunteers, and by providing community meeting space. There has not been any consistent cooperation with clergy and congregations from New Haven's Hispanic community.³³⁸ It is possible that the CCC could be more effective by joining their efforts with non-black community leaders and organizations that are concerned about justice and equality.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious institutions must use their funds in ways that promote community uplift.

It has not been a part of the mission of this organization to funnel money directly into the community, per se. A vital strength of the CCC, however, is the organization's low financial maintenance. Many of their efforts, such as the Brotherhood's mentoring and tutorial programs, their rallies against street violence, prayer walks and street corner services require only donations of time. Almost all of the contributions and grants made to the CCC have gone to fund their

³³⁸ Morris expressed plans to reach out to the Hispanic community in the future (Personal communication, July 12, 2013).

programs, as Reverend Donald Morris, the executive officer and primary administrator does not take a salary for his work. This means that beyond the rent and utilities required securing the CCC offices, all funds go to support the group's programs and outreach initiatives.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious organizations must promote equality as it pertains to issues of all people.

In addition to the CCC's patriarchal position that women are best served by the group through their service to men in the community, the CCC has only expressed occasional concern for the oppression of other groups, to the extent that the oppression of other groups has affected the black community. An example of this would be the group's public decrying of the exploitation of Mexican immigrant workers.³³⁹ This was an opportunity for the CCC to advocate justice for both immigrants and a segment of the Hispanic community. The CCC's angst at the injustice done to the immigrant workers, however, was connected to the conclusion that the work done by the immigrant workers could have been done by "qualified" blacks in the community.³⁴⁰

The CCC's patriarchal and conservative positions on the family have likewise led the organization to be mute on the social justice initiatives of the LGBT community. The CCC would have a broader impact if they were to advocate for justice outside of the black community. Morris is aware of this, but sees the need to address street crime and violence in the inner city as more emergent. (Personal communication, July 12, 2013).

³³⁹ Explained in section 5.2

³⁴⁰ Bass, Paul. "Mexican Brothers... You Are Being Used." New Haven Independent. March 5, 2007. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/mexican_brothers..._youre_being_used/. Accessed on November 11, 2013.

The CCC is not alone in its fight against injustice in the New Haven, Connecticut, and in the Newhallville neighborhood. A neighboring institution, the Beulah Land Development Corporation, is a local example of the CDC model of BCCE, and is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Beulah Land Development Corporation of New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A.: A Community Development Corporation Model of Black Church Community Engagement

6.1 Introduction

“The black church is the church that, down through the years, has helped people of our own background and culture to become something more, to give them a sense of hope, give them an element of integrity, to show them that they are empowered to really be, that they don't have to take a backseat to anyone, that they, as Israel, are God's chosen. We are God's chosen. We are engrafted by the saving work of Christ. So we're blessed as well as anybody else.” - Bishop Theodore Brooks- Chief Executive Officer of the Beulah Land Development Corporation

The Beulah Land Development Corporation (BLDC) is a community development corporation (CDC) and subsidiary of the Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church located at 782 Orchard Street, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A., with offices in the church's administrative wing. The congregation at Beulah Heights uses the BLDC to serve to the community through the creation of educational and economic opportunities and as a platform to address local officials to advocate for the disadvantaged in the social structure as a theological imperative. Before explicating the theories uncovered as to what motivates their service, I shall briefly discuss the relationship between Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC, as well as the organization's history, mission, structure, and site, identifying major functions of community engagement, and the organization's funding of its initiatives.

Relationship Between Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC

While the BLDC is technically a separate institution from the church, for the purpose of this study to ascertain the theological motivations of BCCE agents, the BLDC is better understood as an outreach arm of the Beulah Heights Church for the following reasons:

- Because the CDC was developed out of the church’s mission to serve the community, its purpose and functions are grounded in the theological assumptions that compelled the church to serve.
- There would be no CDC without the church. The sole purpose of creating the BLDC was to create a mechanism to procure funds to effect the community in ways that would exceed the church coffers.
- The BDLC and Beulah Heights church shares the same campus. The operations of both organizations are held in the same spaces.
- The two organizations share the same leadership. Bishop Theodore Brooks is both the Senior Pastor of Beulah Heights Church and the C.E.O. of the BLDC, therefore both organizations function together to fulfill Brooks’s vision to serve God and the community.
- In the eyes of the community there are no distinctions between these two entities. In my observations and conversations with interviewees, almost no one ever made distinctions between the church and the CDC. Rather, they spoke of the work of the BLDC as the work of the church.
- Even if it were possible to ignore the BLDC’s connection to Beulah Heights Church, to do so would be to ignore the religious intentions for its existence, to serve as an outreach extension for urban missions.

History

Because the BLDC is an outreach arm of the Beulah First Pentecostal Church, it is necessary to begin the history of the BLDC with the history of the congregation to fully grasp the BLDC’s historical development. Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church was founded as the “Beulah Heights Mission” in the summer of 1923 on Poplar Street in New Haven, Connecticut, under the leadership of the late Elder Walter and Rosa B. Andrews. Andrews was a Methodist

minister before being converted to the Pentecostal tradition, and subsequently uniting the church with the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (P.A.W.) Inc.³⁴¹

The original storefront congregation had a modest membership of 12 persons, but experienced steady growth under the charismatic leadership of the Andrews. After leaving Poplar Street, the congregation worshipped in rented spaces at 36 Broad Street, and later on Goffe Street and Webster Street in New Haven. Following the death of Andrews in 1933, Elder Lambert Tolbert from West Virginia became the pastor, and the church relocated to 12-14 Admiral Street in New Haven.

At the end of Elder Tolbert's tenure in 1950, Elder George H. Brooks of Ansonia, Connecticut became the pastor. Elder Brooks was subsequently elevated to the office of Bishop of the Connecticut District Council (P.A.W.). New growth in the congregation necessitated its move to the church's present location, at 782 Orchard Street. Bishop George Brooks served the congregation until his passing in 1986. He was succeeded by his son, Elder Theodore L. Brooks, Sr., who was installed as the church's fifth pastor in 1988. Theodore Brooks was soon after elevated to the office of Bishop, and presently serves as the Second Presiding Bishop of the P.A.W. Inc.

Under Theodore Brooks' tenure, Beulah Heights Church has become a pillar of service and activism in the Greater New Haven community. To accommodate the growth in membership

³⁴¹The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) is a historically African American Pentecostal denomination that embraces a "oneness" over Trinitarian Christology. While it is not as large as the seven major historic denominations identified by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), it shares founding roots with the Church of God in Christ in the 1906 Azusa Street Movement. The history and development of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World is included in the following works, Morris E. Golder. *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*. Indianapolis : [s.n.], 1973. James L. Tyson. *The Early Pentecostal Revival : History of Twentieth-Century Pentecostals and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, 1901-30*. Hazelwood, MO : Word Aflame Press, 1992.; Talmadge L .French. *Early interracial oneness Pentecostalism : G. T. Haywood and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014.

and services, the church underwent an expansion, adding 240 seats to the sanctuary, new administrative offices, meeting spaces and a bookstore.

The church's growth under the tenure of Theodore Brooks has been galvanized by a revival of community concern and service inspired, in part, by the late Walter Brooks, another son of the late Bishop George Brooks, and brother to Theodore Brooks. Theodore Brooks credits Walter with helping him start BLDC. Of Walter's influence Theodore Brook's shares,

Under the leadership of the first three pastors, including my father, Beulah [Beulah Heights Church] was pretty much an introvert kind of church, in the sense that its service was about the membership. They did not reach out in a broad sense to do community social activism. They were concerned about the community, but they wanted people to come into them rather than them going out to them. When I took over the church my late brother Walter, who was very involved with social activism and with CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] and the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], he worked with me to help serve the people outside of the church. When I was inspired to pursue housing ventures to create opportunities for the people, my brother Walter came to help me. I'll never forget one day after he retired from serving as a State Representative for the Connecticut House of Representatives he came to me and said, "What are you trying to do with your building project?" I told him, "I'm getting ready to do this elderly building, this 12 unit building over here, I'm going to rehab it." And he asked me "Well how are you going to finance it?" I told him "I'm going to sign for it." And he said, "Are you crazy?" So he came in and started helping me develop the CDC and from there we proceeded to rebuild the neighborhood. (Personal communication, October 22, 2013)

As such, BLDC was birthed in 1994, beginning what would become an ongoing revitalization of the church's vicinity. The organization focused on changing the severely blighted and crime-ridden neighborhood into a safe revitalized community of choice for low-income families who formerly paid more than half their salary for absentee-owned, dilapidated rentals.

Theodore Brooks sees the attainment and rebuilding of blighted properties in the church's neighborhood as a divine conquest. Of this he says,

Right next to the church there was a three-family house. One day the owner called me and said, "I've got to sell you the house." We bought three other houses on the street and I was like, "Wow!" There were six three-unit houses down the street and an apartment building on corner of Munson Street which had twelve-units. The apartment building and one of the six units caught on fire. I was ministering in Brazil when this happened, but when I got back home we started garnishing all the houses. Right before the owners offered us the properties, I told the church that God told me he's going to give me this block. And I said, "Now there's a window of opportunity opening up and you can do one of two things. You can join me or you can get out of my way." The congregation supported me, and so we started the process of rebuilding the block. (Personal communication, October 22, 2013)

Since its inception the BLDC has redeveloped nearly 50 units of affordable housing to families and senior citizens, creating opportunities for dozens of working class families to become homeowners.

Beulah Heights Church and BLDC further serves the community through the Beulah Heights Social Integration Program (BHSIP), a component of the CDC which provides outreach to individuals who have experienced substance abuse and incarceration, equipping them with essential resources to help them obtain employment, housing, and mental health support.

Ultimately, the congregation's tremendous success through the CDC has created a platform for advocacy. Beulah Heights Church regularly holds community forums to address issues of social and political concern. Theodore Brooks and his son Elder Darrell Brooks, an ordained associate minister of the church, have been invited to sit on community boards where they have had the opportunity to address the local political structure and shape policies on behalf of economically disadvantaged families in the community.

Mission

The mission of the Beulah Heights Church through the BLDC is to transform impoverished, crime-ridden neighborhoods in New Haven, Connecticut into revitalized communities of choice, to improve residents' quality of life, and to help re-establish the concept of the family-based community. The BLDC works to reduce blighted homes in New Haven's urban areas, turning them into fully renovated affordable properties that are made available to low- and moderate-income families, making the dream of homeownership their reality. The BLDC also seeks to empower community residents by providing, or acting as a gateway to, programs and initiatives that provide educational, technical and financial assistance to repair and beautify their homes, improve their economic status, and prepare for a sustainable future.

Structure

Bishop Theodore Brooks serves in as the Chief Executive Officer of the BLDC. His son Elder Darrell Brooks, serves the BLDC as the Executive Director and Project Manager. Zeb Powell serves as the Finance Manger. Additionally, the BLDC annually employs a student intern from Yale Divinity School to seek grants to support the funding of the BLDC's initiatives. Latanya Guiont serves as the office administrator.

Site Description

The BDLC is located in the educational wing of the Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church. The Sanctuary of the church, which anchors the worship complex, seats approximately 700 people and serves as an auditorium for the BLDC's larger functions. The educational wing extends to the right of the sanctuary as a straight hallway flanked with classrooms and office

spaces. The church and educational wing are surrounded, on one side by the Waster S. Brooks Senior Housing building, and on the other side to the end of the block by homes that have been rehabilitated by the BLDC.

Functions of Community Engagement

Blighted Property Redevelopment

As the BLDC has repaired properties in the City of New Haven that had been abandoned for years, not only have they positively transformed the community aesthetically, but they have also eliminated hideouts used by gangs, drug dealers and the drug addicted, while creating homeownership opportunities for dozens of economically disadvantaged families.

Completed housing developments include:

- Orchard St. Redevelopment
 - Over \$1.3 million in development at 692, 697, and 709 Orchard Street, and 65 Henry Street, New Haven Connecticut.
- Walter S. Brooks Elderly Homes
 - 12 units of supportive senior rental housing that is subsidized by a Section 202 grant by the U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development.
- Orchard St. Townhomes
 - 20 units of attached tri-level townhomes along Orchard and Munson streets that represent over \$3 million in redevelopment of dilapidated multi-family structures

Homebuyers Initiatives

The BLDC assists potential homeowners applying to government and private programs available to help first-time homebuyers with the help they need to meet the down payment required to execute a sales contract to purchase a home.³⁴²

³⁴² These programs include the LCI (Livable City Initiative) Down Payment Assistance, CHFA (Connecticut Housing Finance Authority) Homebuyer Programs, and the Yale Homebuyer Program.

Credit Repair

The BLDC offers professional guidance and support in credit repair, partnering the Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven and Hill Development Corporation. Focusing on such topics as financial literacy, budgeting, and debt management, this not only serves to ensure a successful first-time home buying experience, but also satisfies pre-purchase counseling requirements of first-time buyer programs.

Senior Housing

The Walter S. Brooks Elderly Homes, a 12-unit senior housing facility located on the corner of Munson Street and Dixwell Avenue in New Haven, provides subsidized supportive rentals to senior citizens 65 years or older with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income.³⁴³

The renovated 1910 three-story brick structure has been converted into 12 one-bedroom units and lower-level social service space for neighborhood seniors, which includes a lounge, kitchenette, laundry room, storage space, lavatory and office space. The design of the units and common areas supports the concept of "aging in place" and handicap accessibility.³⁴⁴

Venue for Advocacy

Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC have also served as a community space to address very important social issues to include street-crime and gang violence, police brutality, urban

³⁴³ According to the United States Census, the median household income in New Haven, Connecticut from 2009-2013 was \$37,892. "Quick Facts" *United States Census* (2010) <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/09/0952000.html>, Accessed on September 2, 2015. BLDC clients must make approximately less than \$30,300 to qualify.

³⁴⁴ This building was named in commemoration of the late Walter Brooks.

education reform, and joblessness. The Church has hosted numerous funerals of underprivileged shooting victims, and city-wide debates on community issues.

Social Integration

The Beulah Heights Social Integration Program (BHSIP) provides supportive services to the chronically homeless, substance abusers, and those returning home from prison. These support services include;

Morning Manna/Soup Kitchen- Feeding program and worship service tailored to suit those with limited church experience. This program caters to the homeless, ex-offenders, and those dealing with substance abuse. Breakfasts are served on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 8:15a.m. to 8:45a.m. Lunch is served on Saturdays from 11:30a.m. to 1:00p.m.

Winter Café & Summer Academy- A component to provide resources, referrals, education, support and encouragement for ex-offenders and substance abusers

Families-For-Freedom- Supports and works in collaboration with juveniles and their families, referred by parole officers to provide successful second chance reentry into the community, and to develop stable and strong relationships with family members

Supportive Housing- provides permanent supportive housing to homeless individuals and families. This comes with a spiritual support system and educational resources that will enable the client to have their basic needs met

Funding

Over the last 20 years BLDC has funded its initiatives through the State of Connecticut Department of Community and Economic Development and through several local and municipal agencies to include the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, the City of New Haven's Livable City Initiative, the Greater New Haven Community Loan Fund, and The Home Depot Foundation.

Theories

In my examination of the BLDC I have uncovered three primary theories that serve to explain what motivates their service to the community. First, the most obvious work done by the BLDC has been the revitalization of homes and buildings. This has been accomplished with their motivation to create opportunities for people in the community to substantiate themselves through homeownership to the extent of becoming self-determined. On both sides, the BLDC directors and the new homeowners see the attainment of property as an occurrence of grace. While the latter receives the miracle of homeownership, the former is used by God to help those who would likely never own a home without their efforts and support.

Secondly, in the same spirit of making homeowners out of the formerly economically disadvantaged, the leaders of the BLDC have opened their sanctuary and offices to the community to provide a home for their voices. Theodore Brooks, and the Church and CDC leadership have been intentional about using their sacred space as meeting place where a plethora of community issues are addressed including, street crime and gang violence, issues concerning public health and safety, and local government policy. From the prominence created by the success of the CDC, the church has become a venue for the voiceless.

Lastly, from the success of the CDC, both Bishop Theodore Brooks and Elder Darrell Brooks have been invited to serve on private and municipal boards. Both men have obliged to serve, motivated by a sense of mission and sacred obligation to represent the underrepresented. I shall now explicate each of these theories and then conclude with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the BLDC as a CDC Black Church Community engagement model.

6.2 Theory (1) Making A Way out of No Way- The Miracle of Homeownership

There is a black church expression that is often spoken during testimonial periods of the worship service, where one might declare “God can make a way out of no way!” This expression speaks to the innumerable obstacles black people in the United States have faced in pursuit of civic equality through enfranchisement, equal protection under the law and unencumbered opportunities at self-development. Faced with institutional and structural racism, for generations blacks have been denied the opportunity of self-development through land acquisition and homeownership. Blacks have accumulated the least generational wealth of third generation American ethnic groups. This is due, in large part, to the fact that blacks have systematically been turned down for home mortgages and denied business loans. Presently, there are black families who are seven generations removed from slavery that have never owned a home.³⁴⁵ The BLDC has facilitated the grace through which God “makes a way out of no way” for several black families through the restoration of blighted buildings for homeownership opportunities, the restoration and repair of credit for potential homebuyers, and the restoration of neighborhood pride through positive aesthetics and safer streets.

Building Restoration for First Time Homeowners

Darrell Brooks described the overall mission of the BLDC’s homeownership program through which economically-disadvantaged families have had the opportunity to own homes in which they can take pride.

³⁴⁵ The tremendous wealth divide by race in the United States is explicated in the following works; Thomas Shapiro. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005. Thomas Shapiro, Melvin Oliver. *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*, 2ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006. Ira Katznelson. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co, 2006. David Roediger. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 2007. Conley, Dalton. *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America*, 2ed. Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2009.

The original mission was to create quality affordable decent housing. That was the initial mission. It's difficult to preach to someone who has a host of issues in their living situation and doesn't have a quality place to live. My Dad, the Bishop says, he wanted to be able to give individuals the kind of house that he was able to afford, and so we made sure that there were hardwood floors and oak stairs in the house. We wanted to make sure that there was at least a bath and a half. We wanted to make sure that each unit was not 1100 or 1200 square feet, but we wanted 1500 square feet. The average size 2 to 3 bedroom home here in New Haven is 1500 square feet, and that's what he wanted to do, because he tells the story that he used to make \$17000 a year and he wanted to purchase a house and the house was \$16000 total in its price. This was almost 40 years ago. And he was denied a mortgage, and so he promised himself then that he was going to get a house, and that if he ever got the opportunity to help others get a house that he would do it, and so that's what the original mission of the BLDC was, to help those who could not get a quality affordable home to obtain one. (Personal communication, October 2, 2013)

The BLDC has been intentional about building and renovating housing units in which homeowners can take pride. In so doing, the BLDC cuts no corner in the finishing touches on their homes. Theodore Brooks recounted a discussion with his late brother, Walter, regarding this matter,

We were building the units and looking at the design, and I said, "Why don't we get these bathtubs that are all one piece and stick them into the unit, that will save us time money and effort." And my late brother said, "Do you have tile in your bathroom?" and I said, "of course I do." He said, "Are you any better than the people we're going to move into the house?" I said, "No." Then he said, "Why can't they have tile?" So we put as best as we could everything in that house that would normally be in a house that would cost you \$200,000 or 300,000. (Personal communication, October 22, 2013)

From the outset the BLDC has built high quality homes with the best material, with the purpose of selling them to first time homeowners. With this focus, not only have they instilled a sense of pride, dignity, and accomplishment to the homeowners, but also they give these first-time homeowners a long and hard push on the road to building wealth. Darrell Brooks explains this process, thusly,

We target people who are at 60% of the median income. To give you an idea of what that means, you've got a family of four and they are making somewhere in the neighborhood of \$40,000. That's not a lot of money. So typically all of our properties that we have sold here to first time homebuyers, you would want to start at 80%, but most of the people who qualified were at 60% and they were single mothers and what we did with them was we literally built wealth. We built a product that was worth \$110,000. They purchased at \$70,000. They paid a down payment at assisted cost and so they actually walked in with a \$50,000 mortgage. Their taxes were phased in over a seven year period. When they signed on the dotted line they walked out with \$50,000 worth of equity. Because of all the grant subsidies and assistance cost, they were paying only \$50,000. So they end up paying less in their monthly homeowner rate than they were paying for rent. Some who were paying \$800 in rent were only paying \$300 in mortgage. So for these families we have created a significant amount of wealth in a short amount of time. (Personal communication, July 25, 2014)

BLDC sees property redevelopment as more of a ministry to the community than a business venture of the church. To that end, there have been times when the BLDC has taken an intentional profit loss to ensure that renting families have the opportunity to become homeowners. Amazingly, the BLDC has not suffered as a result. Theodore Brooks has concluded that the organization has been divinely preserved due to the fact that they are doing God's work. He shared,

I said it was going to be affordable, and it's going to be affordable. So for a house that is valued at \$180,000, through the homebuyers program we may sell it for \$72,500. Because it wasn't about making money, God has sustained us these many years. Because we go from year-to-year, sometimes with barely enough money to go into the next year. But it's been about giving people an opportunity who don't have an opportunity to have a piece of the American dream. To be able to walk into a place that is clean, and decent, and feel like this is mine. This is God's work. (Personal communication, November 10, 2014)

An interesting parallel to the BLDC's work to repair blighted properties to add value and pride to the neighborhood is that the organization instills value and pride to first time homebuyers who purchase these properties. The members of the community who go through the

process of becoming a BLDC first time homeowner, very often experience a spiritual renewal and a positively transformed sense of self along the way.

Credit Restoration and Personal Redemption

As the BLDC renovates properties, they also make ready a market of first time homebuyers to be prepared to purchase them. To this end, they offer resources to repair and restore people's financial status. When they are successful in both ventures, the BLDC facilitates the double miracle of restoring blighted properties in the community and preparing economically disadvantaged people to own them.

Potential homeowners, most for the first time, are taught in the BLDC credit repair program how their credit score works for or against them when borrowing money from a bank. Clients are shown steps they must take to raise and maintain a decent credit score. The BLDC, then, facilitates those in need of serious credit repair by contacting creditors and making payment arrangements on their behalf. Many of the homeowner's program clients come to see the repair of their economic power concomitantly with the divine restoration of their personhood. God has given them a second chance at self-attainment and self-fulfillment. A client of the BLDC's homeowners program described how she became financially empowered through the credit repair program and a valuable moral lesson on stewardship in the process.

Through poor choices that I had made in life after years of substance abuse, and struggling as a single mother, I had destroyed my credit. After I sobered up and started to attend the church I kept hearing about these classes that would help you to get your finances together. All I had to do was come to the classes, share my story and disclose my records and they called different creditors to make arrangements for me. For instance, I owed thousands of dollars to the electric company, the gas company and other bills on the books that I would never be able to pay. I had brutalized my credit. I justified that the

kids need this, the kids need that, back-to-school clothes. I used my bill money to buy that stuff, paying very little to my creditors in back payment. Then they'd tack on a late fee. My balance was always climbing, climbing, climbing, but Beulah Land had people to call and negotiate a deal where if I pay \$300, the \$2500 bill would be exonerated, and they did another \$3000 bill the same way. They helped me to make payment arrangements and cleaned each of the bills off, and I agreed to pay whatever it was. Whether it was \$20 or so, I did what I had to do. That took about 6-8 months. All those years of abuse, just 8 months of being steady and paying something on the back end got me caught up. It gave me a tremendous respect for credit and to be a good steward over what I have. When you owe somebody you've got to pay it back. Otherwise, it's stealing, really. I mean you pay your tithes, you done used the electric company's lights all month long and won't pay the bill, and you're tithing. It's a matter of integrity. The Lord is like, "I don't want no tithes when you stole these people stuff." So I became a good steward. I didn't want to owe anybody anything. It brought out a different type of integrity that I never had before. (Personal communication, August 5, 2013)

Many of the BLDC homeowner's program clients see the opportunity to learn and benefit from the program as providential. An early client of the BLDC homeowner's program shared how she felt that being able to close on her final mortgage payment was intricately tied to her redemption as a Christian and former substance abuser,

They had professional people come in and they taught you what to do as far as paying a little more on your mortgage, and in October I will make my last payment and I will be a homeowner free and clear! I said to the Lord, "You saved me. I'm single but I don't even care if you give me a husband. I'm free of drugs, I'm the first one in my family to raise my children and my grandchildren and the curse of substance abuse and abandonment in my bloodline is being broken with me. I am established! I have something to leave my children and grandchildren. Beyond that, I am so grateful that I can teach my children and grandchildren about the Lord. I'm just in love with this part of my life. I missed out so much. But God has been good. (Personal communication, August 5, 2013)

Another BLDC home owner's program participant described how after becoming a homeowner God continued to use people to help her to pay off her mortgage early, and with further home refurbishments.

When I first walked into my house, people were like, “You are going to live on Munson Street?” But I was just fine living in Newhallville. The Lord blessed me! I mean everything wasn’t expensive and top of the line, but I made it that way, and people blessed me. My girlfriend I went to school with, she’s a broker and she said, “Why don’t you refinance that little bit of a mortgage you are paying. You’re only paying \$500 per month. You can do more. Would you be comfortable paying 700 or 800 a month?” I said, “That’s what I was paying in rent,” and she said, “I’m going to refinance this for you for 10 years,” and she didn’t charge me anything. She did all the paperwork and they gave me money back. Then I had friends who pulled my carpet up and gave me hardwood floors. Then my girlfriend from church whose husband was a contractor did my whole basement over. So I have a full basement. It may not be in a suburb, but I feel like I could not live any finer. The way the Lord used people to fix it for me, has been awesome! Plus, if I decide to move and sell it, it is an awesome investment. It was never a thought in my mind that this could be accomplished. (Personal communication, October 2, 2013)

Just as the lives of the clients of the BLDC homeowner’s program have been revitalized through the opportunity to own a home and to be self determined, the redeveloped portions of the neighborhood have experienced revitalization through the positive change in aesthetics that the redevelopment of blighted homes has brought the community.

Neighborhood Restoration

Housing development has been much more than a business venture for the BLDC, rather, it has been one of the ways the BLDC had ministered love and concern to the community by promoting an environment in which the people could take pride and flourish. Of this Theodore Brooks said,

When we did the housing, I was always of this posture- I never understood in my entire life, why certain elements of the black community had bottles and trash all around right where we live. Why couldn't we have a clean street? Why couldn't kids go out and play safely on the front yard? Why couldn't people sit out on the front porch as they did in yesteryear and converse with one another without fear of being shot? (Personal communication, October 2, 2013)

With this, Brooks launched a mission to turn around New Haven's inner-city community through housing redevelopment and the creation of homeownership opportunities. The BLDC began on the very block where its church and offices are headquartered on Dixwell Avenue, rehabbing housing units at three homes at 692, 697, and 707 Orchard St. These homes were among several declining buildings around the church that the BLDC has turned into bright new homes. The community in the immediate vicinity of the church has seen its share of drug abuse, street crime and gang violence. Much of this has been ameliorated through the BLDC's efforts. Blighted houses, which were formerly hideouts for criminals, are now fully refurbished homes owned by hard working families.

Apart from Orchard Street, the BLDC has worked to renovate blighted houses in the most crime-ridden areas of the City of New Haven. Beyond the obvious effect of creating homeownership prospects for low income families, this has also served to restore tax revenue for the city through the occupation of formerly abandoned properties, and further to positively change the aesthetics of the poorest neighborhoods.

In 2002 the Housing Authority of New Haven (HANH) took on several abandoned lots of property near the corners of Munson Street and Dixwell Avenue. These lots remained an abandoned eyesore for years until the BLDC stepped in and purchased the property for \$49,000 with the approval of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. To reduce the price of the nine houses to be built in the future, Beulah officials asked HANH to remain the owner of the property. That would in effect have HANH continue to pay taxes while Beulah did the development deal. The result would permit Beulah to sell their houses at more affordable prices. When the BLDC is finished with the lot, nine new units of housing will be available for

purchase by first time homebuyers.³⁴⁶ Once the homes are completed, they will be occupied by first time homeowners, thus reducing crime and vagrancy in the vicinity of the lot.

Theodore Brooks, a New Haven native, remembers the city of his youth before the infusion of drugs, poverty, joblessness and crime., He dreams, through his efforts with BLDC to restore some of the black community's former glory. The BLDC has purchased a parcel of land across the street from Beulah Heights Church that Brooks would like to develop into a medical complex. He reflected, "In the 1950s when I was a kid, I'd walk from Starr Street in Newhallville down to Admiral and Dixwell. There were 15 doctors' offices. Now not a one." While the BLDC has yet to break ground on this particular venture, many in the community would echo his sentiments, that the need for business development in the Newhallville community is great.³⁴⁷ Perhaps this will be the next chapter of the BLDC story.

Through their property development, assistance with credit repair, and homeownership program, the BLDC facilitates the miracle of homeownership and has "made a way out of no way" for dozens of black inner-city families. With this investment in the community the BLDC and Beulah Heights Church have come to be a place where the community gathers to address social and political issues. Providing a venue for the voiceless emerges as a second motivation for the BLDC and Beulah Heights Church's community engagement, and shall be expounded upon in the next section.

³⁴⁶ Appel, Allan. "Beulah & Columbus Buy HANH Lots", *New Haven Independent*, April 25, 2011. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/beulah_buys/ .Accessed on September 2, 2015.

³⁴⁷ Appel, Allan. "Beilah Revamps Dixwell Block", *New Haven Independent*, July 16, 2010. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/church_revitalizes_orchard/ September 2, 2015.

6.3 Theory (2) Venue for the Voiceless

“I think the black church sees, and has seen, itself as the beacon light of salvation for African Americans in the midst of hurt, injustice, and abuse. The church has always been a place of refuge for those who have been cast aside.” - Elder Darrell Brooks

During the American Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century, black churches were at the center of activity, hosting meetings to develop protest strategies as well as morale-boosting rallies and worship services. This was a traceable phenomenon. During the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama across the Edmond Pettis Bridge to secure voting rights, Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church was at the center of activity. During the bus boycott to end segregation in Montgomery, Alabama Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was at the center of activity. During the Southern Christian Leadership Conference sponsored “Project-Confrontation” to end segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was at the center of activity.

In an analogous way, from the prominence obtained from the success of the BLDC, the Beulah Heights Church has served as a venue for the voiceless in the New Haven, Connecticut in the twenty-first century. The pulpit at Beulah Heights has been used regularly to decry street crime and gang violence at the rallies and funerals of the victims. The church also hosts lectureships and community discussions on vital social and political issues. Beulah Heights hosts the city’s largest back-to-school giveaway, blocking off the street for the safety of the children. Lastly through the Beulah Heights Social Integration Program, which combines the resources of the church and the CDC, the homeless, substance abusers, and convicted felons are brought to the church campus through feeding programs, counseling sessions and casework. A second

motivation for the community engagement of the BLDC, to provide a venue for the voiceless, shall now be explicated.

A Venue to Address Injustice

On February 3, 1993, in the dilapidated slum lord-owned building that would become the newly refurbished Walter S. Brooks Senior Building, Shirley Troutman was visiting her mother Charlene Troutman with her 7-month-old daughter Danielle. On that night, a drug-dealer with illicit financial motives walked up to a first floor window and fired 15 bullets from a stolen 9 mm semiautomatic gun into Charlene's apartment, killing the 7-month-old girl and permanently paralyzing Charlene.³⁴⁸ Baby Danielle's murder shocked a city that seemed to be growing desensitized to gun violence in the turbulent 1990s, when many American urban centers were reeling from the effects of the illegal drug trade. Outraged by the death of this most vulnerable victim, the city and state reacted. Rallies were held. The governor, outraged, invoked the incident to help pass a state law barring ex-offenders and people under protective orders from buying guns.³⁴⁹ The police chief at that time, created community policing through police substations, a mode of policing used in the city to this day that has had significant results in reducing crime. Even further, Baby Danielle's murder was a catalyst for Theodore Brooks to use the church, which was only two doors down from the murder, to effect change in the community. Brooks

³⁴⁸ Bass, Paul. "2 Decades Later, Danielle's Spirit Moves Dixwell", *New Haven Independent*, July 3, 2014. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/danielle_20_years_later/. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

³⁴⁹ Mahoney, Edmund. "Saga Of A Gun Takes Tragic Turn In 10th Year", *Hartford Courant*, March 20, 1994 http://articles.courant.com/1994-03-20/news/9403200134_1_gun-control-danielle-taft-orchard-street. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

opened the church to the family to hold a funeral for baby Danielle, raised funds for them to attend to their needs, and has maintained a relationship with them for over 20 years.³⁵⁰

I got out on the streets and I raised \$30,000, I buried the child, and I gradually gave the family the money over a period of time. I didn't want any of the money. I wasn't looking for any of the money. This was really just to bless them. (Personal communication, November 10, 2014)

The murder of Baby Danielle marked a new era for Beulah Heights, one where the church would speak out and act against the violence that had been perpetrated in the city.

Since the murder of Baby Danielle, the church has opened its doors to host the funerals of many people who have lost their lives to street violence. With this form of outreach the congregation has the opportunity to show kindness and compassion to families that are often unprepared to pay for funeral expenses, and use the victim's memorial service as an opportunity to address, and make strategies against street violence. They become, in so many words, "activist funerals." In 2014, three of the young men who were murdered in the streets of New Haven had such a service. Durrell Patrick Law was murdered on January 20. Taijohn Washington was murdered on March 24. Torrence Gamble as murdered on April 3. At the funeral for Washington, Theodore Brooks called for a two-week moratorium on street crime.

How many times are we going to have these memorial services for some young person whose life was cut down way too soon, only to leave the memorial service to return to business as usual. We cannot let Taijohn's death be in vain. So I want to make a deal with you. Let's pull back from any illegal activities between now and Easter. Let's have two weeks of peace. No shooting, no violence, no beating, no selling of drugs. (Observed, April 2, 2014)

³⁵⁰ Bass, Paul. "2 Decades Later, Danielle's Spirit Moves Dixwell", *New Haven Independent*, July 3, 2014.

Brooks followed up his idea for a moratorium with a prayer vigil and a community conversation about how to relieve the city of street crime and gun violence held the Friday following the funeral.

On the first night of April night in 2014, Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC hosted the prayer vigil. Approximately 250 people from the community gathered in Beulah's sanctuary to mourn those who lost their lives to violence and to pray for the community. Throughout the prayer visual images of the happier moments of Washington and other victims flashed on two large projector screens. The climax of the event was an address by Theodore Brooks, in which he touched on a number of topics including forgiveness, love and justice. He declared, "Ultimately there is a God that judges everyone, even if they get away with bad deeds in life." He reiterated the moratorium on violence shared at Washington's funeral and encouraged the crowd to leave vengeance in God's hands and to trust God to strengthen them as they continue their lives without their loved ones. True to BLDC fashion attendees were made aware of resources for free counseling. (Observed, April 4, 2014)

A Venue to Address Community Issues

Beyond street violence, Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC, often in tandem with Yale University and the City of New Haven, has hosted lectures and community conversations to address a variety of social and political issues. For example, in September of 2013, the church hosted the kick off of an initiative called, "Get Healthy Connecticut." This initiative, led by health advocates at Yale University and the City of New Haven challenged city residents to lose a collective 375,000 pounds over a two-year period. Awareness of obesity and related health

issues are most pertinent to urban American communities.³⁵¹ A series of speakers at the event pointed out the complex web of biology, local economics, public policy, crime and cultural traditions that affect obesity rates. Proximity to fresh vegetables and fruit is a big factor in poor nutrition, as some neighborhoods in the city are virtual food deserts.³⁵² Also identified as a major hindrance to physical exercise in the community, was the fear of personal safety to simply go outside to walk about the block. The event concluded with an empowering tone undergirded by the idea that the city and its neighborhoods could bring about positive change for both their health and safety, if they had the civic will, and organization to do so. (Observed, September 25, 2013)

Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC have also reached out to the Hispanic community to host forums on immigration. At one event Dr. Kenneth Brown, a diversity training consultant argued that the concept of race had been used throughout American history by those in power to pit immigrants against each other and against blacks for the purposes of continued economic exploitation. His thesis was juxtaposed by a local anti-illegal-immigration activist, Alan Felder, who argued undocumented immigrants are contributing to the marginalization of African-Americans by illegally taking jobs and working below the minimum wage.³⁵³

³⁵¹ According to the Center for Disease Control 37.9% of non-Hispanic black or African American men 20 years and over were obese between 2009-2012. 57.5% of non-Hispanic black or African American women 20 years and over were obese during the same period. *Center for Disease Control*. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/black-health.htm>. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

³⁵² The United State Department of Agriculture defines the “Food Desert” phenomenon thusly, “Food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.” *United States Department of Agriculture*. http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/242675/ap036_1_.pdf. Accessed on September 8, 2015.

³⁵³ MacMillian, Thomas, “Crabs in a Basket? Group Says No””, *New Haven Independent*. March 25, 2009. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/crabs_in_a_basket_group_says_no/. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

Theodore Brooks, chimed in on the debate and recalled a time when he hired a building contractor to do work for the BLDC. This contractor employed a crew of Brazilian immigrants who worked around the clock. To his horror, Brooks realized the men were being exploited. He refused to work with that contractor in the future. Brown concluded at the event, “This exploitation of immigrants will continue as long as African-Americans don’t work with immigrants to secure better working conditions for both groups.”³⁵⁴

Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC has also opened their doors to the children of the community. Annually the BLDC hosts a back-to-school event where young boys get free haircuts, and children are given clothes and school supplies on the church grounds. The event also features music, free games and hot dogs. Many single parents, and grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, attend the event to partake of the resources, some with as many as four or five children. In 2014, the BLDC gave out over 500 backpacks, and partnered with Transformerz Barbershop, a local barbershop in the community, to give 36 haircuts. Brooks said of the event,

For us, this is about giving kids the tools they need for a successful school year. These are tough times. I think even middle-class families are struggling. A number of families we serve have struggled to make ends meet. We wanted to help alleviate some of the burden. (Personal communication, August 22, 2014)

What makes the BLDC’s back-to-school event the most attended of its kind in the city is that it is hosted on-site in the churchyard, where the street is blocked off for the entire day. Of this, one parent shared, “They are really enjoying themselves. I usually keep the kids in the house and in my yard, but with this, with the road blocked off, they can enjoy the day.” (Personal communication, August 22, 2014)

³⁵⁴ Ibidem.

What the BLDC does for the children, in blocking off the street during the annual back-to-school event to ensure their safety, they also attempt to do for the community's marginalized population through the Beulah Heights Social Program. That is, they attempt to provide a safe space for those who are struggling to survive, to be fed, inspired and to receive some life direction .

A Venue for the Marginalized

Seeing the opportunity to address the immediate needs of the most destitute members of the community, Theodore Brooks used the combined resources of BHC and the BLDC to create the Beulah Heights Social Integration program (BHSIP). Darrell Brooks elaborated on the creation of the program:

With the Social Integration Program, the whole idea was to really integrate those who are coming back from prison or those who have found themselves homeless for a variety of reasons, whether they were veterans and found themselves suffering from PTSD or substance abusers, the goal was to bring people to the church, to feed them, give them a worship experience, and provide some other services to help them to get back to where they were in life, to change their lot, so to speak. This is a primary focus for ministry. It's difficult to tell somebody Jesus saves when they have a host of other issues that prevent them from living a quality life. Prison reentry, homelessness and substance abuse are issues particular to our community because the numbers are significant among peoples of color who are dealing with these issues. The church has to take on these issues. (Personal communication, July 25, 2014)

Given all of the above, the BHSIP was founded with the mission to “provide diverse and creative support services to individuals throughout the City of New Haven to ensure each individual has the opportunity to reach their potential. [As well as] to provide services that are nontraditional

during high-risk hours and days, working with the chronically homeless, ex-offenders, and drug-addicted individuals to ensure that they receive social and spiritual support.”³⁵⁵

The church serves as the venue for a number of programs offered through the BHSIP including its feeding programs, support sessions with juvenile offenders and their families, and counseling and teaching sessions for ex-offenders and substance abusers. Through BSHIP scores of city residents and families have received assistance they would have been otherwise unable to afford.

In the many fore mentioned ways Beulah Heights and the BLDC opens their doors to receive people from all walks of life to address their social and political needs. The community is given a place to vent their many frustrations and to strategize for a better tomorrow. The community work done by these institutions, however, does not conclude with redevelopment projects and offering safe space for community forums. Bishop Theodore Brooks and Elder Darrell Brooks, the principal leaders of the BLDC, sit on a number of community and civic boards where they represent the rights and interests of the community’s underserved. To represent the community in seats of power is a powerful motivation of the BLDC leaders to engage the community. This shall now be explicated.

6.4 Theory (3) Taking a Seat at The Table

There is a Negro Spiritual titled “I’m Going to Sit at the Welcome Table One of These Days.” The double entendre of this song reflected the longing of those enslaved to be received in

³⁵⁵ “Mission Statement”, *Beulah Heights Social Integration Program*. <http://www.bhsip.org/mission-statement>, Accessed on September 2, 2015.

heaven when they died, but also to be received as an equal participant and benefactor in the building of America. This “seat at the table” has been somewhat granted in a representative way to black preachers. Throughout the existence of the Black Church, the black preacher has served as ambassador to the larger society.³⁵⁶ For example, at the turn of the nineteenth century, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church’s Richard Allen represented Philadelphia’s Black community to city officials. Abyssinian Baptist Church’s Adam Clayton Powell represented Harlem, New York as a United States Congressman from 1945-1971. Bright Hope Baptist Church’s William H. Gray represented Pennsylvania’s second congressional district from 1979-1991, rising to the rank of House Majority Whip. Black preachers across the country have and do serve in a number of local, state and national capacities and have used their offices and positions to improve the plight of poor and working class urban families. So the fact that both Bishop Theodore Brooks and Elder Darrell Brooks serve on local municipal boards and community foundations to advocate for justice and secure resources for New Haven’s inner-city community places them squarely in the tradition of black church preachers.

The success of the BLDC in New Haven’s inner-city community has caused both Theodore and Darrell Brooks to be invited to serve on the boards of powerful local organizations. In particular, Theodore Brooks is a member of the prestigious Yale-New Haven Hospital Trustee Board and Medical Committee, a former member of the City of New Haven’s

³⁵⁶ Black preachers have had the burden of carrying out a multiplicity of roles in the attempt to serve the spiritual and social needs of congregations of the underserved population. As community ambassadors to the larger society, black preachers have represented the interests of their congregants and community to bodies of government, and other powerful entities. This phenomenon is expanded in the following works, Michael Dash, Christine Chapman. *The Shape of Zion : Leadership and Life in Black Churches.*; Cleveland , OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003. Charles Hamilton. *The Black Preacher in America.* New York, NY: Morrow, 1972. H. Beecher Hicks. *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows.* Valley Forge, PA : Judson Press, 1977. James Henry Harris. *The Courage to Lead: Leadership in the African American Urban Church.* Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. James Henry Harris. *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective.* Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1991. Clarence Taylor. *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality From Jim Crow to the Twenty-First Century.* New York, NY : Routledge, 2002.

Board of Police Commissioners, and the City of New Haven's Police and Fire Pension Board. Darrell Brooks has served on the Executive Board of the Community Action Agency of New Haven. In his secular profession as a New Haven firefighter, Darrell Brooks also sits on the Executive Board of the New Haven Firebirds, a fraternal and activist organization of Black and Hispanic firefighters. Both, Theodore and Darrell Brooks, see their occupation of seats on these boards as a part of their divine vocation to address the needs of those oppressed in the social structure. Darrell surmised

Service has to be outside of the four walls of the church in various capacities, whether its sitting on a foundation, sitting on nonprofit boards, being a part of the elected infrastructure, or sitting on city council. The world, or the secular world, as it is called from the church perspective needs to see people of faith bring their convictions and values into a system that often times will look down on those that are the "least of these" and so Jesus says, "what you do to the least of these you've done unto me." We have a moral responsibility, we have a God-given responsibility to do more than just serve on the usher's ministry, or serve dinner in the church fellowship hall. We have a greater responsibility to go out and impact people's lives where they are. (Personal communication, October 2, 2013)

A third motivation for the community engagement done, in particular, by the leadership of the BLDC, is to use their seat at tables of power and influence to improve the lives of God's "looked-over" children. They have accomplished this in two primary ways. They have used their influence to provide resources for the oppressed, and to decry instances of violence and injustice on the local level.

Crumbs From the Table

Sitting on various civic and nonprofit boards has afforded both Theodore and Darrell Brooks the opportunity to help members of their church, BLDC clients, and the community in a number of ways. From these positions, they are often the first to hear about job openings,

educational opportunities, and new resources being introduced to the city through various government grants and charitable organizations. By no means are these roles a part of their secular lives. This is ministry to Theodore and Darrell Brooks. They see the facilitation of resources to the oppressed as an opportunity to live the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Of this Darrell shares,

One of the difficult challenges that I have always had is that it is difficult to preach the Gospel that Jesus saves, to an individual who has a home where the roof is leaking, or where there are drafty windows. Or they can't pay the heat bill and they are heating their house with a gas oven that's emitting carbon monoxide that if enough of it builds up, nobody in the house will wake up. Or there is lead, so much so, in the house that the dust that gets generated produces lead poisoning and their children have no chance to have a productive and meaningful life because their children have been so inundated with lead poisoning that it has altered their ability to learn. These people have all of these conditions, but I'm going to preach the Gospel that Jesus saves, and when they go home they go back to those same deplorable conditions. This is why the Gospel is more than just Jesus saves. Its more than just sitting in a four-walled auditorium and listening to the choir, hearing a sermon, and then we go back home to these same conditions. If I believe that God came that all men might have the right to the tree of life than I have a responsibility to not just preach my Gospel that Jesus saves, but I have a responsibility to change the kind of deplorable conditions that people live in and to me that is a God-given responsibility. And if I have to sit on a board to do it, then so be it. I am committed to this Gospel. (Personal communication, October 2, 2013)

During his tenure on the Executive Board of the Community Action Agency of New Haven, Darrell was able to help a number of people in the community through difficult times.³⁵⁷ The agency provides a number of support services and resources to urban families. A most vital resource provided, energy assistance, has been crucial for families struggling to endure New Haven's icy winter months. Of the people he was able to help in the community, Darrell shared

When I was on the board of the Community Action Agency. Someone would come to me and say I'm having difficulty paying this bill, or my gas is getting ready to be turned off.

³⁵⁷ The programs and resources of the Community Action Agency of New Haven may be accessed at their website: <http://www.caanh.net>. Accessed on September 5, 2015.

To be able to have information or access to information, to be able to steer people to the right resources was vocation affirming. I was able to help out a number of people who were here in the church and in the community, who I knew was having trouble making ends meet. I would tell them go down and see this or that individual and they would come back to me so excited and they would say thank you! (Personal communication, October 2, 2013)

Beyond the administration of resources, Theodore and Darrell Brooks have used their positions of influence to correct peoples ill-informed and prejudiced assumptions of the oppressed and the marginalized. Those in the power structure who would blame the oppressed for their circumstances, to the denial of inequities in the social structure, would mete out resources in a way that was inadequate and demeaning. Of this Theodore Brooks shared,

The powers that be have a tendency to look down at folks and say you made a bad choice, you made a bad decision and that's why you are here. Often times they will provide services in a way that they are not very empathetic. They provide it in a way where they look down on folks. For example, they will make the resources available, but they'll send them on the merry-go-round instead making it accessible, or telling them how to change their lives in simple steps from step 1-10 or A-Z. When people of faith are not present, they tend to think this way. Many are not empathetic. They do not think, if it had not been for the Grace of God, there go I. (Personal communication, October 22, 2013)

By affirming the human dignity of the oppressed at tables of influence Theodore and Darrell Brooks do theological work on the community boards on which they serve. They are making the same theological assertion that gave birth to the black church, that all people, without regard to race or creed are equal under God.

Raising Accountability at the Table

In his position on the Board of Police Commissioners for the City of New Haven, Theodore Brooks held the department accountable for safer streets, and spoke against

discrimination in the departments hiring practices. In the Fall of 2015, Darrell Brooks had the opportunity to use his position on the Executive Board of the New Haven Firebirds to denounce an officer's use of a racial slur and to speak to the concern his behavior brought to the larger community.³⁵⁸ Theodore and Darrell Brooks have used their positions of influence to decry instances of violence and injustice in the City of New Haven.

From the outset, Theodore Brooks used his position on Board of Police Commissioners to ensure that the department maintained fair hiring practices. For example, in October of 2006, Theodore Brooks raised concerns about a change in the selection process for police. The new hiring procedure required candidates to be scored on a ranked list, which gave less discretion to the commissioners in the process. Whereas previously the commissioners had the opportunity to interview candidates in the actual selection process, under the new process the commissioners were presented with a ranked list of selected candidates and would have the option to choose one out of three for each position down the list of vacancies, without interviews. Brooks's concern, along with Commissioners Richard Epstein and Evelise Ribiero, was that historically, the Police Commissioners had, in a representative way, served as a community filter in the police hiring process. Through the interviews the commissioners were able to get a feel for applicants who had the best interests of the community at heart. A compromise that resulted from this meeting was that the examining company Bruce Davey and Associates would invite one of the commissioners to police the paneling training to ascertain and secure the fairness of the process. At the meeting Brooks raised further concerns about the tests involved in the new hiring process. He expressed his opinion that tests are often skewed by the nature of the background of the

³⁵⁸ The Firebirds is a local organization of Black and Hispanic fire fighters. Their organization maintains a web address at www.newhavenfirebirds.com. Accessed on September 5, 2015

person who designs the questions, which could alienate people from other cultures. He said further

I just have great concerns that tests on a normal basis are written upon someone's thinking process, what they experience, their historical past. When the testing is done, there needs to be an understanding of different cultures. Being a police officer is a very difficult job, and when you put these guys on the street and their psyche is not right, that goes to their head — power, and that is a dangerous thing because ultimately, they are going to abuse that power.³⁵⁹

At a follow-up meeting in November of 2006, Brooks invited Dr. Arnold Holzman, a psychologist to discuss the psychological component of the exam administered to police officer applicants. In particular, the invitation to Holzman was in response to concerns raised by Commissioners Evelise Ribeiro and Brooks about whether the test discriminates across cultures, and could therefore be used to eliminate Blacks and Hispanics from the hiring process. Holzman assured the board that the standardized procedure offers an equal assessment across the board, claiming, "Tests of personality are not of what you know but more of who you are. The results are very stable in terms of what the individual is going to look like."³⁶⁰

During his time as a police commissioner, Theodore Brooks also held officers accountable to do what they could to make inner city communities a safer place to live. At a

³⁵⁹ Katie DeWitt. "Commissioners Cast Wary Eye on New Hiring Process", *New Haven Independent*, October 10, 2006. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/commissioners_cast_wary_eye_on_new_hiring_process/. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

³⁶⁰ Holzman, of Behavioral Health Consultants, explained that the test is meant to identify candidates who may have psychological difficulties in the position of police officer. Katie Dewitt. "Brooks Looks for 'Loony' Protection in Cop Hiring". *New Haven Independent*, November 8, 2006. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/brooks_looks_for_loony_protection_in_cop_hiring/. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

monthly Police Commissioner meeting on Monday January 12, 2010, Theodore Brooks bluntly asked then-Police Chief James Lewis, what his plan was to curb the street violence involving young African American men in the city. “Seven or eight young black men were killed recently. None of the murders have been solved. We have young black men on a rampage, frankly, and residents aren’t talking to police or coming forward with information.” With this, Chief Lewis highlighted the problem of reentry in the city, resulting in felons with guns living in the community. Additionally he noted that evidence in street murders can be difficult to obtain, because it is almost always in some way compromised.

In pursuit of safer streets, however, Chief Lewis noted that he had assigned police officers to work with community leaders in the Newhallville neighborhood. He assigned 43 detectives to visit several registered addresses for a roundup of all criminal warrants from which nine people were taken into custody. Beyond this the operation gave officers an opportunity to speak with residents, to hand out business cards, and let neighbors know that they were looking to solve the murders. Brooks urged the department to remain proactive in promoting safer streets, noting that a key element in this would be developing continuing strong relationships between the community and the department.³⁶¹

A most vital program to reduce street crime and gun violence in the City of New Haven, during Theodore Brook’s tenure as a Police Commissioner, was the gun buyback program. At a set time and venue, any member of the community could come and turn in a gun whether it was obtained legally or not- no questions asked- in exchange for gift certificates to local businesses. According to a city press release, guns in working order earned one \$100 gift card, while assault

³⁶¹MacMillan, “Thomas. Fresh Leads, Old Warrants”, New Haven Independent, January 13, 2013. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/looking_for_fresh_leads_police_serve_old_warrants/. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

weapons and sawed-off shotguns earned two \$100 gift cards. While the gun buyback program is not a panacea to alleviate street crime and gun violence it does have the potential effect of getting some illegal guns off the street, raising the level of awareness of misappropriated guns in the community, and reminding lawful gun owners to store their weapons safely. At a gun buyback day in July of 2009 at the Charles Street police substation, just two blocks away from Beulah Heights Church, Theodore Brooks met with the police to buy back guns. There, he lauded the police department for the gun buyback initiative. Of the program he said, “It makes the people in the community understand that the chief and the department are doing everything they can to make our streets safe, and that is a level of comfort that’s really needed in our city.”³⁶²

Even after his tenure on the Board of Police Commissioners, Theodore Brooks continued to have a moral influence over the department. In February of 2014, Brooks and other clergy met with the City of New Haven’s current Police Chief Dean Esserman to discuss a small, but explosive scandal where an unidentified police officer used a racial epithet over the New Haven police airwaves. The “N-word” was heard and reported by 12 different people in the department on December 30, 2014. What prompted the February 2014 meeting by clergy with the police chief was the seemingly deliberate response of the police department in identifying the speaker of the racial slur in order to discipline this person, in an effort to demonstrate intolerance of prejudice and discrimination.

³⁶² Tuhus Melinda. “Bring Back Your Guns”, New Independent, July 16, 2006. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/bring_your_guns/. Accessed on September 2, 2015

Theodore Brooks, the spokesperson on behalf of the clergymen let the local media know, “They still don’t know who did this and where this came from. They are working with the FBI and the chief is conducting a thorough investigation.”³⁶³

In a similar event, Darrell Brooks, most recently had the opportunity to use his position as a firefighter for the City of New Haven to denounce a racist social media post by a leading civil servant. In a Facebook Group called “English and Proud” under a story titled, “Wake up England! Chased by Muslims with Machetes, South Yorkshire Police Don’t Want to Know!” City of New Haven Fire Department Lieutenant Kevin Owens posted the comment, “in the U.S. we call them [N-word].” Owens was immediately suspended for 15 days while city officials debated his future with the department beyond the suspension. Darrell Brooks was front and center at a press conference of the New Haven Firebirds. Brooks, who finished the fire department’s academy with Owens, shared his shock that Owens would express such a racist sentiment. This raised concern as to who else in the department might be prejudice against ethnic minorities.

I’d never heard him use that word. We’ve had conversations and so, for him to use that word in the context that he used it on social media says to me that it was a part of him in his heart and the fabric of who he is. [As firefighters] we have to go into your homes. We have to serve your wives, your husbands, your children at a very critical time. When you call the fire department you call because of a crisis. When we show up we have to do so without regard to race, religion or any other issue.³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Register Staff. “New Haven Clergy Meet with Police Chief on Issue of Racial Epithet Used on Department Radio”, *New Haven Register*, February 4, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/government-and-politics/20140204/new-haven-clergy-meet-with-police-chief-on-issue-of-racial-epithet-used-on-department-radio>. Accessed on August 1, 2015.

Flynn, Ryan. “New Haven fire lieutenant suspended for 15 days for allegedly posting racial epithet on Facebook”, *New Haven Register*. September 5, 2015. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20150902/new-haven-fire-lieutenant-suspended-for-15-days-for-allegedly-posting-racial-epithet-on-facebook>. Accessed on September 2, 2015.

Owens never owned or denied the deleted post. However screenshots were captured and shared around the department, to show his culpability. While the Firebirds did not call for Owens termination, they did recommend to the City of New Haven that the he should lose his rank. For many others in the community a simple demotion was not enough. Sensing the pressure, Owens opted to retire from the fire department, two weeks before the Board of Fire Commissioners was to determine his continued status with the department.³⁶⁵

These examples demonstrate the ways in which Theodore and Darrell have used their seat at tables of power and influence to address the rights and interests of the underserved within the community. They see this activity as a vital part of their vocation as Christian ministers. In fulfilling this role they are reminiscent of the clergypersons who have represented black churches and communities to the larger society since the time of slavery. I shall now assess the functions and motivations of the community engagement work of the BLDC by the criteria for continuing the liberation mission of the black churches, as outlined and explained in section 3.5

Section 6.5- The BLDC and Evaluative Criteria from Black Theology for BCCE

The black churches and religious organizations must be politically aware and educated concerning the adverse effects of oppressive social structures.

³⁶⁵ Flynn, Ryan. "New New Haven Fire lieutenant accused of posting racial slur files for retirement", *New Haven Register*. September 25, 2015. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20150902/new-haven-fire-lieutenant-suspended-for-15-days-for-allegedly-posting-racial-epithet-on-facebook>. Accessed on September 25, 2015.

Certainly, the data demonstrates that the BLDC is aware of the effects of a failing economy and the need for financial empowerment in its marginalized community. To address this, the organization has attempted to bring about positive change through the redevelopment of several blighted properties in the community and has created educational opportunities where people may learn about finance and the credit system, ultimately repairing their credit and obtaining a mortgage for a home.

The BLDC's attempt to effect positive change in the community through property redevelopment has only been partially effective. As people have taken up residence in the redeveloped homes, gang members and drug addicts can no longer use the formerly blighted buildings as hideouts. Additionally, the aesthetics of the neighborhood become more pleasant.

The redevelopments, however, have not resolved the issue of street crime. Occasional acts of crime and violence still occur in the vicinity of BLDC offices and redevelopments. For example, in January of 2013, the cash register clerk of the Orchard Street Market, one block away from the BLDC and Beulah Heights Church, was murdered in cold blood in a botched robbery at 11:00a.m. in the morning. A neighborhood resident speaking on the proximity of the shooting to the church and the redevelopments noted, "You would never think it would happen on this block."³⁶⁶ But it did.

Like the CCC, the BLDC could potentially be more effective if they recognized the connection to joblessness with street crime. The grants that they obtain from the government and

³⁶⁶ Scinto, Richard. "New Haven Police: Orchard Market clerk fatally shot in possible robbery attempt", January 2, 2013. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20130122/new-haven-police-orchard-market-clerk-fatally-shot-in-possible-robbery-attempt-map>. Accessed on September 2, 2015

private entities could be used to create jobs for people in the community, as an additional avenue to address crime and violence to property redevelopment.

The black churches and religious organizations have a moral obligation to speak out against injustice.

The BLDC takes a conciliatory approach to advocate against social injustice, as the leaders of the organization seek to occupy executive seats on civic boards and local enterprises to effect change from “within” the system. In this capacity they have been in place to hold the city accountable for prejudicial policies and to challenge unfair hiring practices. With this approach, however, Theodore and Darrel Brooks may risk losing the objectivity necessary to be critical of decisions made by the boards on which they sit. Their approach to fight injustice in the system from within raises the question; to what extent can one be critical of a table they have help to set?

The data further demonstrates that as they have served as a venue for the voiceless, the BLDC and Beulah Heights Church have opened their doors on numerous occasions to the community to address a plethora of social and political issues from street violence to social policy. There was, however, no ongoing program where resources were used to disseminate information to organize and act against social injustice on a consistent basis to be observed.

The outreach programs of black churches and religious organizations must affirm human flourishing, as such, these institutions must be aware of the immediate needs of its local constituents.

A reoccurring theme while researching the BLDC was that the group’s community engagement agents felt the obligation to address temporal as well as spiritual needs, and that

without addressing temporal needs, attempting to address spiritual needs is futile. So along with prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel, Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC endeavors to offer programs and resources that promote human flourishing through their economic empowerment programs and their social integration programs to address the needs of the homeless and those reentering society from prison. The immediate needs of members of the community have been addressed through these services.

The black churches and religious organizations must be willing to combine with other organizations when necessary to fight oppression.

While there are models of CDCs that are maintained by a cooperation of different churches,³⁶⁷ the BLDC is independently maintained by the Beulah Heights Church. The BLDC has been effective in transforming the vicinity of the church, and has recently branched out to other areas of the community. It must be observed, however, that there are several churches in the immediate area of Beulah Heights Church, and in the Newhallville community with whom potential partnerships could have been forged to effect broader change in the community.³⁶⁸ This leaves one to wonder, how much more effective the CDC model would be in transforming the Newhallville community if it were maintained by a cooperation of churches, rather than a single independent congregation. Perhaps the work of the BLDC could be expanded throughout the community through a cooperative network of local churches to broaden neighborhood development.

³⁶⁷ This is discussed in section 2.6

³⁶⁸ Potential partnerships could have been made with the following independent black congregations, which are within three city blocks of the Beulah Heights Church and BLDC offices: St. Matthews Free Will Baptist Church, Mount Gideon Faith Fellowship, Trinity Temple Church of God in Christ, Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, Community Baptist Church, and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious institutions must use their funds in ways that promote community uplift.

Certainly, since its inception, the BLDC has funneled millions of dollars in grants to the community to provide housing and educational opportunities. In this way, the organization has used their funds to promote uplift for the church's immediate community. A weakness of the BLDC's engagement to the community, however, has been the creation of an oasis effect in its developments, as the BLDC has purchased and transformed all of the properties that immediately surround the church, removing the blight, and placing the redeveloped homes in to the hands of proud homeowners. This criticism may be tempered by the fact that the BLDC plans to redevelop blighted properties in other sections of Newhallville and Greater New Haven.³⁶⁹

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious organizations must promote equality of all people

Although the particular social justice causes of women, the LGBT community and other ethnic and religious minorities were not a primary focus of this particular BCCE model, the resources offered by the BLDC were extended to the entire community at large. While it might have been tempting to fall into the trap of primarily helping parishioners of Beulah Heights Church, Theodore Brooks has been intentional about casting a broad net to those the BLDC has served. In fact, in the first two rounds of developments only two families from the congregation became clients. (Personal communication, November 10, 2014)

³⁶⁹ At the Close of 2015 the BLDC was finalizing a deal with the town of Hamden to develop a section of the south side of town, which is adjacent to New Haven's Newhallville neighborhood.

Additionally, the BLDC's other grant-funded resources, such as the credit repair process and the social integration program are announced in the local media, so that the community at large could be informed and choose to participate. Even in the cases where there are grant stipulations that require open invitations for services, it is still the volition of the BLDC agents to choose to apply and administer these grants indiscriminately.

In the next chapter I shall examine the First Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut, U.S.A. as a local example of the megachurch initiatives model of black church community engagement.

Chapter 7: The First Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut, U.S.A.: A Megachurch Model of Black Church Community Engagement

7.1 Introduction

The First Cathedral (FC), located at 1151 Blue Hills Avenue, Bloomfield, Connecticut, U.S.A. is a megachurch with a predominantly black membership, led by Archbishop Leroy Bailey Jr. The FC has reached out to the surrounding community, which includes nearby inner city Hartford where it was based for the first 30 years of the congregation's existence, to serve in numerous ways to improve the lives of families and individuals.³⁷⁰ The community engagement activities of this institution will serve as the focus of this chapter to ascertain the motives of BCCE through the megachurch initiatives model.

Three primary theories have been generated from this study to explain the community engagement motives of FC parishioners and volunteers. The first theory is that the FC serves as an example of the power of cooperative economics among Black Americans. The FC, in its partnerships and transactions with major institutions and municipalities, wields power like no other ethnic-minority controlled institution in the region. Although this level of community engagement is largely symbolic, it is quite meaningful and empowering to the band of working class families from the North End of Hartford who built FC. The second theory of what motivates the FC's service to the community is the creation of empowering social connections. The worship at the FC offers more than an experience with the transcendent. On a Sunday

³⁷⁰ Like many American cities, Hartford, has had its share of struggles with poverty and crime. For example, in 2013 35% of Hartford's citizens lived below the poverty line and 13% of adults were chronically unemployed- <http://www.courant.com/opinion/editorials/hc-ed-where-is-hartford-datavise-20150123-story.html>. "Where is Hartford Datavise", *Hartford, Courant*. Accessed on December 2, 2015. Additionally, as of September 1, 2015, Hartford, Connecticut had more homicides than any city in New England, surpassing Boston and Springfield in Massachusetts, and Bridgeport and New Haven in Connecticut, staining the city with a homicide per capita rate of 19. "Hartford Shootings", *Hartford Courant*. <http://www.courant.com/breaking-news/hc-hartford-shootings-0902-20150901-story.html>. *Hartford Courant*. Accessed on December 2, 2015.

morning and throughout the week, the underserved can get connected to a multiplicity of resources that include connections to jobs, legal representation, cars, and utility payments. A third and final theory emerged from my research of what motivates the services of the FC to the community. The church operates as a training ground for those who would serve as foot soldiers on the mission field in the local community. Scores of associate ministers are trained through regular ministry rotations, and are then joined by deacons, and volunteering parishioners. They are assigned to serve at prisons, homeless shelters, convalescent homes, and in the streets of the North End of Hartford to share the Gospel and bring provisional tools to help people improve their lives.

Before explicating the theories uncovered as to what motivates their service, I shall discuss the organization's history, give a site description, and share the church's mission. I will explain the leadership structure for community outreach, identify major church functions involving community engagement, and share how the church funds its initiatives. Finally, I will discuss the extent to which the FC may be deemed a "black church."

History

Because the FC's development as a megachurch occurred solely under the tenure of Leroy Bailey Jr., the church's history and growth is intricately tied to Bailey's personal history and development as a preacher. Therefore, both stories are interwoven here.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ Bailey's biographical information is drawn from the following sources: LeRoy Bailey. *A Solid Foundation*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2003. LeRoy Bailey. "Revitalization of the Church School: Stage 1". D.Min. Thesis. Hartford Seminary, 1982. Gerald Renner. "New Chapter For Pastor And Church." *The Hartford Courant*, September 5, 1998. http://articles.courant.com/1998-09-05/news/9809050241_1_bailey-s-mother-leroy-pastor-and-church. Accessed on November 17, 2015. Bill Ryan. "A Megachurch Takes Shape in Bloomfield." *The New York Times*. December 12, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/13/nyregion/a-megachurch-takes-shape-in-bloomfield.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed on Dec 2, 2015. Personal Communications on November 2, 2014; January 25, 2015; and July 30, 2015.

The Making of a Charismatic Preacher

LeRoy Bailey Jr. was born April 25, 1946 in Memphis, Tennessee. He is the middle child of three born to LeRoy Bailey, Sr., a steel technician, and Vernada Breathett-Bailey, the organist and secretary of the Golden Leaf Missionary Baptist Church. Bailey's parents divorced when he was only three years old, with his mother retaining full custody of all three children. Growing up in the Golden Leaf Church, Bailey turned to his pastor, the Reverend Leander Hamblin as his father figure.

Reverend Hamblin was a charismatic preacher who traveled the country as an evangelist and a revivalist, while also filling the pulpit at Golden Leaf Church. Reverend Hamblin and his wife, who had no children of their own, took Bailey in as a surrogate son. Aware of Vernada Bailey's difficulty after the divorce, Hamblin arranged for LeRoy to spend every weekend with him. In these early years, Hamblin mentored Bailey for the ministry, allowing him to sit in the pulpit, and recite the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer from the lectern.

It was not long before Hamblin's charisma began to rub off on Bailey. On June 18, 1956 at the age of ten, Leroy Bailey Jr. preached his initial sermon. The young preacher's notoriety spread in the city of Memphis and around the country as Hamblin brought him along on the revival circuit when he had time off from school. By the time Bailey graduated from Melrose High School in 1964, he had been promoted to Assistant Pastor at the Golden Leaf Church.

Bailey continued preaching during his undergraduate studies at American Baptist College in Nashville Tennessee, and furthered his preparation for the ministry at the Howard University School of Divinity. After earning the Master of Divinity degree, Bailey began to look for a

church of his own. In his search, he was told of a congregation that had recently split from a mother church in Hartford, Connecticut that was looking for a new pastor.

1st Baptist Church

The FC was founded as the “1st Baptist Church of Hartford, Connecticut on April 12, 1968 by Reverend Edward R. King and approximately 100 charter members. The Church was founded from a congregational schism, as the charter members followed Reverend King after his immediate departure from the Hopewell Baptist Church, founded in 1928.³⁷² The name “1st Baptist Church,” was not an indication of the denominational start in the city of Hartford, but rather as a place-holder name for the congregation’s official incorporation, as five historically black Baptist congregations and two other white congregations with the name “First Baptist Church” preceded its founding in the nearly 400 year old city of Hartford. In 1977, the church officially registered as “The First Baptist Church of Hartford.”

Reverend King left the church within two years of its founding, leaving the congregation to look for a new pastor. Bailey applied for the position, but was not well received by the aging group, as he was only 25 years old and unmarried. They were soon won over, however by his energetic preaching and charisma. Bailey became the congregation’s senior Pastor in 1971 and his tenure has continued to the present.

³⁷² The History of First Cathedral is drawn from the following sources: LeRoy Bailey. *A Solid Foundation*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2003. LeRoy Bailey. “*Revitalization of the Church School: Stage I*”. D.Min. Thesis. Hartford Seminary, 1982. Gerald Renner. "New Chapter For Pastor And Church." *The Hartford Courant*, September 5, 1998. Hayes, King T. “*A Historical Profile of Fifteen Black Churches of Hartford, Connecticut.*” M.A. Thesis. St. Joseph’s College, 1994. Bill Ryan. "A Megachurch Takes Shape in Bloomfield." *The New York Times*. December 12, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/13/nyregion/a-megachurch-takes-shape-in-bloomfield.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed on Dec 2, 2015. Personal Communications on October 5, 2015; November 2, 2014; January 25, 2015; and July 30, 2015.

When Bailey arrived at the church, there were roughly sixty active members who met in rented spaces. In 1972, the Church began to grow after purchasing their first building, the former Jonathan Temple Church on Blue Hills Avenue in Hartford. The church affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. and the American Baptist Churches, the same year. Having outgrown this location the church purchased and renovated the former Agudas Achim Temple at 221-225 Greenfield Street in the city of Hartford.

At this location, the church experienced explosive growth necessitating three Sunday worship services at the 1,200 seating capacity building. In response, Bailey began preparations to build an even larger facility, involving the membership in his dream along the way. His son, Reverend Dr. Michael Bailey, the Youth Pastor of the FC recalls,

We [the congregation] had dream nights where we met with my Dad, “What is your dream for our church? What should we have in our church? What is God telling you about our church?” The people would share their ideas and passions for the ministry. This was our dream. With God leading it happened. (Personal Communication, November 2, 2014)

From 1986-1999, Bailey led the church in a series of capital campaigns to construct a housing complex, and to secure additional properties for the construction of a new worship facility.

The First Cathedral

On September 5, 1999, Bailey and approximately 4,000 parishioners and well-wishers entered their new edifice, which they called, “The First Cathedral.” The mega-worship facility, has a maximum seating capacity of 4,500. The facility also has meeting and classroom spaces for the church’s numerous ministries. The FC maintains the largest worship facility in the New England Region.

Since their occupation of their mega edifice, Bailey's congregation has maintained thousands of members on the church rolls, with approximately, 2,500-3000 attending one of two Sunday morning worship services each week³⁷³. The members participate in ministries of the church which attempt to address every facet of life; the men's ministry, the women's ministry, youth ministry, senior's ministry, and ministries to married couples and singles. The ministries to enhance worship include the music ministry composed of the choirs, praise team, liturgical dancers, musician staff, the drama ministry, the greeters, ushers, security ministries, and the media ministry. Weekly Christian Education opportunities include Kingdom Citizens the new members class series, the Sunday Teaching Hour, and Tuesday night Bible Study. The members of FC participate in several strategic outreach initiatives to local prisons, homeless shelters, convalescent homes and to the street corners inner-city Hartford.³⁷⁴

The Baptist Bishop and Archbishop

In 1997, the congregation at "First Baptist Church Hartford" voted to give Bailey the clerical title "Bishop." While Baptist churches function autonomously and are free from hierarchy beyond the local body, and as such have historically precluded Episcopal offices and titles, the First Baptist Church voted to confer this title on Bailey to honor his role as an unofficial mentor to pastors.

In October of 2001, Bishop Leroy Bailey Jr. was consecrated into the International Bishops Conference with jurisdiction over North America and the Caribbean, with rights of succession. The very next year, Bishop Bailey organized the Churches Covered and Connected

³⁷³ While church officials did not provide a precise and updated number of members on role. An article in the Hartford Courant cited a membership of 6,000 in 1998. Renner, 2998. At the present, the church's website claims a membership of 11,000. "ArchBishop and First Lady Bailey" *First Cathedral*. <http://www.firstcathedral.org/archbishop-first-lady>. Accessed on December 1, 2015. Church attendance appeared to be well over the 2000 mark observed in my several visits for worship, where in both Sunday services the 3,800-seat church was more than half full.

³⁷⁴ The strategic outreach initiatives of the FC shall be explicated in section 7.4.

in Covenant (C4) a formal gathering of his “sons and daughters” in ministry.³⁷⁵ In 2006, Bishop Leroy Bailey Jr. was appointed Archbishop of the International Bishops Conference, USA becoming known as Archbishop LeRoy Bailey Jr.³⁷⁶

Although the denominational designation “Baptist” has not been used in the church’s name since occupying the present worship site, the congregation has continued to cooperate and participate with traditional Baptist groups, maintaining financial and delegating ties with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. and the American Baptist Churches.³⁷⁷ The FC also cooperates intermittently with other congregations and organizations on various community and missions projects.³⁷⁸

Site Description

The FC sits on 45.5 acres of land at the intersection of Blue Hills Avenue and Wintonbury Avenue in Bloomfield, a suburb of Hartford, Connecticut. While Bloomfield has a population of approximately 20,000 persons, the FC draws parishioners from across the Greater

³⁷⁵ These “sons and daughters” are senior pastors of congregations who officially look to Archbishop Bailey as a pastoral mentor. Presently, the following pastors claim this relationship to Archbishop Bailey; Rev. Allen Wiggings of The Hope Church in Orlando, Florida; Reverend Bruce Allen of The Church Fellowship of Jacksonville, Florida; Rev. Kenneth Reid, Mount Grove Baptist Church, Texarkana, Arkansas; Bishop Dandridge Wilborn of Golden Leaf Cathedral (Baptist Church) of Memphis, Tennessee; Reverends Lester and Laverne Walters of New Lighthouse Ministries of New Haven, Connecticut; Bishop Edward Stephens of Golden Gate Cathedral of Memphis, Tennessee; Rev. Victor Rush of Ebenezer Temple United Holy Church of Hartford, Connecticut.- “C4”, *First Cathedral*. <http://www.firstcathedral.org/archbishop-first-lady/c4/>. Accessed on November 2, 2014.

³⁷⁶ The International Conference of Bishops is an organization headed by Bailey. The nonprofit incorporation papers for the organization discloses the same physical address as the FC. “International Bishop’s Conference, USA, Inc.” *Guidestar*. <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/43-2105475>. Accessed on December 2, 2015.

³⁷⁷ The Connecticut branches of both nationwide Baptist bodies continue to recognize the FC as a participating congregation. American Baptist Churches of Connecticut lists the FC as a participating church. “Directory” *American Baptist Church of Connecticut*. <http://www.abconn.org/church-directory/hartford-association.html>. Accessed on December 2, 2015.

The Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention, a state affiliate of the NBCUSA, Inc., lists the FC as a participating church. “Member Churches”, *Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention*. <http://www.ctbaptist.org/index.php/member-churches>. Accessed on December 2, 2015.

³⁷⁸ The First Cathedral’s aid and support to local religious institutions is explicated in section 7.2.

Hartford area which has a population of approximately 900,000.³⁷⁹ According to church staff, some parishioners come from other states to include the nearby Massachusetts border, as well as New York and New Jersey.

As the FC is located on former swampland, the foundation of the church consists of grade beams that equally disburse the weight of the building. The church has been designed to allow for two additions to be built later, adding another 52,000 square feet..³⁸⁰

The outer structure of the FC is divided into three levels. The first level contains the two commercial floors. The second level is located within the second of the commercial floors, with two balconies. The third level houses the cupola, adorned with stained glass windows. The immediate external wall of the FC are covered with dryvit. The entry way set of double doors, creating an energy saving lock. Just beyond the entry way there is a stained glass mosaic-depicts people of all races and every ethnicity from all directions with their hands lifted in praise. The entryway leads to the main lobby, which has a roomy seating area and a receptionist's desk leading to the church's administrative offices on one side, and the church's bookstore on the opposite side.

The main lobby empties out to the grand concourse, a hallway that rounds the circumference of the sanctuary on one side and connects a series of classrooms, meetings spaces, and a cafeteria on the other. The lobby and concourse are connected by a fountain in the shape of a tomb. The water shooting out of the fountain forms the shape of a cross representing "life out of death."

³⁷⁹ 2014 approximations were from the *United States Census*. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/09/09003.html> Accessed on December 2, 2015.

³⁸⁰ These Descriptions were observed and Personal communication during a facilities tour given on November 2, 2014.

The 56,000-square-foot steel frame building has an auditorium design. The sanctuary, therefore, is a perfect circle with a stage, and an audience facing the stage from seating on a main floor and two balcony levels. Its 4,500 seating capacity has been limited somewhat by 500-700 seats, to accommodate some parishioners preferring traditional pews to stadium seats. The massive church structure is topped with a cross that stands 45 feet in the air above the peak of the roof. The church structure is flanked by 1,345 parking spaces. The \$11.7 million church was designed by Sudhakar Nagardeolekar, who at the time was a senior partner of Russell & Dawson Architecture and Engineering of East Hartford.³⁸¹

Mission

The Mission of FC is simply to be, “A Church for All People.” Bailey expounds,

The church was founded as a fully integrated institution. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Our ministry is one of reconciliation. Our doors are open so that all might receive our Lord and our Christ, without regard to who they are and where they are from. (Personal Communication, July 30, 2015)

Leadership Structure for Community Outreach

Archbishop

Archbishop Bailey is the executive officer and visionary of the church. He directs all of FC’s programs and services, and appoints leaders to oversee specific ministries programs and projects.

Associate Pastors

Bailey assigns ordained ministers to oversee the outreach ministries of the church. They also aid in the training of aspiring ministers through ministry rotations.³⁸²

Licensed Ministers

The licensed ministers receive training from ordained ministers through ministry rotations, and are assigned to serve with one or more of the various outreach ministries. These outreach ministries include the Shelter Ministry, the Prison Ministry, the Convalescent Ministry, Street

³⁸¹ Ryan, 1998.

³⁸² Ministry rotations are explicated in section 7.4

Evangelism Ministry and Youth Ministry. At present, there are over 40 active associate ministers and pastors.

Deacons

Deacons of the church work in tandem with ministers assigned to the various outreach ministries of the church. At present, the FC has over 40 active Deacons.

Volunteers

Lay members of FC regularly volunteer to serve in any of the ministry projects and outreach initiatives.

Functions of Community Engagement

Pillar Community Development Corporation

This CDC founded by Bailey in 1994 hosts two annual events. The Golf for Educational Excellence raises funds to provide college scholarships to Hartford's inner-city youth. The First Step Walk, Run, Bike-a-thon is an event to promote health and well being to the community at-large.

Elderly Housing

The FC provides 80 units of affordable elderly housing in Hartford, Connecticut and 50 units of affordable elderly housing in New Britain Connecticut. Operations of these facilities are maintained by FC subsidiary, First Baptist Housing Corporation, 1130 Albany Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut.

Strategic Outreach to Prisons

The FC sends ministers to every prison in Connecticut on a monthly basis, and to the Osborn Correctional Facility and the Carl Robinson Correctional Facility, on a weekly basis.

Strategic Outreach to Shelters

The FC sends ministers to provide Bible Study and prayer to the homeless at South Park Inn, 75 Main Street Hartford, Connecticut. FC also partners with Hartford's Shiloh Baptist Church Food Pantry. Area shelters are periodically gifted with cash donations and winter coats.

Community Fairs

The FC regularly opens its massive campus to the greater Hartford area for health fairs, to aid in supplementing services for those who may not have full health coverage; career fairs for those looking for employment; and fun fairs with free food, games, and rides, for families who may not be able to provide such recreation for their children.

Networking

The hundreds of professionals who gather weekly to worship at FC create informal networking opportunities for those seeking career advice or advancement. Bailey has used this phenomenon to help members to connect to needed resources.

Space

The FC has made its massive auditorium and classrooms available to area organizations for meetings, community events and support groups.

Funding

Church Revenue

The FC's primary source of funding for its ministry and community initiatives comes from the weekly collection of tithes and offerings received from the membership.³⁸³

Facility Rental

Many organizations and local municipalities have, in the past and continue to, rent the FC's stadium-like sanctuary to host large-scale events. This has provided the congregation with a consistent additional stream of income.³⁸⁴

CDC

The Pillar CDC uses grant funding to sponsor a golf tournament fundraiser, the proceeds of which are used solely to fund scholarships for inner-city youth.

Direct Donations

Beyond monetary giving, FC members make direct donations of food and clothes to regular winter drives to supply local shelters.

Is the First Cathedral a "Black Church?"

Before discussing the theories that emerged from my research of the FC, it is first necessary to answer the question, "Is the FC a black church?" This is necessary given that, while the parishioners of the church are predominantly black, the church has members from various ethnic backgrounds; and its vision statement, "*To be A Church For All People,*" implies multicultural outreach intentions. However, for the purposes of my research, the FC is a black

³⁸³ Church officials would not disclose concrete offertory numbers with me as a researcher. As churches are private, they are only obligated to share with members, and even this disclosure is dependent upon how their constitution is written.

³⁸⁴ The Cathedral charges \$8000.00 to rent the sanctuary space as an auditorium for a single event.

church, not just by the predominance of black parishioners, but by the experience of racial exclusion, and its commitment to maintain a ministering presence in Hartford's troubled North End.

Although the church staff did not have a current numerical breakdown of the ethnic background of its parishioners, previous calculations have placed the percentage of black attendees at 98%.³⁸⁵ That the overwhelming majority of attendees were black was apparent at each of my observations of services and events. At some of the Bible studies, which never had any fewer than 400 people in attendance, almost everyone in plain sight was black.³⁸⁶

With regard to the vision statement, which suggests that the church's aim is to be diverse and inclusive of people from all backgrounds, I contend that this does not imply that the church is trying to "not be a black church." If anything, this vision statement intricately ties the congregation to the historic black church mission. Black churches were founded as a theological response to the exclusive practices of white churches as illuminated in the literature review in chapter 2. As such, from the beginning, black churches have been places where all were welcomed as children of God, without regard to ethnic background. Despite this open invitation, black Christians in their churches continued to experience racial exclusion by white Christians and religious groups. So that the Sunday morning worship hour became, and continues to be the most segregated hour in America.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Ryan, 1998

³⁸⁶ See Appendix D for observation records.

³⁸⁷ This particular description of the racial divide within American Christian Churches was given by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on December 18, 1953 in a speech given at Western Michigan University. <http://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf>. Accessed on January 3, 2016. The continuation of this phenomena has been explicated in many works, including; Scott Williams. *Church Diversity: Sunday the Most Segregated Day of the Week*. Green Forrest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2011. Stephen R. Haynes. *The Last Segregated Hour: The Memphis Kneel-Ins and the Campaign for Southern Church Desegregation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. C. Kirk Hadaway, David G. Hackett, and James Fogle Miller. "The Most

Even given their huge numbers and robust revenue, there have been occasions where the FC has experienced racial exclusion. Bailey describes what he called a “Richard Allen” experience when he attempted to participate in a multicultural fellowship,³⁸⁸

Years ago, there used to be a five-church connection. I was the only black pastor. We had a great fellowship, but there was something wrong with that fellowship. We met once a year for a fellowship service. We would take turns preaching around, but when it would come my time, they would miss my time. I preached twice in the fellowship, but towards the end of the season when it came my time, for some reason, I didn’t preach. The second time around when I was skipped, I said wait a minute. Something is wrong with this picture. The fellowship was discontinued, shortly thereafter. (Personal Communication, January 25, 2015)

Unfortunately, this kind of snubbing and racial exclusion has occurred more than a few times when Bailey and the FC has endeavored to participate in religious organizations and events outside of the black community, for which he gave several examples. Another experience went as follows,

Years ago I was in a meeting on reconciliation with the Jewish rabbis. They wanted to have a meeting on reconciliation. But when we got to the meeting the rabbis were carrying the conversation amongst themselves, and so I raise my hand and said, “Is this going to be a meeting where you set the agenda or we set the agenda?” And after that there were no more meetings. (Personal communication, January 25, 2015)

Lastly, the FC was founded in the predominantly black North End of Hartford, and even after relocating to suburban Bloomfield to build their spacious worship center, the church has continued service to Hartford’s North End through feeding programs, support groups, housing

Segregated Institution: Correlates of Interracial Church Participation." *Review of Religious Research* (1984), pp. 204-219. Jason E. Shelton, Michael O. Emerson. *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012.

³⁸⁸ Richard Allen’s experience at St. George Methodist Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1787, as well as the common practice of exclusion by race in white churches in the United States was explicated in Chapter 2.

and the creation of economic opportunities. Their commitment to the community has been consistent as shall be brought to bear in this chapter.

Theories

After extended observations and research of their various outreach initiatives, I have uncovered three primary motivations to the FC's overall service to the community. First, the FC demonstrates the power and potential of cooperative economics amongst black people. As one of the largest primarily black-owned and operated institution in New England, The FC creates a sense of pride for the inner-city community, and serves as a model of the power and the potential of cooperative wealth building amongst poor and working class people. The congregation has partnered with major regional organizations to include, the Hartford Symphony and the Bushnell, and has rented its space to local municipalities, to include the towns of Windsor, Enfield, Bloomfield and East Hartford Connecticut. Further, the FC has used its resources to rescue financially bankrupt and fledgling churches in the region. While this motivation touches the community in a symbolic way, the pride it instills in the community is not to be underestimated.

The tangible benefits of the FC economic power, beyond an ostentatious setting for worship, leads to the second motivation of FC's service to the community, to create empowering social networking. The vast membership who gather to worship at FC is composed of people from all professional walks of life, so that it is a regular occurrence that a member who attends worship may leave with new job prospects, an appointment with a social service agency to obtain housing, or a pro-bono appointment with an attorney to discuss some legal matter. Many

parishioners could not afford or would not have access to these services and opportunities outside of the church

The last motivation uncovered for the FC's service to community can best be described as the sending of foot soldiers into the community. From the congregation, ministers, deacons and volunteers are strategically assigned to prisons, shelters and to the streets of inner-city Hartford, to bring supplies, support and God's message of love and hope. These theories shall now be explicated.

7. 2 Theory (1) A Model of Cooperative Economics

“Poor people from the North End of Hartford came together and dreamed this church. We didn't have too much money, but we came together with what we had and put our money down for our church. That and our faith in God is what made all of this possible.” (Personal communication, July 30, 2015)

African Americans have a very painful history in their attempts at economic self-determination. In the first fifty years after slavery, several communities of successful black entrepreneurs were violently dismantled by white American terrorist groups.³⁸⁹ Even further, it is

³⁸⁹ For example, race riots are responsible for the destruction of vibrant black economic communities in the following American cities:

Rosewood, Florida: Maxine D. Jones, et al. "A Documented History of the Incident which occurred at Rosewood, Florida in January 1923." submitted to the *Florida Board of Regents* 22 (1993). C. Jeanne Bassett. "House Bill 591: Florida Compensates Rosewood Victims and Their Families for a Seventy-One-Year-Old Injury." *Fla. St. UL Rev.* 22 (1994). R. Thomas Dye. "Rosewood, Florida: the Destruction of an African American Community." *Historian* 58.3 (1996): pp. 605-622. Marvin Dunn. *The Beast in Florida: A History of Anti-Black Violence*. Gainesville, FL: U of Florida, 2013.

Tulsa, Oklahoma: Jay Jay Wilson, Ron Wallace. *Black Wall Street*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996. Eddie Gates. *Riot on Greenwood: The Total Destruction of Black Wall Street, 1921*. Woodway, TX: Eakin Press, 2003.

Wilmington, North Carolina: Jerome Anthony McDuffie. *Politics in Wilmington and New Hanover County, North Carolina, 1865-1900: The Genesis of a Race Riot*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979. H. Leon Prather. *We Have Taken a City: Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup of 1898*. Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984. Cecelski, David S., and Timothy B. Tyson, eds. *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2000. Leslie

well documented that black Americans have been disproportionately denied loans to develop their farms and businesses.³⁹⁰ As a result, very few African American families have had generational wealth passed on to them from their predecessors. The one place in the African American community that has been a consistent stronghold of cooperative economics is the church. The poorest of neighborhoods have large and well-maintained churches.

It has been well documented in this study that black churches are not only places to experience the transcendent, but also safe harbors for human development and voicing of social change. Beyond this, the churches have been places where the community has pooled its resources to advance the community. For example, churches have created recreational centers to keep children off of the street, sponsored programs to develop children's creative abilities, procured housing for the elderly, and sent high school graduates to college and so much more. The FC is New England's most obvious tribute to this phenomenon. Over a 31-year period, poor and working-class black people from the North End of Hartford came together and built New England's largest worship facility, an institution large enough to partner in events with local municipalities, and to rescue and stabilize smaller community institutions.

Hossfield. *Narrative, Political Unconscious and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.

³⁹⁰ A class action lawsuit against the federal government found that between the years of 1981 and 1996 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) practiced racial discrimination in the allocation of farm loans. Over 80,000 African American-owned farms were affected. Stephen R. Viña, and Tadlock Cowan. "The Pigford Case: USDA Settlement of a Discrimination Suit by Black Farmers." *CRS Report for Congress*. 2005. Additionally, Discrimination against black-owned businesses by banks and the government is a well documented occurrence, explicated in the following works; Timothy Bates. "UNEQUAL ACCESS: Financial Institution Lending to Black- and White-Owned Small Business Start-ups." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 19.4 (1997):pp. 487-495. David G. Blanchflower, Phillip B. Levine, David J. Zimmerman. "Discrimination in The Small-Business Credit Market." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 85.4 (2003): 930-943. Rebel A. Cole. "Who Needs Credit and Who Gets Credit?" *Evidence from the Surveys of Small Business Finances (February 18, 2013)* (2013).; Shaoming Cheng. "Potential Lending Discrimination", *Journal of Small Business Management* 53.4 (2015): 905-923. Robert Fairlie, Alicia Robb, David T. Robinson. "Black and White: Access to Capital among Minority-Owned Startups." (2015).

Pride and Partnerships

The accomplishment of completing a mega-worship facility, and subsequent business dealings, has instilled a sense of pride into parishioners of the FC, who rightly take ownership of the facility. On several visits, congregants greeted me with salutations such as,

“Welcome to our church.”

“Thank you for visiting our church home.”

On a few occasions where members caught me gazing at the stained glass or the seemingly sky high ceiling, I was pegged for a visitor and given an enthusiastic personal account of how the congregation grew into a megachurch and built the present facility. Worshipers, beaming with pride, became museum curators, giving me impromptu informal tours.

“Let me show you to our cafeteria.”

“Have you been to our bookstore?”

These interactions were still occurring about fifteen years after the churches original occupation of the facility. Being a part of an institution that is so large and important to the region has had the effect of empowering some of the parishioners to seeing themselves as power brokers.

“You must attend our Martin Luther King Jr. event,” said a middle-aged female worshiper who befriended me as we were awaiting the start of worship.

“We partner with The Bushnell and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra each year, to put on an absolutely fabulous and inspiring event.”

“That’s right,” chimed another older female worshiper overhearing from the row in front of us.

“Get a ticket soon, because thousands of people come to our annual Martin Luther King event from all over.”

Upon further research I learned that, since the year 2000, just months after occupying their mega facility, FC has partnered with The Bushnell Center for Performing Arts, a privately owned auditorium in the city of Hartford, and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, the second largest orchestra in New England, to put on one of the largest programs to honor Martin Luther King Jr. in the American north east. Each year, the event has included a speech from some renowned preacher, or a concert by a national recording artist.³⁹¹ These kinds of partnerships have become commonplace at FC. In fact their partnerships with local municipalities to host high school graduations gained national notoriety resulting in a federal court decision.

Municipal Partnerships for High School Graduations

From 2004-2009 nearby municipalities, including the Connecticut towns of Enfield, Windsor, South Windsor and East Hartford rented FC’s facilities to host their high school graduations. On the surface these arrangements seemed to benefit both the towns and the FC. The towns were able to host their graduations at a space where the high school graduates and

³⁹¹ The Inaugural event was held on January 16, 2000. Robert Sherman. "Martin Luther King Jr. Recalled in Celebration." *The New York Times*. January 16, 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/16/nyregion/music-martin-luther-king-jr-recalled-in-celebration.html>- Accessed on November 22, 2015. Each year the event carries a theme and features figures of national renown. For example, the 2013 event was themed, “The Dream Maker” and featured an oration by the sage Civil rights leader Reverend James Netters of Memphis Tennessee, and music by recording artist Kelly Price. In 2014 the event was themed “Dreams that Soar” and special homage was paid to surviving members of the Tuskegee Airman, the first group of African Americans to fly planes for the United States Air force. Additionally, there was a concert that featured Gospel recording artist Kim Burrell, saxophonist Merlon Devine, and violinist Kersten Stevens. This event is offered to the community for a modest entrance fee of \$10.

their guests had plenty of seating, with climate control, state of the art audio-visual facilities and ample parking, all within a twenty minute commute. For renting their space the church received fees that ranged from \$7,400-\$8000.³⁹²

The towns' use of the FC's facility was halted by a court decision prompted by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), that a public school's use of a Christian cathedral to hold a graduation violated the First Amendment of the Constitution. The long battle for which this conclusion was rendered began in December 2006 with an ACLU letter to Enfield School Board Chairwoman Sharon Racine voicing concerns over the board's decision to use FC to host the commencement exercise for the town's Enrico Fermi High School class of 2007. While the towns of Windsor, South Windsor, and East Hartford changed their graduation venues in response to ACLU threats to litigate, the town of Enfield went ahead with their plans to hold graduation ceremonies at FC in June 2007, 2008, and 2009. A 2010 commencement at the FC was halted by the federal court within less than one month before ceremonies were scheduled. U.S. District Court Judge Janet Hall ruled,

By choosing to hold graduations at First Cathedral, Enfield schools sends the message that it is closely linked with First Cathedral and its religious mission, that it favors the religious over the irreligious and that it prefers Christians over those that subscribe to other faiths, or no faith at all. In addition to the character of the forum, the history and context of the decision to hold the graduations at First Cathedral also support the conclusion that, in doing so, Enfield Public Schools has endorsed religion."³⁹³

³⁹² Joseph O'Brien. "Town: No Ceremony At First Cathedral." *Hartford Courant*. December 31, 2009. http://articles.courant.com/2009-12-31/news/09123112529241_1. Accessed on December 2, 2015.

³⁹³ Jenna Carlesso. "Judge Won't Allow Enfield, Enrico Fermi High Schools To Hold Graduations At Church." *Tribunedigital-thecourant. Hartford Courant*, May 31, 2010. http://articles.courant.com/2010-05-31/community/hc-enfield-graduations-decision-0601-20100531_1_senior-northeast-counsel-graduations-alex-luchenitser Accessed on November 22, 2015.

In a press release, the ACLU lauded the decision and the removal of the town's graduation ceremonies to secular facilities as the more inclusive choice and as a win for religious freedom, citing,

From 2007 through 2009, the Enfield high schools held their graduations in the Cathedral's sanctuary, underneath a 25-foot-tall stained glass cross and large banners reading "Jesus Christ is Lord" and "I am GOD." The schools did so even though more than a dozen non-religious sites in the area were available to host graduation ceremonies.³⁹⁴

It is clear, however, that many in the Town of Enfield, Connecticut felt forced by the ACLU into a decision to move their commencement exercises. This is made apparent in the town's obstinacy to hold their commencement elsewhere for three years after the initial ACLU threat. The valedictorian of the 2010 graduating class of Enrico Fermi High School expressed his frustrations thusly,

I planned at one point in my [valedictory] speech to congratulate everybody and say, 'The reason you're here today is because you stood up to the ACLU, who said we couldn't graduate here. Obviously, that's not an option right now.'³⁹⁵

What is symbolically powerful about the FC's exchange with local townships is that the FC, a predominantly black-maintained institution was large and powerful enough to do business with local townships, and undercut the price of large secular auditoriums like Springfield Symphony Hall, the Mass Mutual Center, the Bushnell Theater, XL Center, and the Connecticut

³⁹⁴ "Enfield Schools Agree to Stop Holding Graduation Ceremonies in Bloomfield Church." *American Civil Liberties Union*. July 19, 2012. <https://www.aclu.org/news/enfield-schools-agree-stop-holding-graduation-ceremonies-bloomfield-church>. Accessed on November 22, 2015.

³⁹⁵ Kristin Stroller. "Enfield School Board OKs Settlement In Lawsuit Over Graduations Held At First Cathedral." *Hartford Courant*. July 18, 2012. http://articles.courant.com/2012-07-18/community/hc-enfield-aclu-lawsuit-settlement-20120718_1_chairman-timothy-neville-peter-jonaitis-alex-luchenitser. Accessed on November 22, 2015

Convention Center. Beyond its partnerships with major private and civic institutions the FC has used its strength in assets and personnel to support and rescue other community based services and churches in the Greater Hartford area.

Help to Other Congregations

The FC has also lent support to many congregations in the greater Hartford area even to the extent of lending out personnel and financial support. For example, for many years the FC has collaborated with the Shiloh Baptist Church Food pantry that supplies food to needy individuals in the North End of Hartford. Obviously, the FC is resourceful enough to maintain its own independent food pantry, but Bailey felt it unnecessary to duplicate the services being offered to the community by Shiloh Baptist Church. He shared, “Obviously we could have had our own, but we said, ‘Why should we do that if they already have a soup kitchen?’ We decided that we’re going to supply them so they have more than enough.” (Personal communication, July 30, 2015) During collection periods, FC congregants fill trucks with nonperishable food items to ensure that the cupboards at Shiloh’s pantry remain full.

Another way that the FC has supported other churches is through the lending of staff members to fill ministry vacancies in the greater Hartford area. Beyond their paid staff musicians, there have been other talented musicians in the music ministry who have been sent by Bailey to serve for periods at other churches that were without musicians, with the FC providing the musicians’ compensation. Also from 2008-2013, the FC employed a national Gospel recording artist, J.J. Hairston as the Music Ministry leader. During this period, Hairston would be sent by Bailey to smaller community churches to perform music clinics and workshops to help their choirs with their performances.

I would use J.J. and say, “Hey man, they need some help over here at this church in Springfield. Will you give them some help for me?” And he’d say, “Oh yeah Bishop, I’ll go over there and work with them.” He would go to their choir rehearsal and tune their voices. (Personal communication, July 30, 2015)

In being a good neighbor, the FC has lent major support to the congregation directly across the street from their campus. While the FC was in the process of building their present facility, so was the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bethel completed their church much sooner than the FC, but hit a critical snag before they could occupy the building.

They ran into a financial crunch and couldn’t get into their building because they needed sprinkler systems that cost \$50,000, so the pastor came to me and said Pastor we need your help, can you help us? So we loaned them \$50,000 without interest. They were able to get their sprinkler system done and they finally paid it off years later. (Personal communication, January 25, 2015)

The most extraordinary example of the FC’s assistance to another church was offered to a congregation in Hartford that they carried financially for two years.³⁹⁶ A former pastor of this church became a substance abuser and began to mismanage church funds, and in addition, committed insurance fraud, by spending money that was to be used to repair a building adjacent to the church that had caught fire. This pastor managed to avoid jail time but was fired, leaving church officials to fight tax liens with the city of Hartford, bankruptcy and foreclosure proceedings. Needing help, the church officials reached out to their denominational leaders at the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention (CSMBC), for help. The president of the CSMBC reached out to Bailey and asked him to personally oversee the church’s affairs. Bailey shares,

We got them an attorney to handle the court cases. Not only that, but our trustees had to handle their monies for a couple of years. We carried them for those years. Whatever

³⁹⁶ Names are not disclosed for the purpose of discretion.

they could not do from their tithes treasury, we did. We supplied them with a full band of musicians, and ministers to preach on Sundays and to teach Bible Studies on Wednesdays. We carried them until they got on their feet. Now they are viable. (Personal communication, January 25, 2015)

This congregation was sustained and repaired not through a bank loan, or a grant from some philanthropic institution, but by a black church!

The successful completion of the FC and its partnerships with major private groups and municipalities, and its critical support of congregations and institutions in the Greater Hartford area all began with the cooperative efforts of the poor and working class blacks of the North End of Hartford. The FC then is a symbol to the community of the power of cooperative economics. Beyond this the FC is a place where parishioners come together to share information and access to valuable resources. These empowering social connections shall be explicated in the next section.

7.3 Theory (2) Empowering Social Connections

Bailey learned the importance of social connections within the church, in his early years at the Golden Leaf Missionary Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee.

One of the differences in this church is that I brought some of the southernisms from home here with me, including the spirit of hospitality. I am very intentional about making sure the people who come to this church are known and feel recognized. In this church we have a cafeteria. Now this is not a new idea. The church from when I was growing up as a little boy had a cafeteria. Cafeterias are important to churches like this one, however, because when you have a lot of people you have what is called “crowded loneliness,” and it provides a means by which you create fellowship and an opportunity for people to connect. The church is the one place where you should not feel lonely. (Personal communication, July 30, 2015)

Far beyond ameliorating loneliness, fellowship at FC can be empowering, as an informal network of professionals worship and share information and resources with the congregation. At the FC, a parishioner might find a job, legal advice, a tutor, and the number to a reasonable dentist before or after worship. At times Bailey has made appeals to the congregations for jobs to help the unemployed, and money to help the needy during the service, reminiscent of an altar call. Beyond this, the FC sponsors formal mentoring programs for young people with more than half of the total group coming from the community at large, and has maintained a CDC that has sponsored events to provide college scholarships for over 500 high school graduates. These empowering social connections shall now be explicated.

Free Professional Services

Debatably, a major flaw of the American criminal justice system is that poor and working class people cannot afford the same quality of legal representation as the upper class and wealthy. As such, it is not uncommon for pastors of parishioners from urban communities to be solicited for help with legal crises. Unlike most pastors however, Bailey has an informal team of lawyers and three court judges among his membership who assist him as he serves parishioners in need of guidance dealing with the law.

We've had people who have made a mistake; I'm talking about a legal mistake, and have come to me and should be in prison right now. But with the aid and advice of congregants who work in the legal system, they were totally exonerated. Now they are viable workers in the community. (Personal communication, January 25, 2015)

Bailey does not only tap lawyers for assistance, but believes that members of the congregation who have been blessed with professional resources should use their "gifts" to be a

help to other parishioners. For example, he strongly encourages the many young professionals who attend the FC to offer short-term classes or workshops on career development.

I have these young men and women in their 30s and late 20s who are making moves in their careers. And I said to them, “Alright ya’ll. Y’all have different skill sets you are developing. Hey, Help us, bring it to the fore. You don’t have to teach a class here for a whole year, but you are out there learning, so you can come and teach us.” (Personal communication, January 25, 2015)

Such workshops have included lessons on how to write a resume, how to conduct oneself in a job interview, and business etiquette and attire. Some of the professionals even bring free specialty services to the church. For example, parishioners Chrystal Ford Barrett, a real estate attorney, and Robert Okukwu a mortgage broker, team up annually to hold a forum to teach members about estate planning. The pair also invites bankers to this event to teach members how to advance in small businesses. In a setting outside of the church, attendees would be charged a fee to sit in on these workshops and courses that many of them would not be able to afford. At the church they get the information for free, making it so that the poorest person has the opportunity to learn business development for the future. On occasion, attendees at these events have found connections to jobs.

Employment Opportunities

The FC has been intentional about connecting parishioners to jobs. Each year the church hosts a massive job fair. Of this Bailey shared, “The FC has devoted itself to bringing real hope and encouragement to our congregation and community. One of our most important goals is full

employment for every person seeking a job.”³⁹⁷ In 2013 the Connecticut NAACP and the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Church (CSMBC) joined the FC, expanding the outreach of career fair to the entire state. At their second combined effort in 2014 there were 21 companies accepting resumes and conducting interviews looking to hire people. One woman, who visited the FC for the first time to attend the job fair became a new hire with FedEx in their package department.

I’ve been out of work for eight months. I came here today on a fluke, I was like why not, what have I got to lose. Guess this was God’s way of getting me to church. They’re not having a service today, but I sure did get a blessing! (Personal communication, September 21, 2014)

Little did this woman know that she could have very well received a job at a Sunday morning service at the FC. In a far more impromptu manner than the annual career fair, there have been random Sunday mornings where Bailey has asked how many in the crowd of about 2000 or so worshippers were able to employ someone at their place of business. The several people who raised their hand were then invited to come forward and stand at the front of the church. Then Bailey would tell the worshippers who needed jobs to come up and exchange contact information with these people, and they would. All of this would transpire during the worship service.³⁹⁸

Offertory Assistance

In a very similar manner, Bailey has taken up impromptu offerings for those facing an immediate financial crisis. After a moving offertory appeal, where people have left money on

³⁹⁷ Darnell Goldson. "Groups Announce Community Career Fair." *Hartford Courant*. September 19, 2014. <http://www.courant.com/community/bloomfield/hc-ugc-article-groups-announce-community-career-fair-2014-09-19-story.html>. Accessed on December 2, 2015.

³⁹⁸ While I did not have the opportunity to witness this phenomenon during my several visits to the First Cathedral, it was described to me and has been corroborated by more than a half dozen parishioners that I engaged informally, and by each of the ministry leaders I interviewed.

the altar, he will then invite people who are having difficulty paying their bills to come forward and Bailey would hand them money from the pulpit. On three different occasions he has given out midsize cars to single working mothers from the congregation.³⁹⁹ One parishioner claimed that on the day she received funds, she had been home all day depressed, because the electricity in her apartment was going to be shut off the next day. She would not be paid again until the beginning of the month and she did not know how she was going to explain to her seven year old son why they had no lights and power in their home. A friend stopped by her apartment that evening and picked her up for Tuesday night Bible Study. This was a night when the Bishop made an offertory appeal to help those in need. His first invitation was to anyone who needed help paying his or her electric bill. The woman was the second person in line. The next day she went to the nearest utility payment center and paid her electric bill with cash that Bailey placed in her hand. “That taught me to never get so low that I stay away from the House of Prayer, I pressed my way out that night, and look at how the Lord worked it out for me?” (Personal communication, January 27, 2015)

Mentoring

Young men and women, ages 7-14, are welcomed and encouraged to attend well-organized mentoring programs at the FC. The boys mentoring program is called Young Men of Distinction (YMOD). The girls mentoring program is called the Daughters of Esther Mentoring Program (DEMP). The purpose of these programs are, “to equip the young men and young women of The FC and the surrounding communities to be godly, contributing, competent members of society by nurturing and strengthening their relationship with God, their families, their peers and their communities.”

³⁹⁹ This too was described to me and has been corroborated by parishioners.

The mentoring programs endeavor to fulfill this mission by providing leadership, services, support, and educational enhancement in the following areas:

- New learning experiences
- Leadership development
- Problem solving and skill building
- Exposure to colleges and universities
- Exposure to entrepreneurship opportunities
- Physical and personal enhancement
- Spiritual and character development
- Life skills development⁴⁰⁰

Volunteers from the congregation staff the program.⁴⁰¹ Presently, there are 60 mentees in both programs, about half of whom are not FC parishioners, but from the community at large. The mentees of these programs, most of whom are based in the North End of Hartford, are offered life lessons in church classrooms and are exposed to life outside of their neighborhoods through daytrip adventures to include hiking on Talcott Mountain, miniature golf at Sonny's Place, trips to area museums and an annual pilgrimage to the Basketball Hall of Fame. They are offered classes on arts and crafts, and are taught social graces through sessions on etiquette. They are regularly lauded for their academic and athletic accomplishments in school, and groomed for public speaking as they give addresses to the group.

A good example of the faith and character development that the mentor programs endeavor to achieve in the young mentees was expressed at a 2015 YMOD meeting where 10 year old Christian Williams recited the following affirmation of commitment to moral character grounded in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount,

⁴⁰⁰ First Cathedral Youth Ministry Mentoring programs Pamphlet

⁴⁰¹ Kimberly Upshaw is the Daughters of Esther Program Leader and Mark Waller is the Leader of the Young Men of Distinction. Parents and parishioners volunteer to serve at events and outings.

I am teachable.
I am strong enough to know that I need help, I need the Lord, and I need other people.
Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
I am determined.
Pain doesn't make me give up. It makes me grow.
Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.
I am a gentleman.
I am strong enough to serve others in my community.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
I am principled.
I strive for moral integrity.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.
(Observed, June 21, 2015)

PCDC

In 1994, The FC established the Pillar Community Development Corporation (PCDC) as a subsidiary of the church with a mission to, "...foster and promote the growth, development and well-being of individuals, families, and communities in the Greater Hartford area."⁴⁰² This mission is addressed primarily through two annual initiatives; The First Step Walk, Run, Bike-a-thon, and The Golf for Education Excellence. With these events, the FC has used the PCDC as a tool to connect members of the community from all walks of life to address a fundamental public health concern; and to connect needy and deserving children to financial support for higher education through a day of fun and philanthropy.

The First Step Walk, Run, Bike-a-thon, takes place each year on the third Saturday in October. Anywhere from 1,500-2,000 people follow a route by bike and on foot in an effort to encourage the community to exercise. This event was established to encourage and support residents of the Greater Hartford area who are battling obesity.⁴⁰³ This outing was designed to

⁴⁰² *Pillar Community Development Corporation Website*. <http://www.pillarcommunitydevelopmentcorp.com> and <http://www.pillartournament.com> Accessed on September 30, 2014.

⁴⁰³ More than one-third (34.9% or 78.6 million) of U.S. adults are obese. Cynthia L. Ogden, Margaret D. Carroll, Brian K. Kit, and Katherine M. Flegal. "Prevalence of Childhood and Adult Obesity in the United States, 2011-2012." *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. 311.8 (2014): 806. Furthermore, 37.9 Percent of

address four of the six recommended community strategy categories under the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Common Community Measures for Obesity Prevention Project which includes:

Strategies to address healthy food and beverage choices,
Physical activity or limited sedentary activity among children and youth,
Creating safe communities that support physical activity,
Encouraging communities to organize for change.⁴⁰⁴

The Golf for Education Excellence, which takes place each year at the Wintonbury Hills Golf Course in Bloomfield, Connecticut on the second Saturday in June, is a lucrative fundraiser for college scholarships. Funds are raised through registration fees, sponsorship packages and donations.⁴⁰⁵ For the last four years the event has been chaired by two local celebrities; Kevin Ollie, Coach of the University of Connecticut's Championship Men's Basketball Team, and Brad Davis, the radio host of "Talk of Connecticut." Over the last 14 years the event has raised over \$500,000 to the benefit of approximately 500 college students.⁴⁰⁶

Beyond being a symbol of the power of black cooperative economics and fostering empowering social connections, the FC is a training ground where ministers and parishioners are

non-Hispanic black or African American men 20 years and over were obese between 2009-2012. 56.7 Percent of non-Hispanic black or African American women 20 years and over were obese between 2009-2012. "Black Health" *Center for Disease Control*. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/black-health.htm>. Accessed on January 20, 2016.

⁴⁰⁴ Loretta Khan, Et. Al. "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. July 24, 2009.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5807a1.htm>. Accessed on January 30, 2016.

⁴⁰⁵ At the 2015 Golf for Education Excellence, registration for an individual player \$115, and \$500 for a foursome. Sponsorship packages ranged from "Platinum Sponsorship" at a cost of \$7,500 to a minimal sponsorship of \$200. People are allowed to make individual donations as well.

⁴⁰⁶ Although the Pillar CDC golf tournament website <http://www.pillartournament.com> (Accessed on January 20, 2016) at the time of data collection reported only raising \$435,000, FC staff informed me that the true amount was over \$500,000 and that the website would be updated.

prepared to serve and sent to the community with tangible offerings of food and clothes along with the message of hope and prayer. These activities shall now be explicated.

7.4 Theory (3) Soldiers for Christ to the Urban Mission Field

At the FC, ministers, deacons, and volunteering parishioners are assigned to various outreach initiatives to serve the community. “We are like soldiers for Christ, going out to do the work of the Lord.” (Personal communication, January 26, 2015) To refer to these outreach participants as soldiers is fair because it is as if they are deployed from the FC on a mission to bring messages and acts of love and hope to the community. Outreach assignments come with specific locations to include prisons, convalescent homes, and homeless shelters. These outreach ministries are led by deacons or ministers who schedule weekly service events. Aspiring ministers are required to serve a rotation period in each of these outreach initiatives before licensing. The entire congregation, however, is invited to serve at any outreach event. These activities shall now be explicated.

Ministry Rotations

A requirement to become a licensed minister at the FC is to serve through ministry rotations. That is, an aspiring minister must serve for a period of two to three months on the various outreach ministries of the church. Primarily, aspiring ministers serve for a rotation with the Shelter Ministry, where they serve and pray with the homeless; the Prison Ministry where they give sermons and pray with the incarcerated; the Convalescent Ministry, where they offer prayer and visitation to those in need of long term care; and the Youth Ministry where they learn innovative ways to encourage young people to grow in their faith.

This process produces several positive outcomes for the aspiring minister, and the congregation's community outreach initiatives. First, and foremost in the rotations, the aspiring ministers receive practical training for holistic ministry. Beyond learning to give a sermon from the pulpit, the ministers learn to engage people from different walks of life and throughout the various stages of life. One minister shared her wonderment at her ability to connect with young people during her rotation with the youth ministry.

“I never thought that at my age, I would be able to connect with the young people, but God has given me a gift to reach them. People say that these kids are rude and don't want to listen to anybody, but the kids will listen to you and respect you when they know you have a genuine love for them. Most of them call me “Minister,” but some of them even call me “Aunty”. (Personal communication, November 2, 2014)

Another outcome is that, through the various rotations, an aspiring minister may find a “niche” or a place in ministry where one might fulfill one's calling for the long term. One minister shared,

I went through the rotations before I became a minister. When I first came to the church I just knew the Lord was doing something in me so I was just so excited to be doing more, to be going out in the community. I'll never forget my first experience at Osborne Prison on a Sunday afternoon. The minute I walked through those doors, and heard the door shut behind me, and met those men, I knew right away. There was this total confirmation that I was where God wanted me. I felt totally comfortable, and people usually don't feel comfortable in a prison. (Personal communication, January 26, 2015)

An additional outcome of the ministry rotations is that it supplies the various outreach ministries of the church with personnel. Beyond sharing Bible messages and offering prayer, the aspiring ministers play a supportive role to the ministry leaders, setting up appointments to go out to serve, coordinating schedules with other ministry members, helping to run and oversee events and encouraging new members to join the ministry. For example, many of the Youth

Ministry events require a minimum of five adults for supervision in addition to the youth minister. An aspiring minister in rotation with the youth minister may, in part, fulfill this role, solicit the remaining required adults, handle permission slips, and provide spiritual support at the event through prayer or leading a discussion group. (Personal communication, November 2, 2014)

Ultimately, the rotations set the tone for the aspiring minister's ministry career at the FC. No matter which ministry they choose to continue with, outreach is expected of every licensed minister. According to one ordained elder, the expectation of community outreach is one of the church's strengths,

That's one of the great things about the FC. It is so community focused. We go out into the street and pray for folks. They train us to minister to people, and to meet people where they are. We are not there to judge people. We are there to meet people where they are and to listen. (Personal communication, January 10, 2015)

Prison Ministry

The FC has had an official and continuing Prison Ministry since the 1980s.⁴⁰⁷ The Prison Ministry is staffed by 22 regular members in addition to occasional volunteers from the congregation. The Prison Ministry staff consists of ordained ministers, deacons and lay members. Additionally, aspiring ministers must participate with the Prison Ministry as a part of their training. The ministry visits eight different prisons in the state of Connecticut on a monthly basis. The men's prisons include; Somers Correctional Facility; Enfield Correctional Facility; Mansfield Youth Center; Cheshire Correctional Annex; McDougal-Walker Correctional

⁴⁰⁷ Church staff could not recall an official date, but William O'Neal, the present Prison Ministry leader, recalls that that ministry was in place for at least 5 years before he joined the FC in 1988.

Institution; Osborn Correctional facility' and the Brooklyn Correctional Institution. An aggregate of women from the Prison Ministry make a monthly visit to the York Women's Prison.⁴⁰⁸ At the Osborn Correctional facility, the Prison Ministry holds a weekly service each Monday.

We are there every week rain or shine. The only thing that stops us is if the governor shuts down the road for a snowstorm. Other than that, we are there. Even if Christmas day falls on a Monday, we are there. (Personal communication, January 26, 2015)

The members of the Prison Ministry are broken up into groups of four to six persons and assigned to various prisons by the ministry leader, William O'Neal, who has been with the group for twenty-two years. The Prison Ministry members drive to the various prisons around the state using personal modes of transportation without compensation. A typical Prison Ministry service lasts about two hours. The prisoners who would like to participate are invited into a common room overseen by correctional officers. If the correctional facility has a choir or Christian music group, they will be invited to perform. If not, members of the ministry will lead the crowd in praise songs. Then a ministry member will pray, and someone will bring the Word.⁴⁰⁹ O'Neal was careful to point out that it is not just the ordained ministers who share the Word.

The only qualification to be a part of the Prison Ministry is that you must be a Christian, and you must be willing to participate in the services. Everyone who joins must be prepared to give a Word or at least share a testimony. (Personal communication, January 26, 2015)

At the conclusion of the service, an invitation is extended to the prisoners to receive Christ as their savior. Those who come forward are led through a sinner's prayer for salvation, and briefly admonished to continue in prayer. As many as 14 men have come forward at the

⁴⁰⁸ Both men and women are allowed to minister services at the men's prisons.

⁴⁰⁹ An applicable message from the Bible reading.

conclusion of a service to dedicate their lives to the Christian faith. (Personal communication, January 26, 2015)

O'Neal shared that one of the greatest rewards of serving in the Prison Ministry is the occasional follow up the church receives when a former prisoner visits the FC for worship upon their release.

I would say it happens every two months that a prisoner we have ministered to comes up to me in church to greet me, after they are released. I'm glad when they come up, because in the prisons they are basically in their tan uniforms, and so when you see guys dressed up its hard to detect them or recall them. So when they see me, I always say, I'm so glad that you stopped me because I may not have remembered, and I give them a warm welcome. There was a guy who had been in prison since before I started the Prison Ministry and I saw him last week at our Martin Luther King program. To see these guys who have served long, long sentences come out and praise God it blesses me. It ministers to me. (Personal communication, January 26, 2015)

Shelter Ministry

The FC Shelter Ministry has had a continual relationship with the South Park Inn Shelter in the city of Hartford for over 15 years.⁴¹⁰ The Shelter Ministry consists of four teams of four to six individuals composed of deacons, ministers, and congregants. Additionally, aspiring ministers must participate with the Shelter Ministry as a part of their training. Each team shares at the shelter on a monthly basis, as assigned by the ministry leader, Elder Shawn Brown, so that the Shelter Ministry is represented every week.

Each Saturday evening at 5:45pm, a team meets in the back parking lot for prayer before entering the shelter. Once the team enters the front office at 6pm, a staff member makes the

⁴¹⁰ In 1982, the former South Park Methodist Church was renovated to become an emergency shelter for the homeless. In 1989 the sanctuary was converted to transitional housing. Today, homeless individuals can stay for up to two years, while using the supportive services provided to regain independence. *South Park Inn* (<http://www.southparkinn.org/content/about-us>) Accessed on December 2, 2015.

announcement to invite people to attend the service. Once all the attendees have entered the meeting space, the hour and a half service begins. As with the Prison Ministry, ministers and lay members alike of the Shelter Ministry must be prepared to share a word. Brown explained,

A team only has to commit to one Saturday a month, and we try to encourage every member of the team to be ready to share a word in case a team member doesn't show up. They've got to be ready to take the lead. (Personal communication, January 10, 2016)

After prayer and the reading of scriptures, the Shelter Ministry services are more like audience-participatory Bible Studies, where shelter residents are invited to interpret the text with the speaker, and conjecture points of application. The services are devoid of any formalities and are intentionally personal so as to connect with the shelter residents, who are very often lonely and are in despair. Of this Brown shares,

We want to be like a small group feel, rather than, okay we're here to preach to you. So we ask them, "What do you think the Lord is saying to you with this scripture passage?" And, sometimes the Holy Spirit will lead us in a different direction where if someone is really going through or if it's their first night in the shelter. I haven't met a person yet who wants to be homeless, and so you have to be flexible and open to how the Holy Spirit leads. We have had a few residents in the shelter to come down who were in such a deep depression that they were considering suicide. And, they were so broken and so hurt that sometimes they would just come in and weep and cry, and we would have an opportunity to share just a little bit of God's Word, and to just be there with that person to let them know that God loves them, and that they're important, and that they're not alone. (Personal communication, January 10, 2016)

At the conclusion of the word exposition, a member of the Shelter Ministry extends an invitation to receive Christ. Those who come forward are led through a sinner's prayer for salvation. At this point the ministry team disseminates small combination cups of communion wafers and grape juice to observe the Lord's Supper with the shelter residents. After communion,

names and prayer requests are written down to be taken back to the church campus for more prayer by the larger congregation. Beyond these weekly services, the Shelter Ministry also hosts holiday parties, and provide giveaways of clothing items, as they are donated to the church.

Members of the Shelter Ministry find personal fulfillment in reaching out to connect with those who are most in need in the community. One Shelter Ministry member shared,

We want to be consistent because the people look forward to us coming down and showing that we care, and they look forward to the prayers. We're here to listen to them and pray for them and let them know that we are in this together. (Personal communication, January 10, 2016)

Convalescent Ministry

The Convalescent Ministry is led by Rev. Yvonne Johnson who leads rotating teams of five to ten volunteers to conduct a weekly worship service each Saturday at the Bloomfield Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation. All who wish to attend the service gather in the community room. They are led in prayer, the reading of scripture, and a homily from Johnson or another member of the group designated by Johnson. At the conclusion of the service, rather than closing with a benediction and vacating the premises, the group remains for another half hour to personally engage and interact with the attendees.

More often than not, that is when the real ministry begins. Very often the people here can be so very lonely. There are people who have been left here by their families, or who have no families, and they have no one to come and visit them, so they look forward to us coming to share with them. After service we sit with them and hold conversations about whatever they want to talk about. They need that. (Personal communication, December 2, 2015)

I shall now assess the functions and motivations of the community engagement work of the FC by use of the criteria for continuing the liberation mission of the black churches, as outlined and explained in section 3.5.

7.5 The FC and Evaluative Criteria from Black Theology for BCCE

The black churches and religious organizations must be politically aware and educated concerning the adverse effects of oppressive social structures.

BCCE agents of the First Cathedral provide many essential services to the community through their generous outreach programs. The nature of these programs, however, suggest that FC community engagement agents are more committed to acts of charity and individual personal development, than addressing structural oppression. The data indicates that they are more concerned with fulfilling immediate needs, such as providing food and clothes for the homeless, and comfort and visitation for the imprisoned, than recognizing and challenging the systems that facilitate homelessness and prison industrial complex. They facilitate resume and interview preparation, and connect people with internships and jobs, rather than criticize the systems that exacerbate joblessness and poverty in the nearby urban community. This approach to community work has left somewhat of a void in justice seeking with the ministry.

The black churches and religious organizations have a moral obligation to speak out against injustice.

The FC's focus on charity and individual personal development in doing community engagement work causes the FC to miss major opportunities to effect long term systemic change. For example, one of the ways the FC engages the community is through empowering social connections, where professionals in the congregation give guidance and facilitate resources to those in need. This level of engagement may help to positively change individual lives. Within this same professional network, however, this megachurch has the resources to challenge and

effect change in social crises on the local, state, and national level. Unfortunately, there is no ongoing program at the FC where the church's resources might be used to disseminate information to organize, and act against social injustice on a consistent basis.

The outreach programs of black churches and religious organizations must affirm human flourishing, as such, these institutions must be aware of the immediate needs of its local constituents.

One positive outcome of the FC's charitable and individual personal development focus on community engagement is that this approach facilitates many human flourishing activities to meet the immediate needs of the community. The FC holds massive job fairs for the unemployed, health fairs for the underserved, business and educational workshops for the underexposed. Simultaneously, the FC offers assistance and visitation to the poor and imprisoned, and mentoring to young boys and girls from among the membership and the community at large. Certainly, the FC fulfills this criterion of Black Theology for BCCE.

It must be observed, however, that the building of the FC required the congregation to leave Hartford's troubled-North End neighborhood for suburban Bloomfield. Many parishioners have continued to travel from Hartford's North End to attend weekly services for the last 15 years. But, what about those potential parishioners who might walk in to the church in need of hope and resources? The greatest power of the community-based church is accessibility. The community-based church has the potential to change the downtrodden lives of everyday people by simply being in, and open to, the community. Bailey gives a clear example of this through the story of a man who walked into a church service when the congregation was located in the North End.

There was a guy who came to my church when we were on Greenfield Street and I don't know how he got to us. He just walked in to service. He was on the verge of committing suicide. We worked with him and prayed with him. He ended up becoming my janitor. He worked for me for a number of years. He ended up graduating from college. When he left here, he became Dean of Men in Residential Life at Tuskegee University. (Personal communication, January 25, 2015)

With the fecundity of human flourishing activities the FC sponsors, it must be noted that by relocating to Bloomfield the church is unable to provide a ministry of presence to its original community.

The black churches and religious organizations must be willing to combine with other organizations when necessary to fight oppression.

The FC has joined forces with Shiloh Baptist Church in the North End of Hartford to fortify its soup kitchen. Again, this is in line with a charitable approach to community engagement that does not reflect an agenda against homelessness as a social problem. Nowhere in the data did the FC join forces with another religious organization to address social oppression. Joining forces with other religious and civic groups is another area where the FC could have a major impact in the community.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious institutions must use their funds in ways that promote community uplift.

The moral question to be asked of any black inner-city congregation that builds a multi-million dollar worship facility is, "How is the building of a mega-worship structure the best use of a community-based church's funds?" While the data demonstrates that some in the

community see the completion and continued maintenance of the FC as an empowering example of black cooperative economics, there may have been other more impactful ways in which to use \$11.7 million to serve the community. For example, the city of Hartford is slowly, but surely, undergoing the process of gentrification.⁴¹¹ This phenomenon in other American urban centers has had the effect of totally displacing minorities from their neighborhoods.⁴¹² Perhaps, the FC could have remained at the church's Greenfield Street location in the North End and created an extensive housing development plan, which would have safeguarded the community from displacement and anchored neighborhood families for generations to come. Another possibility is that the congregation could have sponsored small businesses in the neighborhood effectively bringing about neighborhood revitalization and job creation.

The outreach programs of the black churches and religious organizations must promote equality of all people

Again the mission of the FC is to be, "A Church for All People." The church does not discriminate in its charitable outreach to the community, in that; all may be served through its

⁴¹¹ Jesse Reginer. "Urban Redevelopment and Gentrification: How will Hartford's Downtown North / Downtown West Master Plan affect the adjacent neighborhoods?" M.R.P. Thesis. University of Massachusetts: Amherst.2015.

⁴¹² The displacing effect that gentrification has on poor and working class communities, particularly as they intersect ethnic neighborhoods is explicated in the following works; Jacob L. Vigdor, Douglas S. Massey, and Alice M. Rivlin. "Does Gentrification Harm the Poor?" *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs*. (2002): 133-182. Elvin Wyly, Daniel J. Hammel. "Gentrification, Segregation, and Discrimination in the American Urban System." *Environment and Planning*. A36.7 (2004): 1215-1241. Lance Freeman, and Frank Braconi. "Gentrification and Displacement, New York City in the 1990s." *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 70.1 (2004): 39-52.; Lance Freeman. "Displacement or succession? Residential mobility in gentrifying neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Review*. 40.4 (2005): 463-491.; Lance Freeman. *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification From the Ground Up*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2006. Print.; Brown-Saracino, Japonica. *A Neighborhood That Never Changes: Gentrification, Social Preservation, and the Search for Authenticity*. Chicago, IL ; London : The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

programs. It must be noted, however, in one of the few instances that FC parishioners gathered to protest, it was to fight against marriage equality for the LGBT community.

On April 24, 2005 Bailey and his followers were a part of a protest group of 3000 people who marched to the state capital building in Hartford to demand that state legislature repeal a bill that granted same-sex civil unions. At the event Bailey shared with reporters,

We believe that God has given us a standard for our ethics and our conduct. But we live in an age of deconstruction. The word of God tells us to speak against homosexuality. The word of God tells us to speak against bestiality. Homosexuality is an aberration.⁴¹³

Although the Supreme Court of the United States granted the right of same-sex-marriages to be recognized under the law on June 26, 2015, Bailey and his congregation maintain that they cannot reconcile same-sex relationships with their understanding of the scripture. Because the FC is not critical of oppression in the social structure they have not worked to promote the equality of any marginalized group. Because of the FC's conservative interpretation of scripture concerning same-sex relationships they have worked against the social equality of the LGBT community.

In this study, I have examined the functions and motivations for community engagement at the Christian Community Commission, The Beulah Land Development Corporation and the First Cathedral as local examples of predominant models of BCCE. I have also evaluated each local example by criteria drawn from Black Theology for continuing the black church liberation mission through community engagement from Black Theology. I shall now conclude this thesis with a discussion about the continued social relevance and liberating mission of the black churches in the twenty-first century as a result of these examinations.

⁴¹³ Edmund Mahoney. "Thousands Protest Civil Unions." *Hartford Courant*. April 25, 2005. http://articles.courant.com/2005-04-25/news/0504250338_1_same-sex-couples-same-sex-marriage-full-marriage-rights. Accessed on February, 1 2016.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Through the employment of grounded theory to examine data gathered through interviews, observations and textual analysis, motivations for community engagement work at local examples of three major models of BCCE were discovered. At the Christian Community Commission of New Haven, Connecticut (CCC), which represented the grass-roots model of BCCE, the data collected revealed three primary motivations. First, the members of the CCC are committed to *Survival Praxis*, as they endeavor to draw attention to, and correct theological assumptions about street violence; stand before government officials and law enforcement to advocate for the oppressed, and through initiatives that promote the human flourishing of the marginalized. Additionally, they are committed to a *Ministry of Presence* to the community, exercised through prayer walks and street corner services, and through the Promise Land Initiative, where they have adopted the most troubled neighborhood in New Haven, Connecticut for consistent monitoring and service. Lastly, the agents of the CCC are on a mission to *Save the Man to Save the Community*, undergirded by the belief that if they rescue black men from urban plight, these men will be in position to rescue black families and thus secure the black community. As such, the CCC sponsors services specifically targeted for boys and men, including an annual men's conference, and a boys-only mentoring program.

The data collected at the Beulah Land Development Corporation of New Haven, Connecticut (BLDC), which represented the Community Development Corporation (CDC) model of BCCE, reveals that the agents of the BLDC are motivated to facilitate the *Miracle of Homeownership* to working class families, to the effect of economically empowering them for

future generations, while making the community more stable. Clearly, the leaders of the church and the CDC are motivated to serve as *Venue for the Voiceless*. As such, they invite poor and working class members of the community into both Beulah Heights Church and the BLDC offices as meeting places where a plethora of community issues are addressed, including street crime and gang violence, issues regarding public health and safety, and local government policy. Additionally, the leaders of the BLDC are motivated to serve the community by occupying a *Seat at the Table*, that is, they have used their invitations to sit at both civic and private tables of power to represent the interests of the community.

The data collected at the First Cathedral of Bloomfield, Connecticut (FC), which represented the megachurch initiatives model of BCCE, reveals that the agents there are motivated by the opportunity to serve as a *Model of Cooperative Economics* in the region. Secondly, the agents of FC endeavor to create *Empowering Social Connections* where parishioners, with the means to do so, help to address the concerns of the marginalized in the community. Lastly, community engagement agents of the FC are motivated to send *Soldiers for Christ to the Urban Mission Field*, as the church strategically places well-trained teams of clergy and parishioners to serve and minister to the needs of marginalized individuals and families in the community through outreach programs on a regular basis.

Each of the local models was evaluated by criteria drawn from literature in Black Theology for advancing a mission of liberation through community engagement. While each of the models engaged their communities in numerous and significant ways, none of the models met each criteria. This fact points to several implications with respect to the social relevance and liberation praxis of the black churches in the present, which I shall endeavor to outline and clarify. This will be followed by recommendations for how the twenty-first century black

churches might advance liberation, in light of the data. I shall then attempt to outline how the black churches might more effectively advance liberating responses to present critical social issues impacting black communities. I will conclude by identifying other avenues of research that may be drawn from this study, and offering a statement on the limitations of my research.

8.2 Implications

To the extent that these sites are largely representative of their models on a national scale⁴¹⁴, there are several major implications that arise from the data concerning the social relevance of the black churches in the twenty-first century. First, while the churches have consistent and abundant programs to affirm the human dignity of the oppressed, their social justice commitments, in general, are lacking. Then, patriarchal frameworks abound, keeping women from leadership positions and leaving them shortchanged with regard to programming. Furthermore, while the civil rights of the LGBT community has come to the fore in American society, the black churches' response to this cause ranges from ambivalent silence to protestations against it. Lastly, while it seems apparent that it is generally in the best interest of the community for churches and religious groups to cooperate in serving the community to offer maximal aid and support, some institutions continue to work independently.

Consistent Affirmation Human Dignity

Human flourishing activities are abundant in the local models of BCCE. The CCC promotes human flourishing through the creation of cultural opportunities using festivals, community cookouts, school supplies and backpack giveaways, and limited travel exposure to young boys in their mentoring program. The BLDC promotes human flourishing the through the

⁴¹⁴ The generalizability of the local models was explicated in section 4.2.

funneling of resources to create opportunities for economic empowerment for the marginalized through credit repair and homeownership. Through their property ventures, they also improve the aesthetics of the neighborhood, instilling a sense of pride. The FC affirms human dignity through strategic outreach and help to the dispossessed. In summary, aid and support to the oppressed in ways that affirm and preserve their human dignity are expressed abundantly and consistently across the sites. One may firmly conclude that in a variety of expressions within their means, the black churches remain steadfast in their commitment to affirm human dignity through exercises in human flourishing. But, what of their social justice initiatives?

Diminishing Social Witness

Exercises to advance social justice, that is, speaking out to the established political authorities concerning the plight of the oppressed is much more rare, as it pertains to the data. Of the three groups, it may not be surprising that the lion's share of seeking social justice is to be observed in the activities of the CCC, as the modus operandi of grassroots groups is to organize in a direct non-violent manner to address social injustice. Because the CCC is a local independent grass-roots group, their social justice work is case specific, and on the local level. A primary community service of the CCC is to observe the policies and practices of the local government and to identify and decry social injustice. Yet, most of the advocacy on behalf of the CCC is performed solely by Rev. Donald Morris. It is impossible to know how vocal the CCC would remain on local issues of injustice, in the absence of Morris. The larger implication is that within the black churches the phenomenon of the charismatic movement leader has continued

into the twenty-first century. History demonstrates that this is not an effective arrangement for long-term social mobilization.⁴¹⁵

The leaders of the BLDC endeavor to represent the concerns of the marginalized from within the system from seats of power.⁴¹⁶ By sitting on influential private and municipal boards, they seek to reform the system internally. The assumption, then, is that the local government can benefit the oppressed as long as they have advocates within the system. It must be noted, however, that the BLDC receives funds, in part, from the local government for its projects and initiatives. This raises the question, how effectively can a prophet speak truth to power, when those in power finance the works of the prophet? The extent to which one can be objectively critical of a system of which they are a part is debatable. Because all CDC's are powered by grants from the government and or wealthy private institutions, a critical examination of their capacity to maintain an objective social witness may be warranted in each case.

The FC engages the community through abundant acts of charity and through opportunities of individual-personal development, but the church does not maintain a continual social justice component where oppressive structures are identified, denounced and addressed through plans of action involving the parishioners. To the extent that this is true of the megachurch model of BCCE, in general, it would appear that these large institutions with their robust revenues espouse a largely transcendent focus with regard to social injustice, where they seek to be like Jesus who

⁴¹⁵ For example, the weakening of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with the death of King is explicated in David J. Garrow. *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. New York: W. Morrow, 1986. Adam Fairclough. *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens: U of Georgia, 1987. Thomas R Peake. *Keeping the Dream Alive a History of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from King to the Nineteen-Eighties*. New York, NY: Lang, 1987.

⁴¹⁶ This motivation of BLDC leaders is discussed in section 6.4

feeds the multitude, but not like the Jesus who condemns the exploitation of the poor by the money changers in the Temple.

Fighting the Patriarchy Within

As the families that have been served through the BLDC's homeownership program have primarily been single women-headed households, this suggests that there may be segments of twenty-first century BCCE that have begun to address the particular issues that have prevented the thriving of women. The patriarchal assumptions that undergird aspects of CCC programming, however, demonstrate that women's gifts, abilities, and aspects of their human flourishing continue to be suppressed in the black churches.⁴¹⁷ This means that even in the twenty-first century there is more work to be done within the black churches to affirm the gifts of, and to secure justice for women, who after all, have sustained the churches from the very beginning.

Although none of the local models discriminated against the LGBT community by excluding them from their services, the particular causes and issues of the LGBT community were not an area of focus in the community engagement initiatives at any of the sites. The FC in particular challenged marriage equality through advocacy.⁴¹⁸ All of this correlates with the black churches' lack of demonstrable regard for the rights of the LGBT community.⁴¹⁹ As the civil rights of the

⁴¹⁷ The work to be done to confront patriarchy in the black churches has been expounded upon in the following major works. Cheryl Gilkes. *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001. Marcia Riggs. *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003. Monica A Coleman. *Making a Way out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008. Keri Day. *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012.

⁴¹⁸ Explicated in section 7.5

⁴¹⁹ While there are local black congregations that affirm the alternative lifestyles within the LGBT dynamic, many of the independent Black church denominations have made official position statements condemning homosexuality, as well as, same-gender marriages. Examples of these positions may be examined at the following cites. *National Baptist Convention, USA* : <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-us/news--press-releases/the-same-sex-marriage-issue.-voting-and-christian-responsibility.html>. Accessed on February 1, 2016. *African Methodist Episcopal*: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-african-methodist-episcopal-church>.

LGBT community, particularly pertaining to marriage and equal protection under the law have become a predominant social justice concern in society, the black churches reluctance to consider the systemic injustices leveled against LGBT peoples, and to view this community as a disregarded group that could be aided by support from the churches, may be a prominent reason to be critical of the consistency the social witness of the black churches. This leads to the following consideration.

Myopic Social Justice Agenda

There does not appear to be a social justice agenda within any of the local models that addresses the concerns of those outside of the local community. The primary social focus of the CCC and BLDC was oppression by race and class. The social focus of the FC was on addressing the immediate needs of the poor through acts of charity and personal development. Social justice issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, immigrants, religious minorities, or any other marginalized or oppressed group were not prominent in the data. As these models are representative of the black church at large, it appears that the social justice agenda of the black churches, in the present, is too narrow for the twenty-first century.

The Beneficial Cooperation of Churches

The data indicates that cooperation amongst black churches and religious groups are vital to addressing the issues of the marginalized in the community. Ecumenical support has been a

Accessed on February 1, 2016. *African Methodist Episcopal Zion*: <http://thestarofzion.com/the-ame-zion-board-of-bishops-official-statement-on-same-sex-marriage-p209-1.htm>. Accessed on February 1, 2016. Christian Methodist Episcopal: http://www.thecmechurch.org/Announcements/officialstatement_samesexmarriage.htm. Accessed on February 1, 2016. *Church of God in Christ*: <http://www.cogic.org/generalassembly/proclamation-on-marriage>. Accessed on February 1, 2016. *Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*: http://www.pawinc.org/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom_content%26view%3Darticle%26id%3D44%26Itemid%3D73. Accessed on February 1, 2016.

constant feature of religious-based grassroots groups. Cooperation is well observed in the work of the CCC, as it is an ecumenical gathering, where pastors bring their parishioners together to make very public grievances against acts of injustice within the local government. It has already been noted that the BLDC, which is solely sponsored by the Beulah Heights Church, might be more impactful if it were sponsored by a cooperation of local churches.

The FC has gestured a willingness to cooperate in service to the community through their participation with the Shiloh Baptist Church of Hartford, to the extent of regularly contributing to their food pantry. Yet, the congregation has the potential to cooperate with local churches and religious institutions in a more liberating way to positively impact society. For example, the Moral Monday Movement has a chapter based in Hartford Connecticut.⁴²⁰ The Connecticut Moral Monday group is a gathering of religious and political progressives who meet in strategy sessions to plan rallies, protests, letter writing campaigns, and meetings with government officials to address the following demands;

- End to mass incarceration
- End the School to prison pipeline
- End police brutality, excessive force, and overreach
- Affordable quality housing
- Full employment living wages
- Protect voting rights and prevent voter suppression
- Environmental justice
- Eliminate physical and mental health disparities⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ The Moral Monday movement began in April 29, 2013 as a series of weekly protests in the state of North Carolina, led by religious progressives, in response to several actions by the state government of North Carolina. The movement protests many wide-ranging issues under the blanket claim of unfair treatment, discrimination, and adverse effects of government legislation on the citizens of North Carolina. The protests in North Carolina launched a grassroots social justice movement that has spread to other U.S. states, including the state of Connecticut under the leadership of Hartford-based clergyman Reverend John Selders.

⁴²¹“About Us”, *Moral Monday of Connecticut*. <https://moralmondayct.wordpress.com/about-us/>. Accessed on April 20, 2016.

The Moral Monday movement is focused on effecting long term change in the social structure on behalf of the oppressed. If the leadership and BCCE agents of the FC had the insight or desire to join such a movement, with its considerable resources, the congregation could help to effect meaningful social change, especially at the state level. The reluctance to cooperate with other congregations to address social injustice on a systemic level, is likely to be a constant feature of black megachurches. Grounded in these implications, I shall now share considerations for how the black churches and religious institutions might move forward, advancing liberation through their community engagement work in the twenty-first century.

8.3 Advancing Liberation

For the black churches to move forward into the twenty-first century and beyond, continuing the liberating mission of the early black churches to affirm human dignity and advance social justice, the churches should take the following into consideration. The church must wrestle with theologies that limit their understanding of who is oppressed. The churches must become more intentional and strategic about advancing social justice. Churches should endeavor to join forces in their community initiatives whenever possible in the spirit of cooperation. The churches must be economically accountable to their communities.

Reconsider Obligation to the Oppressed

Black churches must come to terms with the expanded identity of the oppressed in the twenty-first century. In the founding of the black churches, it was clear that the subjugated blacks in the north and the enslaved in the south were predominantly oppressed in American society. As such, black churches were founded, not as a segregated space for black worshipers,

but rather as a theological protest and social witness against oppression. Such oppression at this time manifested in the degradation of black people in America. While blacks are still considered a largely underserved minority group in American society in the present, the oppression of women, the LGBT community, as well as the alienation of the foreign-born, those who practice non-Christian faiths, and the oppression of citizens of third-world countries have become eminent. To remain consistent with the liberating mission that gave rise to the black churches, there must be an acknowledgement by the black churches of the twenty-first century of their moral obligation to affirm the human dignity of these groups and to include justice seeking for them within their social witness.

As a precursory step, this will require the churches to wrestle with the oppressive theologies that relegate women to supportive roles, and that discredits the full humanity of the LGBT community, and that sees oppressed groups as the "other." As the early black churches saw all of humanity, without regard to race, as siblings under the parentage of God, the black churches of the present must reconsider, who "else" is God's child, and what is my obligation to the children of God?

Advance Social Justice

If twenty-first century black churches are to remain consistent with the liberating mission which founded the black churches, then social justice must be advanced across all models of BCCE. This means that the black churches have a moral obligation to be aware of oppression in the social structure across all levels of society beyond, racism and classism, including but not limited to sexism, and discrimination by sexual orientation, religion, and nation of origin. As such, the agents of the black churches must be educated and regularly informed regarding the

plight of the oppressed in the broader community. With this awareness, the churches shall then be empowered to have a social witness, that is, to publicly decry social injustice as sin before God against humanity. This witness, can then be moved to advocacy, where the churches develop organized plans to address social injustice to the effect of creating or changing social policy.

Cooperation Between the Churches

The black churches across the models of community engagement must be willing to cooperate with other church bodies when it serves the best interest of the community, without regard for a particular institution taking the sole credit for an effort. The potential effects of cooperation between the churches can have the following positive effects for the community. It increases the mission field, maximizing the number of people who can be effectively served. It reduces fragmentation within the community. Also, the churches may save money by sponsoring large combined events instead of spreading resources across several small events, which ties into the next way in which the black churches may advance liberation.

Economic Accountability to the Community

Across the models of BCCE in the Twenty-first century, the black churches must be accountable to the community with its revenue. Just as the quasi-religious mutual aid societies that preceded black churches in the north combined their resources in the spirit of cooperation and community building, the black churches of today have a moral obligation to support the economic interests of the community. In light of the data, the following considerations should be made . The churches should be aware of the long term plans of local government and industries,

as gentrification in urban centers around the country have broken up historic black communities.⁴²² Churches should serve their communities providing aid to the poor and oppressed. The churches should provide tools for economic empowerment for members of the community in the form of classes and workshops on personal finance, credit repair, and business development. Churches should serve as safe spaces within their community, where local residents and business owners can meet to voice community concerns, and engage in strategic planning. Churches, with the means, should use their capital to invest in their community, to enhance the creation of jobs and other economic opportunities, such as homeownership, and business development. In the next section, I will describe what liberating responses from the black churches regarding contemporary social issues might look like.

8.4 Liberation Responses to Present Issues

In the second chapter, the literature made evident that the black churches, from the religious meetings of the slaves through the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century, engaged their communities to address the issues of critical social relevance of their time.⁴²³ In chapter three, the literature illuminates the theological thrust to advance liberation within the black churches, from which criteria were identified by which to assess local examples of twenty-first century models of BCCE for the continuance of liberation praxis.⁴²⁴ The examination of the local models of BCCE reveals that it is essential for the black churches to respond to the particular urgent needs and current social crises of their communities in a manner that promotes liberation and equality for all of God's children. Critical issues facing the black community

⁴²² Explicated in 7.5

⁴²³ This fact is summarized in section 1.3 and expanded in chapter 2

⁴²⁴ This fact is summarized in section 1.4 and expanded in chapter 3

presently include; the effect of globalization on joblessness and poverty, necessitating navigation of relationships with Spanish speaking citizens, addressing Islamophobia, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the need to wrestle with oppressive theologies. I shall now suggest possible liberating responses to each of these contemporary issues confronting the black churches.

Globalization

Communities that thrived in American urban centers throughout much of the twentieth century are now struggling with joblessness and poverty, in large part, due to economic globalization. As goods and materials have been increasingly produced in other countries for American consumption in order to increase the profit margins of those who own the means of production, blue collar jobs with decent salaries and benefits have steadily dissipated for most American workers. Given the high concentration of black workers in the manufacturing sector, blacks have been affected adversely disproportionately as compared to white and Hispanic workers. By December of 2004, the black unemployment rate (10.8%) was double the national unemployment rate (5.4%), 6.2 percentage points higher than the white unemployment rate (4.6%), and 4.2 percentage points higher than the Hispanic rate (6.6%). Furthermore, the unemployment rate rose higher for blacks (3.2 percentage points) than it did for whites (1.1 percentage points) and Hispanics (0.9 percentage point) between 2000 and 2004.⁴²⁵

The churches cannot avoid this issue. Not only must the churches feel the pain of joblessness in the community in their own revenues, but also in the despair and lack of ability to

⁴²⁵ J. H. Johnson, G. C. Burthey, and K. Ghorm. "Economic Globalization and the Future of Black America." *Journal of Black Studies* 38.6 (2007): 883-99. ; J. H. Johnson, Jr., Farrell, W. C, Jr., & Stoloff, J. "The Declining Social and Economic Fortunes of African American Males: A Critical Assessment of Four Perspectives". *Review of Black Political Economy*, 25-4, (1998)17-40.

thrive amongst congregants and members of the community. Charitable contributions from the churches may help to feed some marginal members of the community, and keep them warm for the night. However, to advance liberation, the churches must work toward the development of long term structural changes for their communities. For example, just as the black churches have sponsored recreational programs and built colleges to train and educate their children in the past, in order to secure jobs for their young people, in the present the black churches must begin to work with parishioners to develop business plans for entrepreneurial pursuits, and teaching and encouraging the practice of in-group economics, as well as developing strategies for trade in the international market.

Building Relationships with Hispanic Neighbors

In the twentieth century, Hispanic Americans have become the largest ethnic minority in the United States.⁴²⁶ People from Spanish-speaking countries moving into traditionally black neighborhoods are leaving black churches concerned with how best to approach their new neighbors.⁴²⁷ This was the case for each of the local sites examined in this thesis. Yet, as the data reveals, there was no particular intentional outreach to the Hispanic community.⁴²⁸ Just as the

⁴²⁶ The Hispanic population of the United States reached 55 million as of July 1, 2014, 17% of the nation's total population, making them the nation's largest ethnic or racial minority. *United States Census*. <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2015/cb15-ff18.html>. Accessed on April 20, 2016.

⁴²⁷ This is particularly true for black churches in the southwestern region of the United States, as is demonstrated in the following articles; Megan Sweas. "African American Church Embraces Hispanic Neighbors." *Baptist Press*. April 6 2016. <http://www.bpnews.net/46612/african-american-church-embraces-hispanic-neighbors>. Accessed on May 10, 2016. C.L. Lopez. "Black Church Barrios: African American Churches Adapt to Latino Neighbors." *Christianity Today*. May 25, 2012. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/may/black-church-barrios.html>. Accessed May 10, 2016. Jeannie Kever. "Historically Black Houston Areas Adapt to Latino Growth". *Houston Chronicle*. July 25, 2011 <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Historically-black-Houston-areas-adapt-to-Latino-2081893.php> Accessed May, 10 2016

⁴²⁸ Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population of the City of New Haven, from which the CCC and the BLDC draw their membership base, increased by 9,148 persons to a total population of 35,591, totaling 27.4 % of the entire population of the City of New Haven. Staff. "More Latinos, Fewer Blacks and Whites" *New Haven Independent*. March 10, 2011. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/more_latinos_fewer_whites_and_blacks/ Accessed April 3, 2016. Between 2000 and 2011 the Hispanic population for Hartford County, from which the FC draws its

quasi-religious mutual aid societies of the antebellum north provided for both spiritual and social needs of their communities as they endeavored to create a sense of community in a hostile society, black churches today must develop ways to positively engage their Hispanic neighbors. In addition to providing both English and Spanish speaking worship opportunities, churches can commission surveys to ascertain from the Hispanic members of the community how they might be best served by the church through services which may include educational opportunities, childcare, advocacy and other means of support.

Addressing Islamophobia

Two primary factors have necessitated that the black church advance responses to Islamophobia in the twenty-first century. The first is the exacerbation of Islamophobia in American society by the Al Qaida attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.⁴²⁹ The second factor is that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and among black Americans in particular.⁴³⁰ These factors have placed Islamophobia as a significant social

membership base, increased by 41,781 persons to a total of 140,749 persons, at 16% of the total population. "Demographic Profile of Hispanics in Connecticut, 2011" <http://www.pewhispanic.org/states/county/9003/>. Accessed on May 3, 2016.

⁴²⁹ The spread of post 9/11 Islamophobia has been explicated in the following works; John L. Esposito, Ibrahim Kaln. *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Todd H. Green *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*. Baltimore, MD: Fortress, 2015. Deepa Kumar. *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2012. Peter Gottschalk, Gabriel Greenberg. *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. Nathan Chapman. Lean, John L. Esposito. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*. London: Pluto, 2012.

⁴³⁰ In 2010, Muslims made up 23.2% of the global population. By 2050, they are expected to make up about three-in-ten of the world's people (29.7%). Michael Lipka, and Conrad Hackett. "Why Muslims Are the World's Fastest-Growing Religious Group." *Pew Research Center*. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/23/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>. April 23 2015. Accessed May 1 2016. Of approximately four million Muslims living in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century, Mamiya estimated that between one-fourth to one-third are African American. Lawrence Mamiya. "Islam in America: Problems of Legacy, Identity, Cooperation, and Conflict among African American and Immigrant Muslims." *How Long This Road:*

concern on the doorstep of the black churches to be addressed. Discrimination brought about by an irrational fear of Muslims has many parallels to discrimination against blacks, against which the black churches have so vehemently fought, including police profiling, discriminating hiring practices, and business service refusals. Making this connection, advocacy against systemic oppression by the black churches must be extended to include discrimination against the Muslim community. This will require that the black churches openly reprehend instances of Islamophobia, and open a dialog with Muslims in the community in order to assess how the church and the mosque may work together to advance justice and social equality.

Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter Movement arose as a social protest against the apparently wanton and unjustifiable killing of unarmed black people by police. The movement began with the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman of the murder of Trayvon Martin, and continued with the national outcry over the killings of dozens of other unarmed victims at the hands of police.⁴³¹ Whereas the Civil Rights Movement was grounded squarely in the black churches, the Black Lives Matter Movement has been considered a movement outside of the churches. This, in large part, is due to the debate over the “respectability” of many of the victims. Some black Christians have joined white conservatives in questioning the criminal backgrounds of those who have been

Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln. A. Pollard, L. Welchel, Dwight Hopkins, Linda Thomas, eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 91-108

⁴³¹ The development of the Black Lives Matter Movement has been outlined in the following sources, Jordan T Campt, Christina Heatherton, eds. *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter.* New York: Verso, 2016. Kelly Brown Douglas. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. Leah Gunning Francis. *Ferguson and Faith Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community.* St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2015. Emmanuel Harris II, Antonio Tillis. *The Trayvon Martin in US: An American Tragedy.* New York, NY : Peter Lang, 2015.

killed, undergirded by the idea that if they had been more law abiding and submissive to the demands of the police, their deaths would not have been warranted.⁴³² The tragedy of the black churches' absence in the Black Lives Matter Movement is that beyond advancing political and legal objectives of seeking justice for the fallen and preventing the killing of unarmed citizens by the police, the Black Lives Matter Movement is a theological indictment against American society which refuses to see all of humanity in the image of God, and therefore equally worthy of life and dignity.

The CCC developed praxis to correct the theological assertion that urban youth were struck down by gun violence because they were doing bad things, through memorializing victims, invoking pleasant memories and highlighting their positive contributions to the community. This had the effect of instilling humanity, and allowing the community to mourn. The black churches must embrace the Black Lives Matter movement as a theological indictment against a society that does not value the lives of the marginalized as equal to the lives of the privileged, which is reflected in an unequal application of the law with dire consequences.

Wrestling with Oppressive Theologies

⁴³² The respectability critique of the black churches' minimal involvement in the Black Lives Matter Movement is expounded upon in the following sources; Anthea Butler. "Black Lives Matter Symposium: The Challenge to Christians." *The Christian Century*. March 1, 2016. <http://christiancentury.org/article/2016-02/challenge-christians>. Accessed on May 2, 2016. Rev. Dr. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder. "A Politics of (Dis)Respectability." *The Huffington Post*. January 1, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-dr-stephanie-buckhanon-crowder/a-politics-of-disrespecta_b_9078942.html. Accessed on May 2, 2016. Gary. "*Black Lives Matter Symposium: The Church's Respectability*". *The Christian Century*. March 8, 2016. Gary Dorrien. "The Church's Respectability Politics". *The Christian Century*, March 8, 2016. <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-02/churchs-respectability-politics>. Accessed on May 2, 2016. Barbara Reynolds. "I Support BLM's Cause, But Not its Approach". *Washington Post*. August 24, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/24/i-was-a-civil-rights-activist-in-the-1960s-but-its-hard-for-me-to-get-behind-black-lives-matter/>. Accessed on May 2, 2016

The black churches must wrestle with oppressive theologies with regard to sex, gender and poverty. There are segments of the black churches that continue to limit women's service in the ministry.⁴³³ All of the black churches condemn homosexuality at the denominational level.⁴³⁴ The prosperity Gospel has made its way to many black pulpits, blaming the poor for their misfortunes to the neglect of the role of oppressive social structures.⁴³⁵ These oppressive stances by the churches are supported by the way the churches interpret scripture. Just as abolitionists struggled to create a theology to confront Christian apologetics in support of slavery, the black churches must wrestle with theologies that allow them to be oppressive from within. Black churches must develop the theology to promote the unencumbered development of women's leadership in ministry. They must wrestle with theologies that prevent them from supporting LGBT members of their faith communities. They must not advance theologies that blame victims for being marginalized to the neglect of the role of social forces in their marginalization.

8.5 Future Research

There is much more research to be done with regard to the work of the black churches of the twenty-first century. The construction of a social justice ministry component as a means of Christian education and missions through the churches is needful. Also needed are theological models for understanding the totality of what it means to be oppressed. It may be worthwhile to examine a collection of megachurches that have demonstrable commitments to their communities to identify the unique opportunities these communities now have to serve. Finally, in the twenty-first century, how essential is the church for advancing social justice in the age of social networking, and as a venue for human flourishing in an integrated society.

⁴³³ Sources that expound on the limitations on women in the black churches are found in footnote 421.

⁴³⁴ Explicated in footnote 423

⁴³⁵ Explicated in footnote 138.

Examination and Model Creation of Social Justice Ministry

With the exception of the work of the CCC, the data indicates that there may be a dearth of consistent social justice ministry within the black churches. This illuminates the need to identify black churches that have organized, and effective social justice ministries. An examination of the theology that undergirds these ministries, as well as tools employed for educating parishioners, developing a social witness, and organizing to affect social policy, might lead to constructive models for the means by which social justice ministries may be applied to churches as a form of Christian education and missions.

The Creation of a Theology of the Oppressed for the Twenty-First Century Black Church Context

The oppressed groups that are identified for service across the models of BCCE, were so identified by race and class, such that much of the services provided to the community was done in an effort to challenge racial discrimination, or to provide resources to the poor and downtrodden. This allowed for only limited concern for the particular needs of women, and no apparent concern for the rights of the LGBT community, as well as other oppressed groups. This suggests a need for a conceptual broadening of "the oppressed" in the twenty-first century. The following inquiries may be made. How have the black churches defined what it means to be oppressed? What theological ideas have undergirded our support of the oppressed? Can these ideas be extended and applied to other oppressed groups? What theoretical obstacles stand in the way of identifying non-traditional groups as oppressed, and in need of ministry from the churches?

A Model for Community-focused Megachurches

With consideration to their vast resources, it is worthwhile to examine the community engagement initiatives of various megachurches. By highlighting models of those megachurches that have made major investments in their community, concrete strategies can be developed for churches with the requisite membership and resources to practice large-scale liberation. In addition to an exploration of the concrete ways in which megachurches have invested in their community, this investigation would require an examination of the theology that supports community investment from these churches.

Social Justice in the Age of Social Networking

From the founding of the black churches through the modern era, the churches were necessary meeting places for direct action. During slavery, the hidden churches of the slaves in the brush arbors of the south, and the newly formed churches of the north were places where oppressive theologies and practices could be rejected and corrected. During the Civil Rights Movement, black churches were used to broadcast and disseminate information related to the cause of freedom, and to hold mass meetings to plot local movements, and to strategize for protests. During these times there was no other place black communities could have organized in such a way than the church. With the advent of the internet, information can be disseminated and social action can be planned in the privacy of each participant's home. The fiery sermons that used to motivate members of the community to action may now be expressed in opinion-editorial blogs. The dissemination of information through the passing of flyers and church announcements, have been all but replaced with emails, web posts and twitter hashtags. Offertory appeals to support community mobilization and organization may now be obtained through electronic crowd-sourced funding. With this in mind it might be worthwhile to examine

the extent to which social action through social networking, has caused an ebb in the social justice agenda of the churches.

Human Flourishing in an Integrated Society

At one time, in many communities, blacks lived out almost all of their recreational life and social development in the churches. As such, the church was the primary station for the promotion of human flourishing. Since integration, however, other institutions, such as secular clubs and organizations, and after school programs, have emerged to replace or compete with the role that was once almost exclusively held by the churches. Yet, the data indicates that the churches across the models offer substantive programs for social development. It may be worthwhile to mark the ways in which exercises in human flourishing in the churches have been affected by competition with secular organizations in the larger society. What programs have suffered, and what new programs have arisen? Also, how has competition for human flourishing exercises affected the culture of the churches as well as the attendance and participation of parishioners and the community at large?

8.6 Limitations

There are a few limitations to be observed in the study with regards to the local examples of BCCE models. There may be more data to glean from an examination of local grassroots groups that work in cooperation with a larger regional or national network of grassroots organizations.⁴³⁶ While the CCC focuses on confronting social injustice on the local level, grassroots groups that cooperate with a national network, focus on social issues on both a local and larger scale. These groups also draw from a broad network of resources, which may enhance

⁴³⁶ Both the National Action Network and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference are examples of networks of local grass-roots groups, working in sync to address social in justice on regional and national levels.

outreach to their community. As the Beulah Heights Church independently sponsors the BLDC, there may be more to learn from CDCs that are sponsored by a cooperative of churches.

Churches that jointly sponsor CDCs may have a broader impact on the community and draw from a wider, and perhaps more diverse constituency to whom they may offer services. It must be observed that FC is an isolated black megachurch in a region of the country where megachurches are not common. It might be worthwhile to examine the extent to which megachurches that are in closer proximity to each other cooperate to impact their communities.

8.7 Conclusion

The black churches across the models of community engagement are vibrant with activity. These churches work to meet many of the social needs of their communities in real and meaningful ways. As such, the black churches are vital to their communities. Yet, to remain consistent with the liberating mission that gave rise to their founding, the black churches must be intentional in addressing social injustice, and their services must be extended to include all who are oppressed in the community, so that all are affirmed as siblings under the parentage of God.

The black churches must be willing to speak truth to power in every social shift, and to confront the new and changing ways that the peace and freedom of the vulnerable is compromised by the privileged. The black churches must look for those who are denied the peace and freedom of God in each generation. The black churches must find the theology to address and correct mutating oppressive structures that arise in new and unique ways with each generation. The black churches must be committed to the advancement of liberation and the promotion of human flourishing, as well as the advancement of social justice in ways that are

continually new and pertinent to the times. In so doing, the black churches will have a social witness that is relevant for the twenty-first century and beyond.

Appendix A- Interview Questions

- 1) What led you to become a Christian?
- 2) What does it mean to be a Christian?
- 3) In what ways do you exercise your faith?
- 4) Do you believe Christians have a moral obligation to serve?
 - a) If so, who must Christians serve, and in what ways?
- 5) To what extent should churches be involved in the community?
- 6) In what ways is this community served by the organization
- 7) Who are the founders of your organization?
- 8) How was this organization started? What was the original mission?
 - a) Is this still the mission today? If so, why and how has it been adapted?
 - b) What is the present structure of your organization? Who are the officers and what are their functions?
 - c) In what ways does your organization set out to serve the community?
 - d) How does your organization finance its programs? Has funding your programs ever been problematic?
 - e) In your own assessment, in what ways has your organization been successful in meeting its service goals? In your own assessment, in what ways has your organization failed in meeting its service goals?
- 9) Who are the people (prototypes/targets) immediately effected by your organization's work?
 - a) Is affiliation with the church/ church organization necessary to benefit from the organization's service?
- 10) How do you identify yourself in terms of ethnicity?
- 11) How would you define the black church? What makes the black church "black"? Is the black church unique? How so?
- 12) Would you describe this ministry/ organization as a "black" church ministry/ organization? Why or why not?

Appendix B- Data Collection - Christian Community Commission

INTERVIEWS

Reverend Donald Morris

- July 10, 2013; July 17, 2013; July 24, 2013; November 14, 2013; January 14, 2014;
February 3, 2014

Apostle Eugene Brunson

- July 26, 2013, August 22, 2013, November 11, 2013; November 18, 2013

Leslie Radcliffe

- July 31, 2013; August 12, 2013

E. Marie Bell

- August 29, 2013; October 30, 2013

Anonymous Clergy Person

- August 21, 2013; November 11, 2013;

Anonymous Volunteer (1)

-January 14, 2013; February 3, 2014; July 11, 2014; August 8, 2014

Anonymous Volunteer (2)

- September 11, 2013; July 11, 2014; August 8, 2014; March 3, 2015,

Anonymous Volunteer (3)

- January 14, 2014; June 16, 2014; August 8, 2014

OBSERVATIONS

Community Clean Up

- June 13, 2013; June 14, 2014

Back to School Event

- August 17, 2013; August 16, 2014

Basketball event

- August 7, 2013; August 14, 2013; August 21, 2013

Bike Ride

- October 6, 2013

Men's Plenary Session

- November 6, 2013

Men's Plenary Session
- November 7, 2013

Brotherhood Leadership Summit Service
- November 8, 2013

Bike Ride
- November 13, 2014

Day of Prayer Planning Sessions
- March 10, 2014, April 7, 2014; April 28, 2014

Day of Prayer
- May 4, 2014

Youth Rally
- May 12, 2014; June 16, 2014; July 28, 2014

Monthly Meeting
-March 3, 2013; April 7, 2013; May 5, 2013; June 9, 2013; July 7, 2013; September 6, 2013;
October 6, 2013; November 3, 2013; December 8, 2013; January 5, 2014; February 2, 2014;
March 2, 2014

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www.thepromiseland.info

- About us -Accessed on July 10, 2013
- Mission Statement- Accessed on July 10, 2013
- Leadership- Accessed on July 10, 2013
- Past Events- Accessed on July 10, 2013
- Announcements- Accessed on July 10, 2013
- Meeting Information- Accessed on July 10, 2013
- Contact information- Accessed on July 10, 2013

Human Services Awards Day Souvenir Booklet (Annual Event)

1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012

Gospel Fest Souvenir Booklet

1997; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006

Appendix C- Data Collection - Beulah Land Development Corporation,

INTERVIEWS

Bishop Theodore Brooks

- October 22, 2013; January 27, 2014; July 24, 2014; November 10, 2014

Elder Darrell Brooks

- October 2, 2013; January 27, 2014; May 12, 2014; July 25, 2014; November 10, 2014

Helen Boykins

- August 5, 2013; October 2, 2013 October 23, 2013

Anonymous BLDC Homebuyer (1)

- August 5, 2013; October 2, 2013; October 23, 2013; January 27, 2014;

Anonymous BLDC Homebuyer (2)

- August 5, 2013; October 2, 2013; October 23, 2013

Anonymous Beulah Heights Church parishioner

- January 26, 2014; February 23, 2014; March 23, 2014

OBSERVATIONS

Backpack Giveaway

-August 24, 2013; August 22, 2014

Get Healthy Connecticut

-September 25, 2013

Morning Manna (BHSIP)

-October 10, 2013; October 17, 2013; October 24, 2013; November 14, 2013

Winter Café (BHSIP)

-January 25, 2014; February 1, 2014; February 15, 2014; March 1, 2014; March 22, 2014

Taijohn Washington Funeral

- April 2, 2014

Prayer Vigil

- April 4, 2014

BLDC Anniversary Luncheon

-November 13, 2014; November 12, 2015

Sunday Worship Service-Beulah Heights Church

October 13, 2013; November 10, 2013; December 8, 2013; January 12, 2014; February 9, 2014; March 9, 2014; April 6, 2014; May 11, 2014; June 8, 2014; July 13, 2014; August 10, 2014; September 14, 2014; October 12, 2014; November 9, 2014; December 14, 2014; January 11, 2015; February 8, 2015; March 8, 2015; April 12, 2015

Bible Study

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October 13, 2013; November 10, 2013; December 8, 2013; January 12, 2014; February 9, 2014; March 9, 2014; April 6, 2014; May 11, 2014; June 8, 2014; July 13, 2014; August 10, 2014; September 14, 2014; October 12, 2014; November 9, 2014; December 14, 2014; January 11, 2015; February 8, 2015; March 8, 2015; April 12, 2015

Appendix D - Data Collection from First Cathedral

INTERVIEWS

ArchBishop LeRoy Bailey

- January 25, 2015; July 30, 2015

Rev. Dr. Michael Bailey (Youth Pastor)

- July 30, 2014; September 15, 2014; November 2, 2014; November 20, 2014; February 25, 2015

Minister Sean Brown

- January 10, 2015; January 26, 2015

Deacon William Oneal

- January 10, 2015; January 25, 2015

Parishioner

- November 2, 2014; January 27, 2015; December 2, 2015

Parishioner- January 10, 2014; September 21, 2014

OBSERVATIONS

Annual Martin Luther King Celebration

January 20, 2013; January 19, 2014

Career Fair

- September 21, 2013; September 20, 2014

Facilities Tour

-November 2, 2014

Young Men of Distinction Meeting (YMOD)

- June 21, 2015

Sunday Worship Service

October 27, 2013; November 17, 2013; December 15, 2013; January 26, 2014; February 23, 2014; March 23, 2014; April 27, 2014; May 25, 2014; June 22, 2014; July 27, 2014; August 24, 2014; September 21, 2014; October 26, 2014; November 30, 2014; December 28, 2014; January 25, 2015; February 22, 2015; March 22, 2015; April 26, 2015

Bible Study- September 9, 2014; September 16, 2014; October 28, 2014; November 4, 2014; April 7, 2015; April 14, 2015; May 12, 2015; May 19, 2015; July 14, 2015, July 21, 2015

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