

Nazarene Theological Seminary

**Can Anything Good Come out of San Bernardino?:
Creating an Urban Ecclesiology from one of America's "Worst Cities"**

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Ministry

By

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

i

Glossary

ii

Abstract

iii

Chapter 1: Incarnation Without a Body

1

A Church Seeking an Identity

1

Vignette: Free Beer

2

Vignette: Liver Transplant

4

The Nazarene and the Church of The Nazarene

6

City Life: A Challenging History

10

13	Multicultural Opportunities: Latinx Protestants
16	The Chimera of Poverty
21	Thick Description: Between the Wash and the Field AKA “3 rd Street”
26	Demographic Data of San Bernardino and 3 rd Street
30	A Bilingual Church
31	An Urban Ecclesiology
Chapter 2: Literature Review: Should I Stay or Should I Go?	
38	
38	Introduction
39	Part 1: Come on and Let me Know
39	Biblical Theology and Perspectives on Ecclesiology
43	Sola Scriptura, The Quadrilateral, and the Role of the Holy Spirit
51	Center Church – Journey to the Middle or Stuck in It?
54	Universal Ecclesiology and The Need for a Local Ecclesiology
55	Ecclesiology from Above
58	Ecclesiology from Within

63	Part 2: If I Stay There Will be Trouble
	Immigrant in Accessibility
63	
	Case Study: The Struggle of Hispanic/Latinx Immigrants
68	
	Spanish Language as a Cultural Bond
69	
	Family Connections
71	
	Bilingual Necessity
72	
	From the Barrio to the World
74	
	Part 3: If I Stay it Will be Double
76	
	Theologies of Liberation and How they Direct Urban Ministry Praxis
76	
	Latin American Liberation Theology – Hope for the Marginalized on a Systemic Level
82	
	Black Liberation Theology – Local Grown for Local Communities
84	
	Cone, Gutierrez, and Others – Liberation in the 21 st Century City
86	
	Chapter 3: All Means All: The Story of God for the People of God
92	
	Introduction
92	
	Part 1: The City and the People of God

93

In the Beginning: The City in the Old Testament

93

City Without Walls: The City in the New Testament

100

Exodus, Exile, and Revelation - Life, Death, and Resurrection of
Biblical Ecclesiology

104

Part 2: Conflict Based Ecclesiology

108

Building a Different Kingdom

108

Prophetic Voices – Suffering Servants

114

Service to the Poor – Wesleyan/Nazarene Ecclesial Identity

122

**Chapter 4: Everyone Means Everyone: A Local Model of Urban Ecclesiology –
Biblical, Immigrant, Liberating**

127

Introduction

127

Part 1: Finding our Place in the Biblical Narrative

129

Urban Manifestations

129

A City on a Hill

132

The Biblical Ministry of Presence

133

Part 2: Fellow Immigrants Searching for Home

137

Mobile in Nature

137

Adaptable to Challenge and Change

140

Surrender the Safety of Home to Engage the Lost

143

Part 3: Seek First the Kingdom and God's Liberation

145

Being a Voice for the Voiceless

145

Does Anyone Care that We are Here?

147

Keeping it Real

150

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Implications and Possibilities

153

Radical Improvement in Individual Lives

153

Vignette: The Praying Abuela – Amalia

154

Vignette: Esmerelda – Finding a Place of Rest

155

Vignette: Breaking the Chains – Jimbo

157

Urban Renewal and Improvement

159

Vignette: Touching the Untouchable – Orchid Court

160

Vignette: Cornerstone Community Health Inc. - From Hep A to Covid-19

161

Vitality in Dying Churches

163

Recommendations for Others

164

Where do we Begin?

164

If Anyone Lacks Wisdom

165

The Leap of Faith

167

Not Against Flesh and Blood

169

Bibliography

171

Appendix: Tables and Figures

183

Abbreviations

CCH	Cornerstone Community Health Inc. A separate 501(c)3 that provides a free medical clinic on the church campus.
COTN	The Church of the Nazarene – An international Christian Denomination.
SBBCOTN	San Bernardino Bilingual Church of the Nazarene – Local church located in San Bernardino, California.
SBB	San Bernardino Bilingual – A shorter name for the church.

Glossary

3rd Street. The colloquial name for the neighborhood where the local church resides. 3rd Street is the main thoroughfare for the neighborhood that grants access into and out of the community.

Abuela/Abuelo. Spanish for grandmother/grandfather. It is used as a term of endearment.

America/American. Colloquial terms used to refer to the country and citizens of The United States of America.

Barrio. Spanish term to describe a local neighborhood. It designates a neighborhood with

a higher level of negative traits such as higher crime rates, violence, drug use, or economic inequality in contemporary use.

Black. An inclusive racial designation used to represent all peoples and cultures who identify with black African ancestry. This includes but is not limited to African Americans, Caribbeans, and African Latinx.

Hispanic. A designation of people who identify with countries and locations influenced by the Spanish language. It is the official designation used by the United States government to describe people who can trace their ancestry from Spain or other Spanish-speaking territories.

Immigrant. Any person or group of people who leave their place of origin to live in another location to establish a degree of permanency. No set distance must be traveled to identify as an immigrant.

Latina/Latino/Latinx. A designation of people who represent cultural groups from Latin America. “Latinx” is a recent addition to express the representation of Latin cultures in a neutral and more inclusive manner.

Liberation Theology. A Christian Theology that focuses on the topic of the liberation of people who are suffering. There are many expressions in this theological field examined through the lenses of race, ethnicity, gender, and denominational/theological traditions.

Majority World. A recent term to designate the populations that do not live in North America or Western Europe. When these populations are totaled together, they make up the majority of the earth’s people. This population disproportionately lives in higher rates of poverty and social/political injustice.

Poverty. A systemic injustice that removes dignity from those oppressed by a perceived lack of goods. It is more inclusive than just economic disparity. The opposite of poverty is not rich but having the basic necessities and a quality of life that allows people to control their own destiny.

Abstract

Steven Erick Martinez

Can Anything Good Come out of San Bernardino?:

Creating an Urban Ecclesiology from one of America's "Worst Cities"

Ecclesiology is the theological understanding of the Church as a present reality and the Church's mission in the world. The majority of the global population has shifted toward urban centers. Simultaneously, contemporary ecclesiology models are based upon outdated cultural understandings and geared to equip ministry for rural and suburban communities. What is needed is an Urban Ecclesiology that is rooted in a local congregational community that can be modeled and modified for broad application to push the Church forward in engaging the urban reality.

Therefore, this project will seek to develop the foundations of an Urban Ecclesiology that will help form and inform churches in the hearts of our cities to pursue the specific vision of what God is calling them to do in their current location. At the same time, the project will remain faithful to the Church of the Nazarene and the Church Universal's theological foundations. This study will demonstrate that an Urban Ecclesiology will be identifiable by reflecting three key factors: 1. Biblical in its creation, 2. Immigrant in its adaptability, and 3. Liberating in its application.

Chapter 1

Incarnation Without a Body

A Church Seeking an Identity

A child's first taste of ecclesiology, the theological doctrine of the Church, was expressed in a simple exercise. While she no longer remembers who taught her, she folded her hands in a specific manner and recited a statement of profound theological truth. "This is the Church," it began. "This is the steeple. Open the door and see all the people!" Of course, this was the moment of truth. If done correctly, eight wiggling fingers were praising God. Many a child quickly learned that if she did not follow the correct instructions, the church was strangely vacant when opened. What became clear was that

the Church was more than just a building or location as the people who gathered were a vital part of the process. What did this nursery exercise teach us? It taught us that the Church manifests itself in at least three principles: 1. A physical presence/location, 2. An identifying sign that distinguished the purpose of the presence, 3. A people gathered in participation. While rudimentary, this simple activity we teach our children formulates a doctrine of the Church that establishes a starting point for this project.

The problem for many North American churches, both denominational and local, lacks a strong understanding of ecclesiology. There are countless thoughts and theories behind this, such as an individual, consumer-based mindset as a culture, or a suspicious attitude toward universal acceptance or foreign control. Currently, North American culture is experiencing radical adjustments, and the simple assertion that American culture is synonymous with Christianity can no longer be assumed. For example, in the simple childhood ecclesiology mentioned earlier, there is an assumption that one recognizes the symbol of the steeple. With the church growth movement of the 1990s, there is a generation of believers who have never worshiped in a *traditional* church building; instead, these followers of Jesus have worshiped their entire Christian lives in coffee shops, warehouses, school gymnasiums, or repurposed theatres and auditoriums. In a current culture of changing norms and symbols, the Church often struggles with maintaining an established identity within itself as well as a cultural identity in the world. Our weakness is the lack of a definite doctrine of ecclesiology that forces us into a process of constant self-discovery that is playing catch up to an ever-changing culture. Perhaps this is seen in the drastic fall in the number of denominations in the United States over the last twenty years. By the end of the twentieth century, there were approximately

1,200 denominations, while today, there are about 200 denominations, with roughly half of those denominations having any significant membership. Simply put, the Church, as an institution, is suffering and one way to reverse this current course is to re-establish an understanding of what the Church is for -congregations to facilitate a viable mission to engage local communities, especially urban communities, with the transformational power of Jesus Christ. This project will use the San Bernardino Bilingual Church of the Nazarene as a guide to ground this study to the realities of urban ministry that do not exist or function in the vacuum of academic research.

Vignette: Free Beer

One cannot overlook the importance of demographic research when entering a new ministry assignment. Virtually all contemporary resources on developing or enhancing the local church's ministry will begin with some assessment of the people being served. Of course, this research function is not new, nor is it restricted to highly specialized experts. It is something that all of us do daily. No longer limited to asking the residents the best place to grab a bite to eat, we can easily retrieve our cell phones. Within a few seconds, we have access to various websites and reviews of what and where the best restaurant is within five minutes of our current location.

Similarly, the local church is seconds away from identifying the average person in their surrounding neighborhood with data that identifies their income, education, ethnicity, household size, and what languages are spoken. The foundation of what a young pastor knew was shaken that first week in ministry during the first service. It was the Saturday “Compassion Service” where following the service, the clothing closet

would be opened, and groceries would be distributed to those who attended. This pastor spent that first Saturday in full observation mode. His task was to interact with the volunteers who organized and ran the ministry. He became acquainted with those from the community who attended the service. People were friendly, and there seemed to be excitement from all sides to have a “new guy” in the mix, especially a young, seminary-trained pastor. Everyone was generous with information and openly displayed their thoughts and opinions on the city, their lives, and especially the church. It would not be a stretch to state that everyone who attended on that Saturday was thankful that the church was open and willing to help with the community's needs. The demographics supported the local accounts as the neighborhood's statistics identified it as economically disadvantaged, with a high percentage of families struggling to afford necessities.

The pastor could not recall every piece of advice he received that day. However, he did remember the conversation he had with “Ned.” Ned is a middle-aged man who was functionally homeless. He always seemed to find a place to rest his head for the night, and he spent most of his days wandering around the neighborhood in some state of intoxication. Eventually, the conversation came to a place where the pastor asked him how the church could reach more people. He responded quickly, “First, you need a sign.” He could easily see the confused look on the pastor's face as the pastor knew for a fact that the church had a sign. The church has several signs that identified the services and times of ministry. “Yeah,” he continued, “But on this sign, you only need two words.” Puzzled, the pastor asked Ned what two words could lead to the explosion of outreach that would guarantee the multitudes. He leaned toward him and looked him in the eyes and revealed his prophetic message. “Free... beer.”

Ned assured the pastor that he did not intend for the church to supply free beer to the community but shared what he believed would be a draw to the church from the community. He assessed that the neighborhood would be interested and would increase the number of people who would venture into the church. In all honesty, Ned's suggestion would probably work regarding increasing initial attendance, but what would happen once people discovered that the church had no real intention of honoring the advertisement? How often do churches make promises that cannot be delivered? Do local ministries know or care what the desires, wants, and needs of the neighborhood around them outside of statistical, impersonal data? Is it the goal of ministry to be a means that attracts people into the church by any method possible?

Vignette: Liver Transplant

In March of 2009, I was given the devastating news that I would need a liver transplant. I had won the genetic lottery and was diagnosed with a series of autoimmune diseases that destroyed my liver. Doctors had initially given me an optimistic projection that I did not need a transplant immediately but was something that would be required in five to seven years. By the end of the year, I was in full end-stage liver disease and was placed on the transplant list. What is typically a three to six-month process was expedited to two days as doctors scrambled to stabilize my body. After two and a half years on the list, I received my liver in the summer of 2012.

The first week of recovery after a transplant is the most difficult. While the body recovers from the eight to twelve-hour surgery, the doctors fight to find the correct ratios of medications that will stop the body from rejecting the new organ. Since the new liver

comes from a foreign body, the recipient's immune system sees it as an invader that must be attacked. The body knows that it needs a liver to sustain life, but at the same time, it desires its own natural, organic body parts. Currently, there are only two known solutions with how to deal with this problem.

The first and most common treatment is immunosuppressant drugs that make the individual's immune system too weak to attack the foreign organ. This comes with risk as it lowers the recipient's ability to fight off other diseases and infections that may potentially attack the body, such as the common flu or Covid-19. In other words, one places the body at an unknown risk to save it from a known threat. The second is to possibly receive an organ from an identical source, such as a twin sibling. Since the cells' DNA structures are identical, the recipient's immune system does not see it as an outside entity and does not attack it. This has led to the hypothesis that if organs could be cloned from the recipient's cells, then rejection and immunosuppressant therapy would no longer be a concern.

When it comes to ministry in the urban context, it often feels that the solution is a transplant model. When we see struggling urban churches in struggling urban communities, we often treat the situation as if an ecclesial organ transplant is needed. One would not disagree with this assessment, in principle. However, the question that must be asked is, where is the transplant coming from? It is from a similar urban environment, a twin situation, or is the transplanted ecclesiology coming from a foreign location that the body struggles to identify with? Is ecclesiology something that is so universal that it can be transplanted freely, or is there an organic understanding of ecclesiology that local church communities must develop for themselves? Is there a need to create an urban

ecclesiology that can serve as a framework for urban churches to establish the local visions and missions to serve their local neighborhoods? Or are they forced to embrace the foreign models of contemporary ecclesiologies that predominantly come from suburban, middle to upper-class American society?

The Nazarene and the Church of The Nazarene

When a group of Holiness Christians contemplated the organization of a new church in Los Angeles, California, they settled on the name The Church of The Nazarene. They believed that this name reflected the most humble, lowliest aspects of Jesus. It was the title that he inherited from His residency place that inferred someone who was not a part of society's established classes. Instead, the title of Nazarene conveyed the message of someone who lived on the borders or margins of First Century Jewish society. Like the disciple, Nathanael stated to his brother Philip, "Can any good thing come from Nazareth?" This was the reputation that the one hundred and thirty-five members who gathered in Los Angeles on October 30, 1895, confirmed when they approved the following statement:

We seek the simplicity and the pentecostal (sic) power of the primitive New Testament Church. The field of labor to which we feel especially called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever also may be found waste places and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin. This work we aim to do through the agency of city missions, evangelistic services, house-to-house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying. To this end we strive personally to walk with God and to incite others so to do.

Thirteen years later, this group of Nazarenes would officially join with two other like-minded groups to establish the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. While these different groups came from other regions of the country (the Northeast and the South),

there was an apparent connection between the early work of the new denomination and urban ministry. These founding members were not ashamed of their call to serve the “poor” and primarily go to the locations where they saw the poor struggle the most: the city.

David Busic, currently a General Superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene, states, “Worldview determines vision; vision determines mission; mission determines strategy.” This statement summarizes what Busic describes as the first three generations of Nazarenes and their overall identity. The first generation was influenced by the optimism of postmillennial thought that permeated the theological landscape of prewar America. Although this generation, and the denomination itself, was established by the merger of several regional bodies, with their ideas and methods, there was a unifying principle that the culture was something to be transformed and, therefore, must be engaged. The cities were opportunities where the transformational power of Jesus could impact and Christianize the population, establishing God's Kingdom in the here and now.

In contrast, the second-generation Nazarenes were established from a different mindset. The leaders that rose from this generation were birthed from the revivals and camp meetings that went along with the social gospel of the COTN. However, this revival movement had roots and standing in the rural communities and was often critical of the urban centers that were places of debauchery. A significant reversal would occur in the minds of many in the denomination, and the cities were now suspect, and vision and mission shifted to more *purified* settings. The Church’s worldview would shift away from the idea of transforming culture toward one of conflict with culture.

The third generation of Nazarenes followed in the previous generation's path with

an air of suspicion of urban areas. As growing and shifting economic and technological advances swept the world before WWII, the Second Great Migration of black families away from the fields in the South to the industrial North became a point of cultural crisis. What resulted was an exodus of white flight to the now growing suburbs that provided access to cities' economic centers but security from the blight that plagued urban populations. To justify such actions, a new shift in worldview became embedded in Nazarenes, one that bloomed from revivalism's individual, moral salvation. Instead of shunning the world, however, this newer model allowed for accommodation of culture if it benefitted and enriched believers' personal lives. This is where we currently see the culture of the COTN. Most of the Nazarenes in the United States embrace the political and social ideologies that promote an individual morality, skepticism of diversity, and a sense of impending doom and social collapse, which are theological perspectives more in line with fundamentalist dispensationalism.

Busic's primary thesis is that the Church of the Nazarene began as an urban-based denomination that eventually transformed into a rural and suburban-based group, which has left the Church at a potential moment of crisis. Will the Church of the Nazarene be willing and able to recapture her earliest identity to be relevant in a world that has become more urban? How then does one develop an ecclesiology from and for a splintered denomination? Is it too late? This project will proceed with the belief that it is not too late to develop an ecclesiology for the Church of the Nazarene, even if it concludes that it might be too late to have a "plug and play" universal ecclesiology that can be inserted into any location or culture around the world. The project will conclude that this should not be the concern to begin with. Therefore, this project will seek to develop the

foundations of an Urban Ecclesiology that will help form and inform churches in the hearts of our cities to seek the specific vision of what God is calling them to do in their current location while remaining faithful to the theological foundations of the Church of the Nazarene and the Church Universal. This project aims not to shame the current manifestation of the Church of the Nazarene, nor is it an exercise in the nostalgia of harkening back to the “glory days” of yesteryear. Instead, the intent is to recapture the fire and Spirit of the early Nazarenes who were willing to work from differing vantage points in pursuit of unity, not uniformity.

City Life: A Challenging History

The people of God have had a contentious relationship with the city that can be summed up with the classic lyrics, “Should I stay, or should I go?” While the English rock band: The Clash expressed the volatile nature of a relationship between two lovers, the same volatility exists between the Church and urban environments. At times, the Church has deeply invested in the city's life, engaging people in various social and economic situations, working for the betterment of all who assembled within the city. At other times, the Church has packed her bags and fled in the middle of the night, leaving unhealed scars to pursue safer pastures. Why does one local congregation stay while her neighboring congregation goes? Does the Christian faith believe that God has a call for the Church to maintain a permanent ministry thrust to the urban communities of this world or not?

A quick glance would show that the majority of the nation’s impoverished citizens reside in cities. From 1972 to 1991, American cities experienced a nearly 100

percent increase in housing people who live in the highest levels of poverty. Nearly two-thirds of the country's poor live in urban areas. With this level of poverty, our cities are plagued with crime, violence, addiction, and an overall lack of safety. Nevertheless, our cities continue to grow, and the population of this world is increasingly being urbanized. It is time to admit that urban ministry's "specialty" is becoming obsolete as urban is now the norm. Without an urban vision, the Church will simply surrender her call and influence to the majority of people we are called to seek and share the life-giving Gospel of Christ.

Timothy Keller reminds us that our ministry vision is formed from our theological vision, which is formed by our doctrinal and biblical traditions. In other words, how we read the Bible will shape how we interpret our theological understanding of the city. While this sounds rather simplistic, and admittedly it is, one must only look at the plethora of "how-to" books and seminars that suggest that great success is around the next corner if one subscribes to specific gimmicks or systems. The wording is harsh, but the challenges of urban ministry need to be rooted in our deepest convictions and understandings of who we are as The People of God.

In this project, it will be demonstrated that the city has a special place in the heart of God. It should come as no surprise that so many metaphors of the Heavenly Kingdom are related to a grand city where God's presence dwells amongst the inhabitants. It is these inhabitants that make the city so important to God. When the prophet Jonah asked why his people's enemy was to be spared, God replied that the one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants of Nineveh were valuable to God (Jonah 4:9-11). Even the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were nearly spared if only a righteous few could be found.

Furthermore, God established an earthly kingdom that included cities of refuge for those who sought mercy and protection. The city was where God's light drew the tired masses who fled the chaos and darkness of the wilderness. For those cities that failed in reflecting the heart of God, the harshest judgments were leveled upon them. Entire cities were eradicated for the sins of injustice against the poor, the weak, and the innocent, and Jesus wept over them.

God's heart for the city implies that God's followers must also have a heart for the city. By the late 19th century, America's urban centers were being flooded with immigrants from Europe, Asia, and the South's plantations, longing for hope of the American Dream. Many of them discovered that this dream did not materialize for every person who managed to set foot on American shores, crossed the Southern border, or the Mason-Dixon Line. Most of them instead found unemployment and poverty. Church leaders began to see that the traditional ministry models that had been established were no longer effective in a growing industrial world. Questions began to arise if the problem was poverty or poor people? Was the fault in the structures of the cities or the residents themselves?

What emerged was a movement that came to be known as the Social Gospel that was significantly influenced by Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbush and his refusal to divide a social theology from an individual one. The Church is to realize that the call from God was and is to save both. However, this ecclesial awakening suffered from the same sins of American society, primarily greed, racism, and segregation. With Jim Crow legally allowing the eighty-year repression of blacks along with laissez-faire business regulations that would restrict the rights of foreign laborers, the plight of the poor in the

city would continue into the 20th and 21st Centuries. Our cities continually neglect the voices of the suffering, and yet the voice of God is constant in asking the Church to respond.

Something must change if we are to recapture the Church's heart for the city. Perhaps what is needed is a shift in perspective. So often, ministry frameworks start from the outside looking in. The early Social Gospel movement suffered greatly from this paradigm. They wanted to help the foreigner and person of color but did not include them in their conventions or listen to their testimonies. In our contemporary setting, the Church can no longer feign ignorance to the cries of the city. It is time to listen to these cries.

Multicultural Opportunities: Latinx Protestants

By 2040 nearly a third of the United States will identify themselves as Latinx. By that date, the US Census Bureau estimates that the Anglo population will no longer be the majority ethnic/racial group (Anglo Evangelicals will no longer be the religious majority). Already the largest minority group in the United States, Latinx people will continue to grow due to continued migration from Latin America as well as a birth rate that is much higher than the shrinking Anglo majority. A recent poll conducted by PRRI showed that most "White Evangelicals" see the shrinking majority of Anglos as a negative to American culture and values.; With these statistical realities, the Church in the United States is not facing a crisis; instead, the Church is possibly looking at the future revival that will reverse the decline of Christian, primarily Protestant, membership.

The first question that is often asked regarding Latinx Christians is, "Are not all Latinx people Catholic?" While the numbers in Latin America themselves skew to this

basic assumption, amongst Latinxs in the US, the number who profess to be members of the Roman Catholic Church is rapidly declining. The percentage has dropped from sixty-eight percent to fifty-five percent in the last decade alone, with an estimated annual loss of six hundred thousand. It cannot be surprising that Protestant denominations are increasing membership in the United States and Latin America, the fruit of more than one hundred and twenty years of evangelical labor abroad, and nearly ninety years of domestic Spanish Language Districts in the Church of the Nazarene and other Holiness denominations. In fact, by 1960, the most comprehensive data collected showed an increase of nearly 500 percent in congregations and members in Spanish-speaking churches in the span of thirty years. There is no need to wait for this wave of Latinx Protestants to crash upon our local congregational doors. The reality for many of these Latinx Protestants is that this wave has already landed, and they eagerly sit on the outside of our churches, longing to be seen and engaged.

The thrust of this project is to find a path forward in ministering to Latinx populations (amongst other urban cultures) in the United States. In no way will this project be a defense of ministering to Latinxs populations, as our history has already shown that the question of *if* has already been answered (even if we have forgotten or buried our historical roots over the last one hundred and twenty years). No, the question that remains is *how*? Traditionally, the method of reaching Latinxs has been a model of segregation of Spanish language ministries with Spanish language ministers. This approach made sense well into the 1980s, with a large wave of Latinxs crossing the Southern border. The assumption was that Spanish speakers were almost entirely immigrants and had little to no connection with American culture or education. However,

recent studies have shown that by 2009 more than sixty percent of Latinxs in the United States were born in the United States. These studies also showed that the growing Latinx population was also growing in English proficiency, where seventy-eight percent of third-generation Latinxs were reported as being predominately English speaking.

With this information, the Church must reexamine her methods of ministering to Latinxs in the United States. This is done by shifting away from the segregation model and into a bilingual ministry model that incorporates a multicultural congregation that reflects the ever-increasing multicultural demographics of the city where the church is located. The reasoning in selecting this approach will be based upon an understanding of a dynamic Latinx Immigrant culture as it faces and embraces its rapid growth in numbers and influence and the increase of contemporary study of holistic family ministry in the local church. The goal is to show that an understanding of these two movements will create a clear case for the need for bilingual ministries to reach and serve Latinx families in holistic, spiritual care.

At this point, it is essential to discuss the nuance of identifying terms. *Latinx* describes Spanish-speaking people who trace their ancestry from Central and South America and the Caribbean. However, *Latinx* can be a term for all people from those regions regardless of the language spoken. *Latinx* describes people of a region, while *Hispanic* describes people of a language. Many feel that *Hispanic* is a term that is forced upon Spanish speakers as it is the official word choice of government agencies.

In contrast, the term *Latinx* is chosen by the people themselves and is the word choice of those who practice advocacy. As a person of Spanish-speaking origin himself, The author prefers the term *Hispanic* since it limits the confusion of language, which will

be shown to be an essential factor in understanding the culture of those from Latin and South America. However, this project will use the terms interchangeably while allowing voices to express themselves in the identifying terms of his or her choice with the understanding that the term *Latinx* will (in this project) refer to Spanish-speaking people of various locations in the Americas.

The Chimera of Poverty

What is the most significant issue that underlies the systemic problems that plague our cities? If hard-pressed, one would likely conclude that the biggest issue is poverty. However, when pressed again, there becomes a difficulty in adequately defining what poverty truly means. The simplest definition is a lack of financial resources. The United States government stipulates that nearly forty million people live at or below the poverty line. The government defines poverty as those who fail to earn a specific amount of income. For example, in 2009, the Federal poverty guidelines stipulated that a family of four earning \$22,050 was at 100% of the poverty level. Does this definition help in understanding what actual poverty looks like? Would earning an extra dollar a year suddenly elevate said family out of poverty? To fully serve and minister to our inner cities, the Church must have a more precise, more inclusive definition of poverty than merely those who live within a specific income bracket. This research uses the following definition of poverty: an inclusive, holistic understanding of the city's needs and inhabitants. Poverty can be observed as a chimera of three social plagues: Economic Inequality, Violence, and Addiction.

Poverty is more than merely a lack of money. If this were the case, then the

solution would be to spend our way out of poverty. People do not live in a vacuum of perfect economic formulas; people live in a fallen world. Therefore, the economic head of poverty is rooted in the inequality of the entire system. This absolute standard of defining poverty demeans life's value to fundamental biological factors instead of what is deemed necessary to participate in society fully. This absolute standard has allowed the perception of poverty to seem manageable or confined since we see an absolute poverty rate of 12.6%. However, the distance between the poverty line and the median income level is greater now than ever. In 1959, the poverty line was set at 50% of a like family's median income. By the year 2000, the poverty line was decreased to be only 20% of the median income. The numbers of true poverty are much higher (nearly 18%), and current welfare programs are vastly inadequate.

It must be stressed that the issue is not merely a lack of income but the growing inequality of incomes. The rate of increase in incomes amongst the upper class and the working class is simply staggering. From 1970 to 1998, the average working wage increased less than 10%, while the average wage of a top 100 CEO increased by 3,700%. Simultaneously, the minimum wage has remained stagnant, drifting closer to the absolute poverty line as this increase in stock value. The economic inequality between the top .01% and the bottom 90% is reaching levels traditionally seen in Latin America, deemed the most economically unequal region on the planet. This inequality is destroying the lives of people who are then looked down upon by society at large as unfit, unqualified, or unnecessary to participate in our society.

Material needs are not the only thing necessary for people to live and thrive in society. The prevalence of violence amongst urban communities has jeopardized the

psychological needs of safety and security amongst communities. While most would define violence as physical force, our definition must include psychological and emotional trauma. Violence breeds fear and insecurity in the city and erodes the lives of people who are already suffering from economic inequality. One of the largest factors of urban violence is the growing lack of social identity amongst the inhabitants. It is easier to commit acts of violence against those perceived as objects or who feel like objects themselves. This escalation of violence in urban areas leads to greater tension and isolation amongst those who live at the lowest levels of poverty, for they are unable to afford relocation and are often required to commute through the most dangerous of spaces for the most basic of necessities like work, groceries, and school. This results in greater economic instability as many who are the most vulnerable are too frightened to seek self-improvement if the path was deemed too dangerous to take. Even areas of refuge, such as local parks and basketball courts, were unsafe. Property values plummet, and economic opportunities move to safer locations resulting in an ever-decreasing economic net worth of urban families.

The third head of the poverty beast lies in the perceived mitigating solution of drugs and alcohol. Addiction to drugs and alcohol plays heavily into the cycle of poverty by connecting the plagues of economic injustice with violence. Illegal drugs bring money and potential income into the city while simultaneously providing a major source of its drain on personal and social capital. Perhaps the greatest example of this was experienced in the cities of Colombia during the 1990s. At the height of the infamous cartels. The leaders invested highly in their local communities by building schools, hospitals, and soccer fields while employing many in their construction. Simultaneously, their activities

led to mass amounts of violence and death through their cartel wars and the rampant abuse of drugs and alcohol that came with the drug trade. In the US, the largest factor in identifying areas of violence is the density of alcohol outlets in each area. Simultaneously, these alcohol outlets are also income sources for residents or are deemed valuable as they offer convenience in providing other goods and services. However, the societal cost is great. Studies show that households that struggle with drug and alcohol abuse are at increased risks of violence both inside and outside the home. Partnered with economic challenges and overall violent communities, addiction establishes another connecting avenue of destruction amongst those in the inner city.

Armed with our enemy's vital information, the Church should be willing and able to strike dead the Chimera of Poverty, yet the beast continues to plague our cities. Unfortunately, the Church is not fully immune to the destructive and seductive power of the beast. For decades, the Church has tried to counter the issue of poverty with a cheap, parlor version of God's grace, such as the so-called "Prosperity Gospel" or aligned ourselves with income revenues from objectionable sources. Companies who fail to pay living wages pursue and woo the Church and other Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) with income streams to serve the very communities they exploit. We invite politicians to speak to our congregations and help elect them to office only to see them serve themselves rather than the communities they claim to represent. A new, innovative Church vision is needed for congregations like the San Bernardino Bilingual Church of the Nazarene.

Thick Description: Between the Wash and the Field AKA "3rd Street"

A community with a population of 220,000 is not a small city, let alone a small town. However, San Bernardino has that small-town feel where things seem to be slower-paced than the big city of Los Angeles that seems so far away and yet casts her shadow upon the sleepy and distressed remains of a bankrupt city. A city that is well past the brink of extinction and continues to live because it is either too stubborn to die or simply missed the memo that it was supposed to. With the city goes the people, too stubborn to give up, clinging to the possibility that the memo is a typo.

Spaced over a large area with multiple freeways darting through, the city is an amalgam of multiple neighborhoods. The North Side is reserved for the wealthy and upwardly mobile. There, one will find the expanding university and the vast amount of new construction – half-million-dollar homes in a city where 80% of her children are on school lunch programs. To the West is the working-class community that is segregated from the downtown loop and equally segregated from the negative perception of San Bernardino.

The East is the up-and-coming suburbs as the city melds into the neighboring city of Highland, which is having a scandalous affair with the city of Redlands, the Jewel of the Eastern Suburbs. They sell the promise of affordability with the offer of removing children from the plight and failure of the San Bernardino City School District. The South is commercial and captures the travel of those commuting West to LA or going East on Interstate 10 in a reversal of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Then there is the center, the heart of the City. This is where one finds the neighborhood of 3rd Street.

For the minds of many, 3rd Street is simply an object: a pothole-riddled road that connects downtown to out of town. At either end of the three-mile stretch, one must

choose to either venture into the county and city high-rise buildings or the newly renovated airport - destinations leading to the reality of failed promises and expectations for a city in crisis. Although one would be hard-pressed to find a departure, heading toward the airport is still the direction of flight, a speedy escape to the outer suburbs' safety. Various candlelit shrines litter the roadsides to retell the cautionary tales that leaving the neighborhood with such speed can be just as deadly as living in it.

3rd Street is also a neighborhood that reflects the transient nature of those who travel the street for which it is named. For those who do not live in the community, it is commonly referred to as “Where?” or after a brief description; the name changes to “Oh Yeah!” or the simpler “Oh?!” which is the shortened version of “Oh! Why would you choose to live there?” the answer is in the question itself, it is not a place where one chooses to live; instead, it is the place one lives when there seem to be no more choices. It is a neighborhood where one lands with the hope of being able to fly away one day and, at the same time, a neighborhood where some have lost all hope ever to fly again and are simply looking for a place to rest one’s head.

The beauty of Southern California is the diversity of topography. In two hours, one can hike or ski in the majestic snow-peaked mountains and then venture to the beach for a beautiful sunset dinner reservation. One can journey to the highest and lowest elevations in the Continental United States. In other words, traveling in the state is seldom in a straight line. 3rd Street is not exempt from this topographical reality. Two “geographic” features define the neighborhood that one must transverse to navigate the community. To the North, there is the *Wash*, and to the South, there is the *Field*. Both obstacles provide access and challenges to those who wish to connect to the Street, where

goods and services are located away from the residences.

The greater San Bernardino area is referred to as the Inland Valley. Growing up in the area, one can easily locate their bearings with a glance to locate the mountains which point to the North. Cardinal directions are the parlance du jour when providing guidance in the city. In the 3rd Street community, the mountains are a distant destination of possible relaxation and escape from everyday life that few can grasp firmer than a dream. Therefore, the flood control ditch, or the Wash as it is named, becomes the main feature for direction. Very few residences occupy 3rd Street itself, and the neighborhood is divided by those who live “above” or North of the Wash and those who live “below” or South of it.

The Valley was created eons ago when a great river trespassed and eroded the land creating a basin at the foot of the mountains that were thrust upward with violent collision and volcanic forces; coincidentally, similar forces continue to maintain the conflict and ruggedness of the people today. Although it is infrequent, the fear of rain and the potential flooding has spawned a series of channels throughout the Valley to guide the torrential waters to the ocean. Since the rain is infrequent, the Wash is mostly bone dry and is therefore repurposed by the community, especially the homeless, as a place of refuge and shelter.

The look of excitement on the woman’s face when she expressed that God had answered her prayers was memorable. She was recently reconciled with her mother, and she now secured a “place” to live. A spot under one of the bridges that allow access across the Wash had become available, and she had secured it for her severely ill mother and herself. God answers prayer; God must, as just as the journey through the wilderness,

God can cause water to come forth from the rocks. While not a rock, the drainage pipe that juts out of the concrete wall next to the county jail does disperse warm water that endlessly flows into the Wash. The water's origin is equally mysterious as what flowed in the Desert of Zin but is not of much concern as it is used to bathe, cook, and drink.

Fortunately, the forgotten and daily neglect of 3rd Street offers a respite as the normally fenced, enclosed, and concrete reinforcement of the Wash ends as the neighborhood begins. While still a treacherous path, one can save time by repelling and climbing the ten-foot trench embanked with loose dirt and gravel. Only the brave, foolhardy, or desperate take the direct path with results in most taking the Pedley Street bridge to travel back and forth, often adding hundreds of yards to their walk, saddled with their burdens, both physical and personal.

The Southside of 3rd Street is an unfortunate afterthought. The County claimed most of the land that was once the border of the long-abandoned Air Force base. The base has been occupied with businesses that relocated their employees and their warehouses, resulting in a false hope of potential employment. Therefore, the Southern neighborhood is simply two streets with no direct access to 3rd Street without a trip around the block unless one desires to venture through the Field, the abandoned, well-trodden parcel of property that connects 2nd Street with 3rd. As with the Wash, the community's refugees have transformed the field into a series of encampments with tents and makeshift shelters. According to mail records, dozens of people live at approximately three to four addresses (including the Church) on 2nd Street but, they reside in the Field.

The Field comes with inherent risks that come to define life on 3rd Street. Traveling through the half-acre of refuge and debris from decades of encampments is a

minefield of hidden shrapnel with the added cover of potential ambush locations. Many who make the journey use precautions such as traveling during the day or traveling with makeshift protective clubs or “walking sticks” to fend off stray dogs or attackers looking for targets. Again, the desperate or foolhardy brave the shortcut. Those in recovery have learned that the reward of saving a walk around the block is not worth the risk of temptation as a quick and easy fix can always be found in the Field. One might ask, “Why does anyone bother to venture to 3rd Street?” The answer is that many believe that God has provided an Oasis in this Wilderness.

While sparse, some destinations draw people on 3rd Street itself, Phil’s, Ellis Liquor, and the Church. Phil’s is a local burger joint that provides the best and perhaps only option in a food desert. Along with the quality food, Phil’s is also responsible for the only positive fragrance that fills the air and cuts the choking fumes of speeding diesel engines. Sadly, Phil’s is a luxury that limits community participation. The usual patron is a county worker enjoying a lunch hour meal with coworkers or those who pick up an office order and speedily leave the neighborhood to take their bounty to safer environments.

Ellis Liquor (and Mart!) is the provider of goods for the neighborhood as the nearest grocery store is several miles away. In a community where walking is necessary, the local run to the store becomes a strategic affair of mathematical precision as weight limits. The full allocation of space in a plastic bag is calculated and recalculated at rates that would amaze a NASA control room. The ability of community members to distribute and transport a variety of commodities along with a handful of children should qualify for some Olympic-like event that often goes unnoticed, let alone unrewarded. The selection

is limited and often overpriced, but Oases are few, and the demands must be met to ensure their survival in the Wilderness itself.

Finally, there is the church, a hodgepodge of various decades of construction where extraordinarily little matches in architectural design and yet flows together in its own strange way where it transforms into a beacon that calls the neighborhood. It is not an understatement to suggest that everyone knows the church and what is done. Many have attended a holiday service over the years and received a turkey or toys for Christmas. Several times a week, the church provides clothing and food for those in need and provides an alternative to the pipe for showers and other hygiene needs. Perhaps the greatest need that the church provides is space. In a crowded community where multiple generations huddle in small single-family domiciles, the church provides a place to gather and stretch. A safer place where children can play and where order is possible, a place where people come and feel “blessed.”

Demographic Data of San Bernardino and 3rd Street

A quick Google search would reveal a constant flow of negative headlines regarding the city of San Bernardino. Scandal and turmoil from the city leaders plague the community as the people struggle with the ramifications of a failing economy and civic bankruptcy that brings potential closure to needed social programs and services. If this disheartening economic reality was not enough, the level of violence and crime brings a credible threat to safety. highlighted by a terrorist attack a few years ago. Simply put, San Bernardino is not a place where people desire to live. Admittedly, this brief description is anecdotal and can easily be dismissed or diminished as a biased reflection of someone

who is perhaps too close to the struggles to assess the city accurately. Does the actual data of this community reflect what a casual glance seems to reveal?

For this assessment, the desire is to present an accurate portrayal of San Bernardino and an accurate portrayal of the neighborhood in which the San Bernardino Bilingual congregation lives and serves. Two primary resources will be used to show the macro and micro pictures of the community. The first resource will be the US Census data that has been compiled and accessed through the Church of The Nazarene research department. The second resource will be the Child Opportunity Index 2.0 (COI), which uses US Census data to evaluate children's potential to succeed based upon their access to several factors such as education, economics, and physical health. According to the COI report, The Riverside/San Bernardino metro area ranks as the fifth-worst in the nation when it comes to opportunities for children's advancement. Looking at the data maps associated with the COI report, San Bernardino is an epicenter of the lowest levels of opportunity. The city is the bottom of the funnel, where opportunity increases in proportion to the distance removed from the city. Interestingly, many surrounding cities such as Rancho Cucamonga, Loma Linda, and Redlands are often rated in “best places to live” lists.

When looking at a half-mile radius centered around the church’s address, we see a population of more than 10,000 people in an area of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a square mile. This creates a population density that is more than four times the average of the city itself. Although it is often ranked as one of the worst neighborhoods in San Bernardino, it continues to grow in population because it has remained one of the most, if not the most, affordable housing locations in the city, and therefore the entire region. The easiest way to describe the

neighborhood is that it is half as good or twice as bad based on national averages. Any socio-economic factor that would be deemed beneficial – wages, for example, would be half the national average, while a negative factor like crime would at least be double the national averages.

The clearest examples are homeownership and poverty level. Homeownership rates are nearly half of the national average, with slightly more than 30% of the population owning their home. At the same time, the neighborhood is filled with homes that are substantially lower in value, which keeps the rental prices down but provides little equity and capital for economic growth. It is no surprise then that this neighborhood's poverty rate is more than double the national average at over 50%, with another 10% living near poverty. Of course, these statistics can be misleading as they do not factor the cost of living into the equation. While the neighborhood is deemed “affordable” compared to the surrounding areas, it is still located in a state with one of the highest costs of living. For example, in San Bernardino Unified School District, 88.5% of students qualify for free or reduced school lunch.

Equally unsurprising is that the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood fits the profile of an economically and opportunity depressed community. Most of the population (71%) identify as Hispanic, with only 10% identifying as white. However, when it comes to language use, 40% of homes speak only English. Considering that 28% of the neighborhood identifies as foreign-born, the community comprises second and third-generation immigrant young families (over 60% of the population is under the age of 35) who have established roots in American culture, maintaining aspects of their culture of origin.

Overall, this community's demographics have been used to identify what the church believes to be the best way to serve and communicate the Gospel. Without extraneous details, the overall approach is to be bilingual with an understanding of the needs of families with immigrant backgrounds. Simultaneously, the data reveals that ministries that meet the immediate needs of lower-income populations, such as food, clothing, shelter, and hygiene, are essential. On a spiritual level, the church must address the realities of trauma with a level of healthy optimism and hope while being guarded against the constant temptation of cynicism and despair.

A Bilingual Church

San Bernardino is a city that is growing in population, even though the income levels of its citizens are shrinking. Incomes have fallen ten percent over the last ten years as we have seen nearly a fifty percent reduction in the white population over the last twenty years. In nearly equal numbers, Hispanics/Latinx have replaced the fleeing white population. With the increase in population, as well as an increase in lower-income families establishing residency, there has been a noticeable increase in rental properties. Traditionally, areas of higher rental populations tend to display the appearance of blight. The high percentage of rental properties influences local schools with less property tax collected for their benefit due to lower property values. The local neighborhood, less than a square mile, displays a densely populated area that depicts higher levels of ethnic minorities, especially Hispanics, who live in the lower economic tiers. At the same time, only half of the population speaks Spanish as their primary language. There is a large

percentage of Hispanic residents who are or in higher levels of being acculturated into US society.

Being bilingual is a growing necessity for our community. With nearly half the families in the neighborhood speaking Spanish, it is important to communicate the gospel message in a Spanish medium. At the same time, there is also a large segment of Latinx families who speak English. To create a church culture that embraces one language or another would leave out a significant portion of our community and create division amongst our families as many of them are “3G” households where three generations (children, parents, grandparents) live together to share household expenses. Many of these 3G homes communicate in both English and Spanish as the children become more acculturated into American (dominant?) society while the older generations retain the language and culture of their upbringing. While being bilingual in our communication is a vital component for our ministry, it is important to note that being bilingual means more than the ability to communicate in two languages but the ability to communicate between multiple cultures. Hearts need to be bilingual as well as minds. Can we love each other despite our cultural differences?

The concept of bilingual ministry comes with a challenge, as many models of ministry suggest, or at least demonstrate, that it is easier to separate ourselves into language and cultural groups than it is to work together. Being bilingual comes with the understanding that one will have to surrender some expertise or power to unleash another's power for the sake of unity. The church encourages the congregation to be “culturally bilingual,” where we recognize the “language” of the community to understand better how they view the neighborhood. Often the Church uses the term

partnership but consists of a one-way directive where the dominant Church participates if they can set the agenda or engagement parameters. While this presents the possibility of disagreement, it also establishes an equal opportunity for the community to engage the local church and reveal possible holes and weaknesses in our ministry. To borrow language from advocacy groups, we need to shift from a welcoming community to an affirming community when it comes to identifying with the neighborhood's cultural strengths.

An Urban Ecclesiology

The last half-century has seen the rise of theological study from the Majority World and other segments of marginalized and underrepresented voices. At the same time, most of the recent growth in the Church is amongst this population segment. The West is beginning to see, hear, and listen to these populations' voices to engage a growing secular and pluralistic society. Leslie Newbigin was a primary voice that returned from the Majority World to share insight into how the West needed to respond and refocus its view of ecclesiology based upon the Majority world's insights. His time in India allowed him to experience a people who were breaking free of colonial rule and attempting to find their own ecclesial voice. Simultaneously as Newbigin's work, Latin American, Black, and Feminist theologies began to formulate and challenge the West, bringing attention to the oppression and marginalization that was at our doorsteps. With the continued rise of immigration from the Majority World, the West is becoming increasingly influenced and aware of these voices.

The epicenter of diversity in the West is currently found in our urban centers. The

city has become the proverbial crucible where various cultures and ethnicities converge, attempting to find a promised land of opportunity and freedom. Therefore, it would be imperative for a missional ecclesiology to include dialogue from an urban context. Current ministry models for urban areas, primarily the inner city, are difficult to find or are simply miscontextualized ecclesial models slapped with an “urban” label but are nothing more than attempts to diversify homogenous suburban models by claiming to be welcoming to ethnic and racial minority populations. Instead, what is needed is an ecclesiology that reflects the blessings of multicultural and multilingual encounters while facing the challenges of oppressive poverty that exists in our cities. What is needed is a truly Urban Ecclesiology.

This Urban Ecclesiology will reflect the amalgam of several cultural and contextual ecclesiologies that should equally express the multitude of voices and produce a harmonious calling that resonates with the Church Universal. The project will posit that the orchestra that will produce this symphony will be an accompaniment of three key concepts. It will be 1. Biblical in its creation, 2. Immigrant in its accessibility, and 3. Liberation in its practice. The goal of this project will be to have a dialogue with various voices regarding this construction of an Urban Ecclesiology to seek a greater understanding of the call that God has placed upon the city as well as help create a theological framework to help those currently engaged in inner-city ministries a fresh perspective from the city itself on how to listen and unleash the power of the people of God who dwell amongst the poor.

Biblical in its Creation

When formulating a biblical understanding of ecclesiology, it is easy to fall into the temptation of beginning with and developing this ecclesiology from a New Testament perspective. This temptation is developed from a lackadaisical assumption that the Church is a New Testament construction that supplants the Jewish tradition and becomes a new historical reality once the followers of Jesus were ostracized from the synagogues to the ultimate destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. However, it is vital for an Urban Ecclesiology, to begin with, a full biblical understanding of what is meant by *urban* in the context of God establishing a people. The biblical narrative is filled with numerous encounters of God engaging the cities of the Near East as God demonstrates God's continuous call for repentance and reconciliation.

These encounters run the gamut of response from the destruction of cities like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), Jericho (Joshua 6), and even the holy city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25) to displays of mercy and salvation such as Nineveh (Jon. 4), Keilah (1 Sam. 23), and the holy city of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32). Even Jesus would experience the city's turbulent ups and downs as the multitudes would welcome Him as King (John 12) and cry for his crucifixion (John 19). It would be the cities that Jesus would cast judgment upon (Matt. 23, Luke 10) and the place where Jesus would weep and lament the reality of those who miss the call to be with the Father (Luke 19). Nevertheless, the promise remains that God will draw the people back to establish a forever home for the people of God in the new Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36, Rev. 21).

The city represents permanence where people choose to establish roots, surrender their nomadic wanderings, and claim a home. In its most basic form, the city is the place where people gathered to trade goods and services while offering mutual protection and

establishing an identity. The desire is to establish a position that *urban* in a biblical sense is defined as any attempt or calling by God to establish a people in a specific place for a specific purpose. This specific purpose or the Mission of God through the church is the constant cycle of being sent out from the city to find the lost for them to be brought back into the fellowship. Furthermore, this Mission must find its identity in the complete breadth of the biblical witness.

Immigrant in its Accessibility

One of the key factors for the growth of the city is that they are places of immigration. As mentioned before, cities are locations where people gather for mutual benefit. Traditionally cities have been the “welcoming” centers where those foreign to the land find access to employment, housing, and social services to help the process of assimilation into the new land. Similarly, modern churches have established a role as beacons for those willing to find a new identity and opportunity in Jesus Christ. As society has moved into a post-modern mindset, the notion of simply being present in a location as an ideal factor in evangelism is outdated and ineffective. It is time for the Church to reconnect to its Immigrant Accessibility to recapture the faithful witness required to establish an Urban Ecclesiology.

In human history, there have been several attempts to limit immigrants' access to the city's full participation. Unfortunately, the people of God have participated in these practices and have hindered and limited the Gospel message to only the privileged or those deemed worthy to enter our gates. Since the Church functions to be a people who draw others to have a permanent residence with God, it stands to reason that the message

of the Church needs to be accessible to all those who would be willing to immigrate to this new location. It is important to mark a difference between accessible and inclusive. Often our ecclesiologies claim to be inclusive in that no one is officially left out from the call to receive redemption. However, inclusivity means little if those called are refused points of contact with the Gospel message and cannot comprehend or faithfully respond to this message. Inclusivity must include the reality of belonging to the Church.

An Urban Ecclesiology that is Immigrant in Accessibility will be able to accomplish four things. First, this ecclesiology must be able to move as immigrants themselves have moved, crossing borders of culture, language, and geography. Second, this ecclesiology must be able to listen to voices/languages that are both familiar and new. Third, this ecclesiology must be able to adapt and create points of contact that allow all people to respond faithfully. Lastly, the Church must be able to function as immigrants themselves, being able to surrender the safety of “home” to achieve the previous three goals as a community of mutual transformation.

Liberation in its Practice

With the advent of cities came the opportunity for partnerships between people to increase their markets and influence in providing goods and services. At the same time, we live in a world that is fallen - where relationships are fractured. The result of this fracturing in relationships combined with proximity to others has allowed systems of exploitation to flourish and dominate the lives of many. As mentioned earlier, the biblical witness speaks of God’s contentious relationships with cities as they ran afoul of the will of God with the mistreatment of the poor and the alien. God has a well-established

message of justice spoken through the prophets and enforced by God's own mighty hand. The community of God is to be established with the premise that the people live in the context of love and solidarity with their neighbor. Five of the Ten Commandments given to Israel spoke of this premise of holy communion of a shared life together for the family of God.

When this vision of loving solidarity is fractured, what is the community's role to re-establish the order that God desires? Traditionally ecclesiology falls into one of two camps. The first camp argues that this fracture is a personal failing of the covenant, and therefore the solution is likewise a personal experience of repentance. Regardless of what happens around the individual, the individual has a moral ability and obligation to respond to the temptation of sin or face the ramifications of a fractured relationship between God and others. The second camp speaks of such sin as not only personal but systemic. While admitting that individuals are responsible for choosing to sin or not, the ramifications and effects of sin and communal fracturing are not always connected with personal choice. This camp argues that it is possible to be a righteous person and still face the realities of poverty, injustice, and disenfranchisement. The biblical stories of Israel's enslavement in Egypt or attempted genocide in Babylon reveal that there are powers and structures in place that desire gains through the mistreatment of others. The conclusion of these stories is God's intervention - to deliver God's people while establishing a new social order to move forward toward right relationships.

God's interactions with injustice in the city must lead to an ecclesiology where liberation is pursued and practiced by the Church. It is understood that the use of the term *liberation* will come with potential negativity if not open suspicion. For most in the West,

the word liberation comes linked with Liberation Theology, which for many, will be forever linked to Marxism, racial/ethnic identity politics, and civil conflict. This is an unfair assessment of Liberation Theology and tends to be the perspective of those who stand in positions of privilege amongst the Church and society. However, the heart of an Urban Ecclesiology is not to grasp or enforce a specific view of Liberation Theology but must present itself as a theology of liberation nonetheless. This project will use the following parameters to define what a theology of liberation will be: 1. It must be influential in the world, 2. It must be impactful to promote change, 3. It must be tangible to the real struggles of those who are suffering.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Introduction

The development of an urban ecclesiology is foundational for the future of effective ministry in San Bernardino. The hope is that this foundation will be used to build a greater systemic structure that would allow for ministry to continue and flourish for years to come. It is the belief that establishing an ecclesiology embedded in the everyday life of believers will help in the pedagogical pursuit of creating and maturing future generations who are equipped to serve the city regardless of pastoral gifting. So much of urban ministry (and ministry in general) is rooted in local pastors' personalities who are often trained to maintain organizations as his/her priority. The project's goal is that by presenting the basics of an urban ecclesiology, a local congregation can develop its own incarnational personality that will shape the faith of all who participate, including and especially ministry staff. A church that holds deep convictions to a biblical theology of holiness along with the adaptability to become immigrant ambassadors of this theology should be able to successfully establish a praxis of liberation that will see ongoing, effective ministry in an urban context.

It is now necessary to gather a multitude of voices that have influenced the creation of the three key concepts or principles of an urban ecclesiology (biblical, immigrant, liberating). The intention is to present this review of voices as one of a dialogue instead of a debate. In other words, the desire is to present these topics in a point/counterpoint style; rather, the intention of this section will be similar to a host who gathered these scholars and experts around the dinner table, breaking bread together,

expressing their views of an important and sensitive topic. Sometimes the conversation will be confrontational, but it will be respectful in areas of disagreement. Each topic will begin with an introduction of the theme on a general level with a gathering of a variety of voices who are classified as experts in the development of contemporary missional ecclesiologies. By missional ecclesiology, the project will be referring to the idea of developing or identifying an ecclesiology that helps the Church pursue a vision of ministry. After this introductory discussion, the review will then go in-depth to draw out important discussions regarding specific challenges that an urban ecclesiology must face and overcome to be relevant and effective in transforming the Church's mission toward urban communities.

Part 1: Come on and Let me Know

Biblical Theology and Perspectives on Ecclesiology

The understanding of *urban* requires a biblical approach that begins with creation and continues throughout the entirety of Scripture. Peter Nyende believes that the very moment of creation is God's first establishment, creating a place to be worked and served by God's people for worship and to glorify God. God created the Garden as a place where God chose to dwell with God's creation, especially God's children. Even further, God continues to move to establish a permanent location for God's people throughout the biblical narrative with a final promise to create a new center of worship. Nyende continues to paint the image of God's desire for permanence with the imagery of God moving possessions into the world, such as the Ark, Mercy Seat, and other sacred objects to establish the Throne or seat of God amongst God's people. There can be no debate that

God has chosen to establish a place of residence and to establish a people with an identity.

The identity of the people of God is found in their participation in the mission of God. Christopher Wright reminds us that only those who know their story will be willing and able to participate in the mission of reconciliation to the world clearly. He writes that with the influx of Gentile believers entering the faith, there was tension with what some saw as a Jewish story (Acts 15). James and the early Church leaders appealed to the Scriptures that God's plan had always included the Gentiles as part of God's mission. While James chose the Prophet Amos in his defense of being a blessing to all nations, he could have easily reached into nearly every segment of the Scriptures to see this mission. In fact, Wright suggests that beginning with Abraham's call that the entire narrative of the Scriptures is to anoint a people to bring the blessing of God to all others. At the time of Abraham's calling, the cities and nations of the world are scattered, living in dysfunction and chaos. God calls Abraham to a foreign land - blessed and fruitful, away from his own dwelling to establish a nation for others to dwell. Michael Goheen would share in his agreement with Wright and Nyende that God elected a people and a place to create a history that all creation could experience the "mighty acts of God."

This "scandal of particularity" or election of a particular people at a particular place and time speaks of a God who is not afraid to enter the world in its current context. Therefore, the people of God continue in this practice of entering and engaging a world that needs to be redeemed. This is the heart of what Goheen would call the "Universal History" of the biblical narrative. It is the only history that the Church recognizes and is "the whole point of Christianity." Craig Van Gelder, like Goheen, also points toward

Newbigin that the universal history leads to a universal salvation, not necessarily a defense of universalism, but a salvation that can be encountered universally regardless of culture and context. The scandal of particularity allows the Gospel of Jesus to be transferable because it can be translated into other cultures since it has been revealed in one already.

Of course, one cannot speak of the *Scandal of Particularity* without moving toward Jesus Christ, God Incarnate. Benjamin Valentin would ask the Church to pause for a moment. While not objecting to the importance or deity of Jesus, he would direct others to Jesus of Nazareth, the Galilean. The humanity and life of Jesus was a scandal not only in the putting on of flesh but in the very cultural context in which Jesus lived and ministered. Through Virgilio Elizondo's work, Valentin shares that Jesus was a mestizo (half breed) who lived in a mestizaje (mixed cultured) community. Historically, Galilee was a border between the Gentiles' Hellenistic culture and the Temple culture of the Jewish elite. Those from the region were observed as being between the two worlds with acceptance granted in neither one. As Nathanael asked his brother, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Valentin does not believe that the location of Nazareth in Galilee was an accident but part of the Divine Mission. In Jesus, God not only took on flesh but took on undesired, marginalized flesh. The same flesh that the Mission of God sets to redeem. The same undesired and marginalized people who immigrate and populate cities today.

Simply going to the marginalized places of society is not enough to be a true biblical ecclesiology. The mission requires the people of God to follow in the work of Jesus, which was to bring the nations back to the Father. Gustavo Gutierrez emphasizes

that a biblical ecclesiology will manifest itself into a spiritual “adventure” for the Church and the world. This is the heart of the biblical witness to share the testimonies of those who have ventured before so that the Church may follow in the same path in order to walk with Jesus, who has prepared a place for His disciples in God’s Kingdom. For the People of God, this Kingdom's role is working and serving with those with whom God desires to reconcile, this being an act of worship, an evangelical pursuit – an invitation for others to have an encounter with Jesus. Gutierrez would agree with Valentin that this Jesus is the one from Nazareth who gave sight to the blind and healed the sick, who declared the Good News to the poor.

There would be little disagreement between these authors for a need for a biblical construct of ecclesiology. While each author may stress a specific story or encounter more than another, this shows the universal aspect of the biblical narratives as each writer finds themselves in the greater mission of God. The Church is called to work and tend to the people of God, and it must be able to touch the nations. This point of touch is the realization that God works in the context of human history as God has touched the lives of those who believe and follow God's mission. The purpose of this touch is to call us to dwell with the God who chooses to dwell amongst us. The City of God will show a diversity of cultures, races, and ethnicities as the Gospel is universally translated to fulfill Abraham's promise of blessing the nations. Likewise, our urban communities are part of the nations awaiting the touch and blessing of God.

Sola Scriptura, The Quadrilateral, and the Role of the Holy Spirit

This section aims to identify how the approach of Scripture will influence the

direction of how Believers will engage or possibly disengage from a multicultural context that is essential in understanding our contemporary urban societies. Specifically, to investigate the priority of Scripture in formulating theology and how our understanding of the Biblical narratives shapes our theological assumptions and guides ecclesial mission. As a Nazarene, it is tempting to steer this section as a simple contrast between the Wesleyan, Holiness tradition and the Calvinist, Reformed tradition. However, with the use of a Roman Catholic voice, which both Protestant traditions would be critical and challenged by, the study will offer an approach that conveys and includes the greater Christian Tradition.

Gustavo Gutierrez's essay "Notes for a Theology of Liberation" tackles the theory of Liberation Theology from what one may believe to be the reverse angle by beginning with the question of, *what is theology?* Often the pursuit of contextual theologies begins with first defining context and establishing a justification for embracing a certain context or not. This assumes that one's theology is already rooted. This creates an open assumption that the Church is already in possession of a perfect theology and then looks for an opening into each specific cultural experience where it can be translated and transmitted without error. What if the challenges to establishing contextual theologies do not rest solely in the varieties of cultural context but in the reality that the Church carries (often in secret) various theologies that may very well be incapable of being contextualized by their very nature of being cultured? Gutierrez responds with the reminder that theology is a reflection and comes second to the "pastoral action" of the Church. The Church does not merely act because a theology is present; instead, theology becomes present because the Church acts. Therefore, theology's task is reciprocal in that

theology itself is also shaped and influenced by the Church's engagement in the world, which helps better understand the original revelation that has sent the Church to act. For Gutierrez, the primary agent of this revelation is the Holy Spirit, who will be found ever-present in the theology of the Church.

The claim that the Spirit of God directs the theological movement of the Church is a bold statement if it is believed and practiced. The honesty of Brian A. de Vries must be appreciated when he asserts his desire to trust the Spirit in the pursuit of contextual theologies but submits to Sola Scriptura's authority above all else. Coming from the Reformed Tradition, de Vries equates the Scriptures with the Word of God (note the capitalization), which would place the Bible on an equal footing of Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, the Bible is universal in accessibility to reveal the saving message of the Gospel as it is ultimately written outside of any worldly culture. However, from a Wesleyan perspective, one cannot be comfortable with undercutting the Spirit's importance as an ongoing agent of influence in offering confirmation and illumination of the Bible. This is why de Vries struggles and is non-committal to accepting the value of contextual theologies because his theology does not allow a discussion that challenges his context of Reformed theology. His emphasis on sin and corruption is so great that he concludes that it is impossible to have a contextual theology (such as an urban theology/ecclesiology), even if it is a noble one that is to be pursued.

While Timothy Keller would challenge his fellow Reformed brother to pursue a Gospel-centered ministry, he is hesitant to venture into such a bold conclusion as de Vries. However, he is in full agreement with the overall conclusion that the world is something that cannot be trusted because it is fallen, and we are under the curse of God's

wrath, “the great problem of the human condition.” In other words, the Chimera mentioned earlier exists due to the willful subjection of God’s wrath on all people. Why would the Church even attempt to reach out to people or engage the city's context? What is the evangelical push outside of the fear of a wrathful God? Keller recognizes this problem by falling back on the Calvinist understanding of *common grace*. Common grace is in no way equal to the saving grace found in Jesus. It is the general goodness that is left by being created in the Image of God. While this grace does not lead to God, it does allow some aspects of culture to be useful in the ministry of the Church. Like de Vries, Keller believes that this grace allows the contextual pursuit of theology, and therefore ministry, to be a noble pursuit but limited and ultimately a human construct, a faulty tool that could help spread the Gospel but ultimately something suspicious in the Church’s hermeneutical pursuit.

The biblical principle that drives Keller is his view of sin as idolatry. He ultimately defines idolatry as “a failure to look to Jesus for our salvation and justification... the root of every sin is a failure to believe the gospel message that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is our justification, righteousness, and redemption.” While this definition is not problematic, this hermeneutic allows Keller to avoid the tension that the scandal of particularity demands. He is so afraid of being wrong in his view of culture or extending too far away from a balanced center that he commits the “sin” of being guided by his preferences in avoiding the idolatry of the extremes. For example, Timothy Keller identifies four specific groups that urban ministry has a greater potential in reaching: 1. The younger generation, 2. The “cultural elites,” 3. Accessible “unreached” people groups, 4. The poor. However, Keller offers little in how to reach these specific groups

without ultimately degrading or using the others. While the Apostle Paul sought to become all things in order to win some (1 Cor. 9:22-23), Keller seems to suggest that he becomes no one to all in order not to offend or to reach the most. While Keller simply speaks of these populations as demographic reality, these groups represent much of those that Jesus and the Early Church reached in the New Testament. With a correct hermeneutic, local churches become *cities* themselves in their purpose of transforming sojourners, immigrants, and the lost into a communal people. C. Rene Padilla does not hold to the view of de Vries or Keller and comes to a similar conclusion to Gutierrez that the Word of God, Jesus Christ (not the Bible), is the center and focus of our theology. Hence, when exploring the relationship of the Word being the essential normative factor in our understanding of the action of the Spirit we discover the true theology that is not limited to the intellectual pursuits of modernism but the “discovery of the will of God.” Theology becomes the living relationship between the Church and God as the Church faithfully engages the world, revealing God's will to all nations. Theology, then by definition, requires context to reflect the incarnational reality of Jesus. Scripture cannot be separated from culture since it was written and proclaimed with cultural contexts. Padilla and Gutierrez provide a Pentecostal bridge (although neither would be considered Charismatic) to Wesleyanism's holiness tradition.

Wesleyan tradition believes that Scripture has an essential role in developing a Christian community by providing a faithful witness to the world. Diedre Brower Latz believes that this role extends beyond just the edification of personal spiritual growth, but when faithfully engaged as a community, the local church becomes the embodiment of God's soteriological message for all of creation. Without this foundational message, the

local congregation risks losing its God-given witness to the local communities that they minister within. The true danger is that the local church will become nothing more than a holy club that serves itself and therefore produces a ministry that places self-preservation over evangelistic mission. Of course, without some form of conventional evangelistic efforts, the local church would cease to grow and thus, decline and die. Living and transmitting this biblical message is the only way for the continuation of Christian ministry. Where does this transmission take place? Brower Latz says, “Preaching – the central role of communicating the good news, the importance of the ‘sermon’ for edification and exhortation was a feature of both Wesley and the Wesleyans. The pulpit formed people, and pulpit-theology shaped lay-theology.”

It is important here to note the Bible holds the strongest theological support for an urban ecclesiology. In the study of scripture, John Wesley and the early Methodist found their support for the theology of holiness that became the major theological component for what became the revivalist movement of the holiness movement of the 18th Century. At the heart of holiness theology is the requirement of a social ministry “that is, it was essentially relational with regard to perfect love for God and neighbor.” This love of neighbor must be distinguished as being from God and not simply another social program that has promised much but delivered little regarding the healing of deep physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma. For Wesleyans, this is more than common grace, which reduces God’s work into a broken clock. This is *prevenient grace* –

The active nature of the grace of God at work within all creation and on behalf of all people, drawing people towards God, the agent of transformation within the life of the world, is a vital component in the theologically Wesleyan ecclesia. The expectation of God’s working in, and beyond human expectation and the necessary joining in with this working in both works of mercy and acts of piety is inherently Wesleyan.

Any mention of praxis must be filtered through the witness of Scripture. This is not to say that experience, tradition, and reason are not important or ignored; rather, the Bible becomes the lynchpin on which the congregation can lean upon to discern the direction of God's call into a hurting world.

Once again, a return to David Busic is in order. Along with his historical insight into Wesleyan theology's social interpretation as an ecclesiology, Busic provides a biblical treatise on Isaiah 11 that serves as a "paradigm for churches in urban contexts." The biblical text helps in this construction because it contains both prophetic and apocalyptic elements that provide for a future hope as well as a structure for how the Church is to live and practice today. While Busic offers several excellent points of ecclesial value, two offer the best and strongest support for urban churches. The first is that the Isaiah text suggests an inclusive diversity where the actors in the vision are not asked to become something other than what they already are. The lion is not asked to be a lamb or vice versa. Meaning, the church is not meant to be a homogenous community but a diverse community representing the diversity of urban communities. Class, gender, ethnicity, race, and even personality are not required to segregate but are important factors of Christian Conferencing or engagement with the present culture. The second aspect of ecclesial value is the hope of healing and wholeness. Contemporary premillennialism (found prevalently in Evangelical circles) is rooted in the theological belief that the world will only get worse and must get worse for Jesus to return. Busic demonstrates that the biblical texts speak of salvation as a cosmic healing between creation and God as well as between creation and itself. This implies that not only is

forgiveness possible, but that forgiveness comes with the potential of transformative healing, what Busic calls *Shalom*. In this *shalom*, the urban church is free to expect social transformation by pursuing justice rooted in community healing.

Center Church – Journey to the Middle or Stuck in It?

Wherever people are gathered, there is a call for the Church to spread the Gospel, regardless of population size or background. There is a need for Christ in the smallest hamlet as there is in the largest metropolis, yet the foundational premise of biblical ministry is to gather as a people. Unfortunately, there is a competition where the Church should minister or a false need to justify a personal ministry location with faulty hermeneutics. An example of this is Stephen Witmer, who condemns the competitive and comparative fighting between rural and urban ministry, yet falls into the trap of ultimately rejecting the urban realities of Jesus ministry with a lack of in-depth study and exegesis using anachronistic definitions of terms like village and city instead of their original understanding in the Greek. This leads to Witmer's several bad assumptions, often equating urban ministry with solely the “cultural elites” (and by proxy those who pastor in this area) with opulence, power, and prestige. Rather the truth is much better expressed by Charles Van Engen, who speaks of the transformational aspect of urban Christians as “living in profound tensions” between working with those in positions of power while being advocates for the poor and marginalized.

It is this tension that creates the greatest contemporary challenge to urban ministry. Honestly, who actively seeks to live in tension when it far easier to pursue friendlier confines and populations? The “solution” toward tension is not to flee the city

but to engage it. However, the greatest problem is engaging in urban ministry through the lens of safety and security rather than that of the scriptures, especially in the demographics of whom we minister. The truth is, it is easy to be a church in the city but not be a city church with a true heartbeat that reflects the biblical witness. Gabriel Salguero reminds the Church and Keller that urban areas are vastly diverse in ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and it is foolish to think that creating space for one or a select few of these groups is demonstrating the vision that God has for urban ministry. Instead, tension continuously exists if the Church is to follow a biblical understanding of city. It is a constant reminder that ministry goes in two directions: comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable. Salguero writes, “It is not just asking someone if we can share the gospel with them; it is asking, Can I sit with you in worship, even when it causes us both discomfort?”

Context is the cultural realities that accompany the pastoral actions of the Church as it engages the task of theology. All engagement that the Church has with the world is with a context in which theology is produced and practiced. One’s theology will help establish contexts that will either be helpful or harmful in establishing an effective witness to communities. With Jesus as the normative base, the Church hopes that she will first see that all cultures are equal in the need to receive the gospel and second, that all cultures are valuable to be heard and listened to as they are equally capable of being *response-able* to the guidance of the Spirit as the Spirit reveals the Word of God. Therefore, all theology is contextual, or it fails to be true theology because the goal of theology is to reconcile people to a loving, saving God.

Traditionally, when the discussion of context occurs, the next step is to discuss the

aspects of cultures. As mentioned earlier, the goal of theology is to reconcile *people*. It is dangerous, if not prideful, to think about culture before people. The tragedy of colonialism is that the Church saw the need to fix cultures without the people's engagement. Orlando Costas reveals this distinction in his work on the Galilean mission of Jesus. While He addresses the distinction of Galilee's culture from other communities, He also stresses the fact that he chose to engage people who were on the periphery of that culture. In other words, Jesus engaged a specific time and place using a specific language/dialect (what can be called cultural context) but also chose to address a subset of people who did not fit the ideals of that culture, primarily the poor and the outcast. While Jesus was not opposed to challenging the norms and mores of Galilee, or any specific culture for that matter, the focus was not on redeeming culture but on those who suffered under it. By focusing on the people, Jesus was able to challenge more than just the culture of Galilee but the entirety of Israel.

Universal Ecclesiology and The Need for a Local Ecclesiology

The Early Church was not interested in defining the doctrine of the Church. This is a naïve view of the work of the Early Church. Instead, the Early Church grasped the concept that the Church would always be defined as the people of the Triune God expressed through the truth of Scripture. This is seen in the early ecumenical councils and creeds that defined the Church as a divinely called reality of being one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Therefore, to examine a universal ecclesiology starts with looking at these four areas of description. What begins to illuminate is the first description of being *one* is literally impossible to define without the other three. What makes the Church *one* is the

ability to submit to and practice the other factors. Therefore, ecclesiology should be defined by the Church's ability to live as a community, rooted and reflecting the image of Jesus while united in God's mission to be sent out by the Spirit to share that mission with the world.

Ecclesiology from Above

Daniel Hardy defines holiness as the propriety aspect of the Church, the truest form of purity that those who follow God can achieve. This is because holiness and God are mutually defining of each other as there is no greater purity, wisdom, or good than that revealed by God. It is the quality of God that draws people to be in community with God. He states, "And holiness is the attraction to God, what calls and moves people." Of course, the greatest example of holiness that we have is Jesus, the Incarnate One. While Jesus is not the Church himself, the testimony of Jesus is the singular example for the Church. Jesus is the Holy One of God, who perfectly manifested God's mission through faithful obedience that ultimately led Him to the Cross. Therefore, the Church is an entity whose origin is something outside this world while simultaneously working within it. Stanley Hauerwas has often been associated with what can be called the "pilgrim" approach to the world. For Hauerwas, the Church is an alternative community that embodies God's transcendence to maintain the holiness that the world needs, if not desires. Hauerwas is greatly influenced by John Howard Yoder and the Anabaptist

tradition, which have greatly shaped the landscape of ecclesiology in this area of holiness. It is difficult to argue that ecclesiology can be shaped from a source outside of the character and witness of Jesus. However, this leaves a potential problem because, at some point, one must admit that as human beings, there must be something in our being that can identify the Holy and perhaps that God allows the Holy to be experienced outside of traditional ecclesial means. To limit the Holy in such a way would limit the idea that God's grace can be prevenient. The mark of the Church's understanding of this prevenient grace is found in its catholicity.

The term catholic is defined as - being a part of the whole. In this case, the whole is the mission of God to the entire/whole world. Jesus' mission was to reconcile the entire creation back toward God fully. Therefore, the Church's catholicity is the foundational belief that there is no corner of the world that "is inhospitable to the good news of Jesus Christ that has lead Christians from the very beginning to preach the gospel to all nations." While the holiness of the Church is the transcendent experience of God upon the body, it is in its catholicity that the creation is allowed to respond to God within our own abilities and limitations. In other words, it is where the mission of God is translated into the languages and cultures in which the people of God communicate. The Church is reminded that this mission of Jesus is shared and passed on to the People of God as they are transformed into the Body of Christ as the Church was not a concept created after Jesus but that Jesus is the Church, the full embodiment of the covenant that God has with people. What therefore unites us is full participation in the redemptive mission of Jesus as we gather from every tribe and tongue. Like on the day of Pentecost, the unity of the Church is not found in some ethnic or cultural purity/unity but in the diversity of those

willing to join with their unique gifts and graces as all are inherently eligible to be a part of the mission when they respond to hearing the gospel in their own language.

The final aspect of this basic model of ecclesiology is the apostolic nature of the Church. It is in this apostolic aspect of the Church with which we have been sent out to engage the world. When speaking of being apostolic, one is essentially speaking of actions or practices that have been passed to the community. If catholicity is being the mission of God, then apostolic is being the missionary of God. In some ways, describing the practices of apostles seems like a daunting task. One defines apostolic as communal liberation. Hauerwas is insistent that the polity of the Church is “intrinsically liberating” and “The church, therefore, acts as a context for liberating responsibility when it welcomes the stranger into its midst with joy.” The practices of liberation are not just reserved for those in the Church body. The actions must be relatable to the stranger, those not yet part of the body but invited to join the community. Yoder, likewise, argues the same principle. Even when dealing with those practices that we refer to as sacraments, he reminds us that the basic principles are universal in application to believers and unbelievers alike. The power in the Eucharist is in the breaking of bread and the union of those who participate. So, while some might practice a ritual in a local church, the transformative power that the sacraments imbue in them is transferable to those in the world. The power of the sacraments is how God uses the mundane to convey transformational power. To Yoder, the “mundane” elements are the sacred ordained by God to be universally translated by the Church.

When it is said that the Church is one, it is not a declaration of uniformity but of unity. While the two millennia history of the Church is filled with numerous schisms,

reforms, and excommunications, the current existence of the Church shows that the primary actor of the Church is not humanity but God. This does not mean we are not full participants of the religious community. People are fully ingrained in the life of the Church and how the Church participates in the mission of God to the world. The Church is working with One who is much bigger than humanity. The Oneness of the Church is not found in the Church's ecumenical agreements between and within denominations. Instead, the Oneness of the Body is revealed whenever the body succeeds as missionaries and faithfully obeys the mission of God by liberating others from the same bondage we once experienced ourselves.

Ecclesiology from Within

The study of ecclesiology quickly becomes a theological pursuit – meaning that it becomes a discussion regarding the character and calling of God. While the previous section of the project described what could be called a transcendent view of ecclesiology, it is important to know that God's full revelation is not only observed from the Divine nature of the Triune God. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the humanity of Jesus is equally important in engaging the study of the Church as we look at our primary example of how to serve God and our neighbor. In Philippians 2, Paul provides the Church with the self-emptying hymn of Jesus. This act of *kenosis* in lowering Himself of His divine nature demonstrates that the Church has a human component. In other words, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus provide a framework that the Church is made up of human beings who are continuously calling other humans to become transformed to be a “better human,” one that reflects the Image of God as seen in Jesus.

The Incarnationality of Jesus provides the Church the avenue to be tangible to others. One concept that can never be forgotten is that the apostolic nature of the Church implies that the message and mission of God can be transferred to those who are not in the community. Therefore, it is important to examine how one enters the Church and becomes grafted into the Divine fellowship from a previously lived life outside of it. Ross Parsley correctly describes that the ministry of the local church is where this ecclesiology from within occurs. He writes, “Learning and growing in Christ have a teaching element, but it must be paired with powerful real-life leadership experiences of sharing God’s kingdom with others.” For the Church to grow, it must engage people, and these people are not those who come into the local fellowship understanding the creeds, teachings, and practices of the Universal Church.

Any Universal Ecclesiology must have the ability to be applied locally. The keyword here is *applied* and not just merely *practiced*. One of the great disasters of contemporary church culture is the desire to merely reproduce “successful models” of local churches as if it is the mere practices of these congregations that have made them successful instead of the “flesh and blood” application of the Incarnate Jesus that influences the practices of a local body. In other words, any concrete system of ecclesiology limits the local congregation to reach their community and ultimately limits the social nature of the Trinity by eliminating the need for continued communication with the God who calls people to engage numerous people who inhabit numerous cultures and experiences socially. This engagement comes with risk as the history of the Church has demonstrated that there are times when engagement with the world has led to a loss of focus on God. However, that engagement with cultures and experiences will produce

more powerful local congregations and, therefore, a more transformational display of the Church universal.

Like the Universal Church, the local congregation must be more than the activity done in a building. The building, or location, is significant because it is a witness to a specific moment of history in which the people of God engage in the mission of Jesus. While working within history, the church cannot avoid working with societies and therefore working within cultures. When it is suggested that local churches must engage in culture, this suggests the church must work within the parameters of society and societal tools. For example, a local church finds itself in a specific neighborhood that faces specific issues. What does a liberating community look like in this neighborhood? Is there a possibility that an inner-city ghetto will have different needs than an upper-class suburb? Of course, one can argue that both “need Jesus,” but in which way do they need Jesus? Fortunately, cultures have created tools and social sciences that churches can use to understand and serve the communities they are in.

Christian Scharen suggests that social science can help in two ways. First, social science gives us a “solvent” that helps break down the community's barriers by offering a critique from within the community that allows the people to see the problems and possible solutions for their community. Second, social science also acts like a beacon that shines a light on the people and actions that are currently working toward transformation. It should not be difficult to see the potential benefits of using culture as an ally if nothing more than a missionary bringing a translator or guide before venturing into the jungle. It is surprising how often congregations fail to gain footing in their neighborhoods because they do not know their surroundings' basic information. Instead, there is push back that

one should not let the culture overpower the church by setting the agenda. Cultures are rarely neutral in their agendas, or to be more honest, those who use these tools are not neutral. Hauerwas is an example of someone who embraces the theological truth of liberation but rejects the main tenants of Liberation Theology, not because of the concept but in applying the social tools of the State to enact violence against the State.

Hauerwas is not free from critique in this area. Feminist theologian Gloria Albrecht says the Church is not innocent from abuse and that many of the historical Church's traditions and actions have been destructive and continues to be destructive to minority populations. Primarily Hauerwas has been challenged by the lack of engagement in the experiences of marginalized people. When speaking of minority experiences, this project does not specifically speak of ethnic groups or the actual numbers of populations. Instead, this study will use the term minority to speak of the voice of those who are underrepresented and undervalued in the Church and Society. For example, in the United States, the voices of Hispanic immigrants are often ignored or downplayed even though they represent the largest segment of growth in Protestant churches, especially Evangelical churches. In the same way, women's voices can be described as a minority experience even though women have held most of the membership in the Church for nearly the entirety of Christendom. These experiences suggest that the world functions in an apartheid system where the majority world is forced into silence and forsaken by the statistical minority classes' rule.

Minority experiences cannot and will not remain silent. Jesus himself was “moved with compassion” when He saw the multitudes who suffered and were dispirited (Matthew 9:36). The risk of not listening to these voices is that someone else will. As

mentioned earlier, the critique of Liberation Theology is valid. While those like Hauerwas are stressing the ideal of the Church, the local bodies were searching for a praxis that would ease the suffering and institute a tangible embodiment of justice. Unfortunately, what they could not find in the Church they found in Marx and other political philosophies. Liberation Theology does not require a praxis from Marx. There is plenty in the ecclesial work of Liberation theologies to create our own praxis because the catholic mission of the Church is to be a liberating community.

Part 2: If I Stay There Will be Trouble

Immigrant in Accessibility

An Urban Ecclesiology that is Immigrant in Accessibility will accomplish four things. First, this ecclesiology must move as immigrants themselves have moved, crossing borders of culture, language, and geography. Second, this ecclesiology must listen to voices/languages that are both familiar and new. Third, this ecclesiology must adapt and create points of contact that allow all people to respond faithfully. Lastly, the Church must function as immigrants themselves, being able to surrender the safety of “home” to achieve the last three goals.

The idea of making theology/ecclesiology accessible is the primary focus of Valentin’s work of establishing a “Public Theology.” He positions himself that the Church must move beyond the traditional borders of its communal influence in a post-modern society. This traditional border is that the world of religion is primarily restricted

to the internal concerns of the fellowship itself. Often the goal is personal fulfillment of those in the organization that those outside cannot comprehend or even find offensive or damaging to those not in fellowship with the organization. The solution is to move the Church's discourse into the public sphere by allowing other voices or disciplines access to the Mission while simultaneously opening channels of communication that present different languages and symbols. The intention is to make the Mission of God relatable and desirable to a broad audience to enact social change for the benefit of all society. Valentin would welcome an Urban Ecclesiology as it would be moving toward a social impact that demands participation from those not currently in the Church. Goheen would probably wince a little at Valentin's language, especially when Valentin expresses the Church functions as an agent of Social Activism.

Goheen would find a point of connection with Valentin in that Church itself needs to have a "missionary encounter with culture." It is far too easy for a community to be so involved in one's own culture that it is unable to acknowledge and be aware of another culture, let alone be able to challenge and communicate with it. If the Church is unwilling or unable to listen to the cultures they are trying to reach, she loses sight of the cultural idolatries that infest her understandings of God's mission, creating unnecessary distractions and hindrances. This is the heart of what makes our message contextual in that we learn to speak in the cultural languages of those we are attempting to reach. Goheen would emphasize that there is a risk in this venture in that ultimately there will be a point of tension where the mission of God and the mission of this world will be in conflict. This conflict is not simply a difference of opinion but a call to submission to ultimate loyalty between the Church transforming the world or the world transforming the

Church. Gutierrez and Carlos Sosa Siliezar would acknowledge this possibility but would demand the Church push forward in this missionary encounter because God has and continues to demonstrate God's power regardless of the opposition.

Gutierrez believes the tension created by engaging the world is what makes our witness to it more valuable. He alludes to the reality that the majority in this world are currently living in conflict and tension in their everyday lives. These people are forced to live as strangers and immigrants in their own lands as they cannot have access to the benefits and liberties of their home communities. The solution is for the Church to become strangers ourselves, willing to live in solidarity even if it leads us to an estrangement with others in the Church. Unless our ecclesiology can adapt to the challenges facing the people we are trying to bring restoration, we will continue to be met with suspicion, if not as the actual antagonist that has caused their struggles. Since the Church does not avoid participation in the sufferings of this world, they are not afraid of the diversity of those who suffer as well.

Siliezar informs the Church that diversity is something that must be reconciled and redeemed by God. He does not shy away from the reality that this diversity can influence the mission, but it is worth the risk to engage it for the sake of loving a diverse world. The hope is that the community of God will be able, through the power of Jesus, to have a transforming effect on these diverse communities. Like Valentin, Siliezar believes the Christian community should be engaged in dialogue with a mixture of communities from different "contexts and geographies" for the sake of greater social impact in addressing serious societal issues and not only the "internal concerns" that Valentin spoke of earlier. Siliezar reminds us that part of the very nature of being a community is the

relationship and understanding that other communities exist. To acknowledge that these other communities have nothing of value to offer would move the church into the position of oppressor, and our witness would be suspect. Siliezar would argue that Goheen is unwilling to go far enough to walk with the oppressed even though Goheen is willing to walk a considerable distance.

Similar in scope with Goheen is Wright, who states that there is a need to protect the ecclesial message from the idolatry of the world. In the 21st Century, Wright points to the idol of consumerism as the ultimate voice of competition to the work of God's mission. He would agree with Goheen "allegiance to the biblical story" that causes us to stand and resist the idols of the public square, which will lead us to suffer as we stand against the culture of the world. Does this concept beg the question of the ability to stand and resist is a reality of the privileged? The very notion of *standing* is to imply that one has ground to stand upon. How do those who are aliens and strangers in the lands stand against their struggles? Gutierrez would suggest that the poor do not have the luxury to stand up for change as they must walk according to the Spirit for the pursuit of justice.

This is not to discredit or disparage Wright and Goheen, or to a greater extent Leslie Newbigin, who is their obvious influence on this point. They are just not willing to take the risk as far as others. Is it because the others who have spoken are part of communities who live in realities where their local communities have virtually nothing to lose? It speaks of the need to continue to seek diversity in the Church itself on this concept of Immigrant Accessibility. It cannot be overstated that this concept comes after establishing a biblical creation of Urban Ecclesiology. There is no desire to surrender the foundation of ecclesiology for the sake of accessibility, nor does one have to believe that

an accurate exegesis of the biblical story would require the Church to do so.

Dwight Zscheile has no desire to lose or surrender the authority of the Scripture or the authority of the Church as it relates to cultures but does believe the present Church is at a time where she needs to become learners from the communities around her if she is to reach them. He challenges the Church by reminding her that she is in a constant cycle of forming and reforming her methods and practices and that to continue to stand in a rigid status quo will only lead to her own decline as she loses her voice in the public square. It is the nature of the Church, according to Zscheile, to adapt and change in order to follow the guidance of the Spirit. While we do not adapt and change the very foundation of God's mission, the Church must be able to see that God is not as static in action as the Church might believe. To do so would lead The Church to the risk of becoming like the Pharisees and Sadducees, who rejected even God Incarnate.

The idea of Immigrant Accessibility leads to challenges and positions that will cause the Church discomfort. Nevertheless, the truth is that there are multitudes of people who are living in the discomfort of not being reconciled with God. Like the parable, the Church walks past and often over these people every day as they sit at her gates, longing for her to stop and offer an invitation to join the Church in the fellowship. Does she speak their language (literally and culturally) to be able to engage them and invite them to dwell with her? Is the Church willing to walk with them, learn from them, and hear their prophetic voices? In her willingness to be not of this world, has she forgotten that she still lives in it? Perhaps the opposite is true in that she can no longer find herself being an immigrant - an alien in a strange land because she is acclimated to the world more than the Community of God.

Case Study: The Struggle of Hispanic/Latinx Immigrants

Daniel A. Rodriguez beautifully describes the immediate cultural difficulty that Latin-Americans face in an Anglo-American society as a people “living in the hyphen.” Hispanics born in the United States are caught in the middle of two dominant cultural realities and increasing isolation due to not fitting completely in either culture completely. Due to racial and ethnic discrimination, even those Hispanics who fully assimilate their lives and language to the dominant Anglo culture still face rejection as never being Anglo enough while facing equal discrimination amongst Latino groups for selling out their family and cultural heritage to gain success.

This marginalized existence is nothing new to Hispanics. Hispanic existence in and of itself is a life of being *Mestizo* or mixed. When the Spanish “discovered” the New World, they not only pillaged the treasures and resources of the native populations but “created” new ethnicities as they assimilated the “savage” tribes into the civilized European cultures of language and religion. Contemporary history allows us to label this assimilation as colonial rape correctly. Forcing their language, culture, and religion upon the natives, a new, mixed ethnic group was created. The cultural offspring of the colonizers have spent the last 500 years in the margins of Latin America. No longer do they have access or ownership of ancestral lands, nor are they fully embraced as European or Spanish enough to access education or economic opportunities. Therefore, many believe that the best option is to flee to the United States, where dreams of opportunities for a new destiny are on the horizon.

Many Hispanic immigrants' reality is the *barrio* - the name given to the poorer

sections of urban areas. It is the place “where people live on the edge of death, and their humanity is not of compelling interest.” While they fled a homeland of drugs, violence, and crime, many Hispanic immigrants are forced back into those environments as they enter the United States. As their ancestors before them, Hispanics continue to survive even if they are discarded into the dark corners of society. Their technique for survival rests upon two key factors that have remained true for one hundred years of modern immigration. The first is a strong adherence to their native Spanish tongue, while the second is an even stronger adherence to their multigenerational understanding of family.

Spanish Language as a Cultural Bond

Hispanics are defined by their attachment to the Spanish language. One should not conclude that every person who identifies as Hispanic is fluent in Spanish, nor does one have to be a predominant user of the language to be influenced by this cultural identity. Merely identifying with the language creates a cultural bond that is stronger and more assimilating than religion or national citizenship. Within the United States, Hispanic immigrants are finding cultural connections amongst themselves regardless of national origin as the ability to communicate and share similar experiences has allowed Hispanic-Americans to become a growing voice in politics and cultural influence. While the largest Hispanic populations in the US are from Mexico, the barrios are communities of people from a variety of national locations. Perhaps this is seen best in local churches where language unites people of differing and even at times warring nations and tribes.

This cultural identity with language is not unique to Hispanics, yet they do seem to maintain and hold onto their native tongues much longer than other ethnic groups who

immigrate to the US. One study concluded that even after fifty years of living in the US, Hispanics retained an equal Spanish proficiency as those who recently immigrated from Latin America. Furthermore, Hispanics are shown to retain their Spanish affinity as they learn and teach their children English. While Spanish might not be “needed” in regards to basic survival (especially in second and third-generation immigrant children), it is still retained as it is valued as a cultural binding agent that allows a connection to family back in their native lands or to maintain positive relationships and advantages within their barrios. Due to Hispanics' large-scale segregation found in the barrios, they tend to retain and use their native tongue longer than other immigrant groups.

Family Connections

As indicated, perhaps this retention of Spanish is due to the cultural value of familism. Familism is the cultural belief that families should strive to find support within themselves. The best support and care systems will be found inside the family rather than outside of it. This cultural attitude has resulted in a larger percentage of multigenerational homes that extend beyond the nuclear family. David Maldonado’s experience of his grandparents living “only about twenty feet from my parents’ house” was a common theme for many in his barrio and remains common for Hispanic families to live near one another to this day. Therefore, it is necessary for families to retain language proficiency to communicate and maintain close family bonds.

While not every Hispanic family will be multigenerational in the immediate household, they are overwhelmingly multigenerational in how they process and handle family dynamics. Due to economic poverty and the difficulties of acculturation,

immigrants' psychological stress is a serious factor in their overall health and well-being. Fernando Rivera reminds us that Hispanics lean upon their families to find comfort and relief from this stress. The higher the connectedness to the family has resulted in greater relief from cultural stressors. This connection with immediate and extended family must be observed by the Church to provide for the spiritual care of Hispanic immigrants.

Bilingual Necessity

Acculturation is a reality, and the language that binds the barrio and the family is becoming lost as new generations begin to adapt and thrive in the United States. While the first and second generations maintain a high functional ability in Spanish, the third generation sees a tremendous drop off in Spanish use and mastery. For example, seventy-eight percent of third-generation Hispanics speak primarily English with little or no proficiency with Spanish. This is nearly a complete reversal for first-generation Hispanics in the United States. The culture of familism can be a separation or segregating mechanism that comes with potential difficulties. Instead of addressing the challenges of assimilation with the dominating culture directly, there is a potential temptation to withdraw. This withdrawal and the growing difficulties of living in the barrios are causing a growing endemic of incarceration and other symptoms of negative assimilation amongst Hispanics, such as gang violence, drug use, and higher than average dropout rates.

What can the Church do? What should the Church do? Is the Church even doing the best she can in providing the holistic spiritual care that is needed for the largest minority group in the United States? As previously stated, most of the Hispanics in the

United States are born in the US, and the vast majority of third-generation immigrants are predominantly English speaking. Nevertheless, the number of older, first-generation immigrants is still large enough to require Spanish proficiency to maintain competent communication. To effectively reach the entirety of immigrant families, the church must embrace a multilingual approach or face the reality of alienating a significant part of the family. Rodriguez believes that “Hispanic evangelical churches in the United States must challenge the assumption that Hispanic ministry is synonymous with Spanish-language ministry.” His belief is based upon the experience that native-born Hispanics who are dominant English speakers struggle in Spanish language churches because they are often ridiculed for their lack of Spanish proficiency and a perception that this deficiency in language represents a similar lack in the appreciation of their ethnic culture. This eventually leads to a possible exodus from the congregation and negative impressions of their familial culture.

With a different dominant language, second and third-generation Hispanics also bring to their local church different cultural understandings, primarily in understanding the mainstream culture and functioning well in it. It would greatly disadvantage local congregations (and families) to isolate and marginalize these groups, especially since they have greater opportunities for success than monolingual/multicultural immigrants. The largest advantage is in education, which serves the individual and previous and future generations with access to previously unaffordable resources. Not only does education allow for greater economic success, but it also allows understanding and appreciation of their ancestral culture that they are able to share with others, bridging the gap between mainstream and minority cultural groups.

From the Barrio to the World

Hispanics are caught in a pull between two (if not more) worlds - the struggle between full acculturation while maintaining a connection to the culture of their ancestral origin. The Church could/should provide comfort and sanctuary to this tension; however, the Church has traditionally only escalated this tension. Often in the name of multiculturalism or multiethnic diversity, we have created a melting-pot where diversity is only accepted if it fits in the pot. The leadership, worship styles, and dominant language reflect those of the majority culture, the ones who control the pot. Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li argue that this is not the direction the Church should go. Rather, “a healthy multi-ethnic church will be established not by assimilation but rather by accommodation.” DeYmaz and Li make a strong argument that the dominant culture must be the ones who intentionally take steps to welcome those of the minority culture. They go even further to say that it is unbiblical to have a specifically monocultural church in design. However, even the accommodating model suggests that a dominant culture is needed. What results is not a true sense of multiculturalism but one of an inclusive monocultural church; Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan believe this is a biblical principle and acceptable. Both groups agree that ultimately, it works best to have a multicultural approach that emphasizes multilanguage groups meeting in a language segregated reality of multiple services.

Juan Oliver has stood as a prophetic voice to the Church, reminding us that Hispanics are not a “‘new mission’ field for Anglos - or worse, a new ‘market base’ that might save dying Anglo institutions.” Hispanics are not commodities. They are not added

seasoning to give Anglo churches flavor. Instead, Hispanics in the United States are equipped to lead the Church into a new revival. To build up these future leaders, the Church needs to grow and nurture Hispanic families from within the barrios they live in, as well as the diverse, multilingual culture that the barrio represents. Churches do not need to be bilingual and multigenerational in order to reach Hispanics. Instead, local congregations will shift toward bilingual, multigenerational ministry so that they will be able to be reached by Hispanics.

Can anything good come from the barrio? This was the question that Nathanael asked his brother Philip regarding Jesus. Can the savior of the entire cosmos come from a barrio like Nazareth? Not to be outdone, even the people from Nazareth had difficulty believing that God would anoint a local carpenter's son. It is a natural assumption that when we see the blight and struggle of the poor and marginalized that they are the ones in need of outside assistance. However, Paul affirms that the Gospel message is an upside-down proclamation where God uses the low and weak of this world to display God's power. Recinos boldly claims:

Latinos are surrounded by broken bodies in their communities in the States and in Latin America. The spiritual values that find representation in Latino lives invite mainline churches to see and hear crucified people criticizing societies that create conditions of wretchedness and death. On the faces and in the testimonies of the people of the barrio, Christians rediscover that God does not permit oppression to go unanswered. Latino newcomers assert that God frees people to struggle for a better way of life.

The barrio is not the final frontier for the evangelist; rather, the people of the barrio (especially Hispanics) are the living embodiment of the Crucified Christ, who are called to proclaim that something good can, has, and will continue to come from Nazareth.

Part 3: If I Stay it Will be Double

Theologies of Liberation and How they Direct Urban Ministry Praxis

With the advent of cities came the opportunity for partnerships between people to increase their markets and influence in providing goods and services. At the same time, humanity lives in a world that is fallen - where relationships are fractured. The result of this fracturing in relationships combined with proximity to others has allowed systems of exploitation to flourish and dominate the lives of many. As mentioned earlier, the biblical witness speaks of God's contentious relationship with cities as they ran afoul of the will of God with the mistreatment of the poor and the alien. God has well-established a message of justice spoken through the prophets and enforced by God's own mighty hand. The community of God is to be established with the premise that the people live in the context of love and solidarity with their neighbor. Five of the Ten Commandments given to Israel spoke of this premise of shared life together for the family of God.

God's interactions with injustice in the city must lead to an ecclesiology where liberation is pursued and practiced by the Church. It is understood that the use of the term *liberation* will come with potential negativity if not open suspicion. For most in the West, the word liberation comes linked with Liberation Theology, which for many, will be forever linked to Marxism, racial/ethnic identity politics, and civil conflict. This is an unfair assessment of Liberation Theology and tends to be the perspective of those who stand in positions of privilege amongst the Church and society. However, the heart of an Urban Ecclesiology is not to grasp or enforce a specific view of Liberation Theology but must present itself as a theology of liberation nonetheless. This project's parameters define what a theology of liberation is thus: 1. It must be influential in the world, 2. It

must be impactful to promote change, 3. It must be tangible to the real struggles of those who are suffering.

The idea of social engagement is not foreign to the Protestant churches of the 20th and 21st Centuries. Zscheile asserts that this segment of the Church has been active in shaping political discourse for the sake of shaping the greater society. The Temperance movement led to Prohibition, where in Zscheile's words the church, "won the battle but lost the war in terms of being able to actually manage the broader culture." While it is easy to look down upon such a movement from our more pluralistic viewpoint of today, the intent was clear that the Church at that time believed that addiction to alcohol was causing tremendous personal and social suffering and needed a solution. The remnants of this movement still exist in several holiness denominations, such as the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene, who continue to advocate for dryness for the sake of work amongst addicts. The Church recognized that it had appeal and the ability to make a greater social impact, even in the West. A generation later, the Church was instrumental in passing the Civil Rights Act, embracing a theology of liberation that walked with the suffering to enact changes for racial and ethnic minorities' rights and liberties. The ramifications of such theology led to the martyrdom of several leaders. The consequence of martyrdom is the tragic legacy of those who follow in the liberating theology of Jesus. We are told that we are to bear our own cross, a symbol of political oppression, as we walk in the mission of God.

Wright will testify to the political influence that the Church has in the public arena. It is God's design for the people of God to speak prophetic truth and influence into the public sectors because God has chosen to audit the public square with judgment

placed upon just and unjust behaviors. God is not confined to God's Temple but is able to travel and see the works of the cities themselves. God sees and hears the plots of injustice, and God acts in judgment and redemption of the public arena for the sake of God's kingdom. It is at this point that Wright seems to struggle with how this redemption comes into reality. He is determined not to reduce this redemption as simply God eradicating the world and starting over or just ushering away God's people to a heavenly realm, for that would limit the legitimacy of the suffering of injustice. He argues that the primary task of the Church at this point is to be a "signpost" that points to the redemptive work that God will establish in the future. The greatest signpost is the Cross that shows the direction to God and God's justice. How well is the Church displaying its witness as a signpost? Signposts are stationary by design and require travelers to walk past them. This seems to suggest a disagreement with Zscheile regarding his idea that the believer is to walk with their signposts while journeying with those who are traveling in the public arena. How far is the Church willing to walk for the pursuit of liberation?

Goheen admits that Newbigin's ecclesiology does focus on the Church engaging culture, but the idea that the Church can transform culture is only a possibility, not a primary concern. Newbigin's argument is that the Church must remain faithful to the calling "compassionate service," and any church that allows that to be replaced with political action is to become a church that has "betrayed the gospel." The Church's service as it loves its neighborhood will produce mercy and justice as firstfruits to the reality of final justice in the coming Kingdom. Gutierrez would balk at this understanding of compassionate service and justice. He would question if such belief could even produce an authentic spirituality in the believer or the Church itself. Gutierrez calls this pursuit of

solidarity the *Dark Night of Injustice*, and it is rooted in the context of the Exodus of Israel as he reminds us that the goal was not just to flee Egypt but to cross the desert into the Promised Land. The Church must be committed to rejecting any system in this world that leads to the continuation of poverty. If she desires to leave behind the idol of consumerism, then she must embrace an alternative that cannot be confused by it or seeks benefits from this idol in any way. Part of this alternative is in the establishment of a community that not only believes that transformation is possible but that lives it and pursues it for others. This pursuit will always be political because it will always stand in opposition to those who oppress, who will then seek to destroy the witness that endangers it. The Church does not pursue this life because it is delusional but because it believes that God wills it and that God will see it through. The journey through the desert of the *Dark Night of Injustice* is only achieved if we walk forward and pursue the community of promise. The final word in this difference of political/social action will be given to Benjamin Valentin:

The God presented to us in Scripture is ostensibly a God who is connected to humanity and creation, a God who knows no bounds, a God who constantly is crossing over between and among us looking to help us to burst free of particular locations in order that we may be better able to build bridges, make connections, and fabricate solidarities among ourselves that could, in turn, engender social justice.

Valentin's perspective of God inviting Godself into the social realm can only be called Incarnational as God intends to place a transforming touch upon God's people and the world. This healing touch is essential to an ecclesiology that is Liberation in its practice by establishing a community where true humanity is restored. Ruth Padilla DeBorst confirms this by pointing to the very root of what ecclesiology is, the work of the

Church. The very word for church in the original Greek is a political word. The *ekklesia* was an assembly of citizens that gathered outside the normal function of the city (*polis*) to form an alternative body with a new political understanding. This called out assembly was open to participation by all people, including those who were barred from the polis' traditional role, such as women, slaves, and non-citizens. In this new community, new citizenship was granted and enforced by those in the community. Padilla DeBorst is quick to point out that this new way of citizenship and life was not “extra-terrestrial” or merely a *spiritual* belief but was rooted in these communities' everyday lives who cared for orphans and widows while purchasing the freedom of slaves. Padilla DeBorst would agree with Valentin that the *ekklesias* of the New Testament were established “counterpublics” that granted access to a minority, and often marginalized subgroup, a way to impact and influence the greater community, even if the attempts were met with rejection and persecution. The very existence of the Church results in the existence of a political entity because the gathering of people creates an opportunity for touch and influence. Will we use this touch to impact and change the greater society?

An Urban Ecclesiology that is Liberation in its practice will wrestle with how far the Incarnational touch of God extends into this world. When put in those terms, it would be for any believer to doubt the power of God to liberate those who live in the suffering of poverty in all its dimensions. The debate is to what extent does the Church work in the public arena to achieve this call of liberation. The Church's testimony agrees with the truth of St. Athanasius, who declared that what is not assumed cannot be redeemed. If God truly seeks redemption in all aspects of creation, then an ecclesiology must exist that assumes the public arena as work within its parameters to redeem them. The Church must

assume solidarity with the poor as well as with the process that creates poverty. How can this be? How can the Church stand with the oppressor? The Church stands with the pain and misconceptions that those who oppress must do so to eliminate their own suffering. The process itself is something that needs redemption. If the Church rejects to engage and impact the process, she is limiting God's redemptive power to establish the biblical commands of loving our neighbor. There is no suggestion for an ecclesiology that functions deontologically, rather a suggestion that one takes the call of God seriously. Instead of *one ought, therefore one can*, it should be: *God asks; therefore, one shall*.

Latin American Liberation Theology – Hope for the Marginalized on a Systemic Level

Latin American Liberation Theology believes that the secular world does not have God's interest at its core. Instead, the world is made of those who will gladly exploit all it can to achieve one's goal of power. This is most evident in the way that the poor are exploited in mass numbers throughout the world. Leonardo Boff explains that although it is difficult to formulate a single theology of liberation, there is a single reality where, "I must insist that there is one and only one, theology of liberation. There is only one point of departure – a reality of social misery – and one goal – the liberation of the oppressed." There is no apology that this leads to a view of where in order for the oppressed to exist, there must be an oppressor. The oppressors in Latin America were the dictatorships who often worked with and under the protection of the West to displace indigenous people from access to basic human services for the exploits of raw materials or cheap labor. As a

result, many turned to Marxist theories for possible solutions. The Church of Latin America was not frightened by the extreme examples of Marxist implications. Identifying and labeling the class struggle of poverty that plagued most of their populations made the risky association necessary. Like all academic and secular thought, Marxism needed to be evaluated by the Church, and the assumption that Capitalism was inherently Christian was rejected. The conclusion is that a social revolution is needed to address the historical reality of oppression.

This revolution that is often spoken of in Latin American liberation thought is not merely a political call to overthrow local governments. That would be too easy and ultimately not effective. True Liberation Theology requires a revolution of the hearts and minds of people. There is a pastoral aspect that calls people into solidarity and community with the oppressed so that the material realities of poverty shape the spiritual realities of salvation and connectedness with God on a personal level. Gutiérrez explains that this spiritual journey of Liberation Theology is rooted in the reality of traveling through “the terrible solitude of the wilderness” in order that one may become a son or daughter of God – truly free. In the struggle against oppressive powers, we discover and have a true encounter with God.

The clearest encounter that humanity has had with God is found in the Incarnation. In Jesus, God took on flesh and dwelt amongst us. More specifically, the “us” that God chose to dwell with was the poor and marginalized. From the very beginning, Jesus’ life was filled with connections with the multitudes of those who understood the daily struggle of survival under an oppressive Roman Empire. Born in a humble manger to a peasant couple, visited by lowly shepherds, Jesus would be a refugee

in Egypt before growing up in the outskirts of obscurity. God was announcing not just a Savior but a Savior who was called to save the poor. Gutiérrez would call this theological reality “the Preferential Option for the Poor.” The Church cannot be neutral; Jesus was not neutral. Jesus and, therefore, the Church must choose to walk in solidarity with the poor even when, especially when that journey leads to the cross.

Black Liberation Theology – Local Grown for Local Communities

The Lowly Jesus is the subject of a hymn that has and continues to be sung in congregations that face the reality of poverty. We sing, “Jesus knows all about our struggles,” and we confess that there is no greater friend than the “Lowly Jesus.” The image of a lowly and suffering Jesus is the major focal point in the Black Liberation theology of James Cone. He states,

[T]he lynching tree joined the cross as the most emotionally charged symbols in the African American community – symbols that represented both death and the promise of redemption, judgment, and the offer of mercy, suffering and the power of hope. Both the cross and the lynching tree represented the worst in human beings and at the same time “an unquenchable ontological thirst” for life that refuses to let the worst determine our final meaning.

The very notion that God Incarnate would suffer and even die the death of a public lynching (the shameful reality of hundreds of black Americans) calls the Church to find not only solidarity with those who suffer but also a redemptive understanding of suffering. Cone is quick to point out that it is difficult to embrace this understanding of suffering as it may lead to a belief that suffering is necessary or valuable. The paradox is that the suffering is not legitimized, but it is redeemed.

There is power in the redemption of evil. This power is a driving force of Black

Liberation theology that is not as clearly seen in their Latino counterparts. One can speculate why this focus on reconciliation exists so prominently in Black theology. The Black experience in the United States is not one of indigenous class struggle. Forcefully and violently displaced and transported to the Americas as slaves, Blacks were visibly and culturally different than their white masters. America is land forced upon them. Reconciliation is a path to liberation as racial equality is part of the American Dream that is mapped out in the Constitution. In Latin America, the dream for many has never been fully materialized as many of these nations are in their adolescence, if not their infancy. Does Black Liberation Theology seek a revolution or to be a part of the Revolution that already took place?

Redemption theology is centered upon the reconciliation of people and, therefore, liberation theology. Reconciliation assumes that two agents are reconnected as equals. For the poor to be reconciled with those in power, one of two things must happen: the poor are elevated to a human status of the powerful, or the powerful are reduced to the status of non-human. While both routes will be difficult to transverse, the only plausible solution is for the elevation of the poor, which will require a humbling of those in power but not the removal of their own humanity. Black Liberation Theology includes an inward focus of calling the Church back toward the redemption story of the Kingdom of God. The prophetic voice is first turned toward the direction of the Church before it is sent out to the nations of the world.

Cone, Gutierrez, and Others – Liberation in the 21st Century City

In his original preface, Cone openly injects that his book – *A Black Theology of*

Liberation, is written for the black community, “not whites.” It is not that whites cannot read this book, but it is his belief that whites will simply not understand what Black Theology is unless they have an existential crisis where they begin to ask themselves, “How can we become black?” For Cone, theology's task is for the release of the oppressed, not for the justification of the oppressor; therefore, Black Theology can only be truly understood by those who are oppressed by their very existence, their *black* existence. Fifteen years later would find Cone softening his stance by reflectively admitting that he wrote the book in a manner that would allow “white theologians” to engage it. He wrote his theology in the manner and language of classic “white theologies” but from a firmly rooted perspective in the black experience of oppression. He reminds us that theology has a prophetic element to it and that it was proper for him to espouse a theology that required blackness to be a key element needed to understand it fully.

It should be obvious that a theology of liberation would begin with a premise that one is oppressed and must be set free. Therefore, a Black Theology of liberation is a theology that recognizes the oppression of Blacks and calls for their God-ordained release from bondage. Cone argues that the very nature of theology itself is rooted in liberation. He writes, “There can be no Christian theology that is not identified unreservedly with those who are not humiliated and abused.” In the United States (in the context fleshed out above), Cone identifies those who are oppressed as black. It is literally a black and white situation where black and blackness represent the oppressed, those whom God has chosen to liberate. On the other side, white and whiteness represent the oppressor, the ones who ultimately face the judgment of God for oppressing God’s people.

This classification of black and white is not necessarily rooted in the color of

one's skin, although in the United States, it was a reality that blacks were oppressed simply because of the color of their skin. Nevertheless, Cone would argue that there were/are "white theologians" who were clearly "black" in their understanding and commitment to the causes of liberation and justice. For example, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer are not considered to be white by Cone for their actions and words against Nazism and Hitler show their blackness. At the same time, it would be irresponsible to simply suggest that Cone is simply labeling the oppressed as "black." Cone's Black Theology is focused on the liberation of American blacks from the tyranny and abuse they face on a personal and systemic level in the United States. Black culture and experience are vital and needed for a Black Theology to the point that Cone lists them along with black history on equal footing with traditional theological revelation such as Scripture, Special Revelation, and Christian Tradition. This establishes a vital black voice to engage in the task of theology effectively.

A large part of Cone's theology is the empowerment of the black voice that has long been silenced by both white society and the white church. He argues that Black Theology must deconstruct and destroy the false idols of white theology that have allowed the United States to participate in 400 years of abuse that exterminated the Amerindians and seeks to exterminate blackness. He writes, "The goal of black theology is the destruction of *everything* white, so that blacks can be liberated from alien gods." The true God, according to Cone, must be black, for God cannot be a God of all peoples, for God cannot be identified with oppressors. Therefore, only a black God can exist for the oppressed/black can only recognize a God as the one who brings determination and liberation to the black community. The very essence of God is black, for the essence of

God is liberation.

Cone admits that he was not aware of the history and works of theologies of liberation that were congruently emerging from the Majority World. His work would emerge independent of their voices. However, his thoughts are relatable to the key tenants of liberation found in Latin American Theology. Orlando Costas, for example, would identify with the concept of blackness that Cone shares as he understood the incarnational context of Jesus manifesting itself amongst a marginalized group. Leaning on the Mestizo theology of Virgilio Elizondo, Costas reminds us that Jesus physically stood out as a Galilean who was impure, less than a traditional Jew treated with contempt and suspicion. Jesus identifies and is one with those who are oppressed. To say Jesus was black in the American 1960s would be the same as saying that Jesus was a Galilean in the 30s AD. It is to say that Jesus takes on the very nature of the oppressed, and it is this oppression that is crucified and destroyed. Jesus' Galilean/Black identity is central to the scandal that is salvation. Furthermore, René Padilla reminds us that this scandal of salvation is not just an individual pursuit of forgiveness but one that extends to the entire world as a call to repentance away from oppressive systems of power, of the "alien gods" that Cone spoke of. While the specific category of "black" that Cone speaks of might be foreign to the theologies of Latin America, the concept of theology identifying itself with the oppressed is not.

Regarding Latino Liberation Theology, the "black" of Cone would be translated as the "poor" in the works and teaching of Gustavo Gutiérrez. Like Cone, he believes in the preferential love and treatment of the poor as central to the identity of God. God cannot be seen in those who dehumanize and murder the poor. Again, the language of

alien, that which is foreign to God as the cause of death and oppression as Gutiérrez writes, “The exploited and marginalized are today becoming increasingly conscious of living in a foreign land... a land that is alien to their hopes and is owned by those who seek to terrorize them.” True theology can then only be found when identifying, living, and working with the poor.

The significant difference between the liberation theologies of Gutierrez and Cone is the stress on class versus race. There is no suggestion that Cone would argue that the struggles for liberation are entirely racial, but that the black experience in the United States has shown that class and race are nearly synonymous in American culture. Where Cone would say “black,” Gutierrez would say “poor” to convey those who are oppressed. This influences Gutierrez as he seeks a praxis for the Church to become poor itself, which in itself is a liberating act of spiritual worship that allows an incarnational opportunity to live in solidarity with those suffering in poverty physically. This distinction may seem minute at a casual glance, but it is important to see that it is far more difficult to hide one's racial/ethnic appearance than one's class status. At the same time, the reality in the United States is that the racial divide prevents people in similar situations of poverty and oppression from being in solidarity with each other. Does the language of blackness cause more harm or highlight a reality that must be addressed in a diverse community such as many American cities?

The contemporary Liberation Theologians of today would struggle with the language of early James Cone. Their concern is that it was too black and not inclusive or global enough. This was an ironic twist when many of Cone's black contemporaries were upset that Cone was not black enough and that his usage and reliance on white

theologians like Barth discredited his argument on blackness. However, Ivan Petrella unabashedly considers Cone's theology as part of the significant history of Liberation Theology. He argues that Cone's connection to white theologians allowed Cone to avoid the monochromatism that "is the most important debilitating condition found in US liberation theologies." Instead, Cone would later work to develop a concept of liberation that demanded coalitions with other marginalized and oppressed people to bring about a true redemption instead of merely a black one. Cone desired for Black Theology to be a partner with other liberating theologies, especially those of the "Third World." He recognized that unlike those outside the US, blacks in the United States had access to capital, equity, and power on levels that were not present in other developing countries.

Chapter 3

All Means All: The Story of God for the People of God

Introduction

The goal of the previous chapter was to demonstrate that urban churches have an important place in the discussion of a greater development of Christian ecclesiology. It should now be apparent that local congregations like San Bernardino Bilingual are integral to the universal Body of Christ as significant examples of God's missional purpose for this world. The primary thrust of this chapter is to demonstrate that an urban understanding of ecclesiology is more than just an example. Instead, it will be demonstrated that the history of God's people, from creation to the present age, has been primarily experienced through the lens of the most basic urban concept - the *city*. It is in the city that believers best experience the biblical call of an all-inclusive community of the multitudes who gather to bring liberating justice to those who cry out to God. As the city is witness to the Chimera of Poverty, it stands to reason that the destruction of this beast will take place in the territory of those who daily encounter its destructive energy.

This chapter will be divided into two sections that will focus on the biblical and historical/theological narratives of the People of God. First, it will be the project's position that the biblical narrative, in its entirety, is a testimony of God's use of the city for the creation and redemption of humanity. The focus of this section will demonstrate that the Old Testament constructs an outline of God's call and purpose for the city that is further embraced by Jesus and implemented by Paul and the early Church as revealed in the New Testament. At the same time, special attention will be given to significant biblical moments when the people of God were displaced and experienced life outside the

security of the Promised Land.

Second, it will be further demonstrated that this biblical understanding of the city will influence the Church in its historical pursuit of developing a theological construct of ecclesiology that is constantly striving to demonstrate the saving mission of God to the nations. This project will take the position that ecclesiology is created as the Church engages in a series of conflicts between God's will and the powers of sin and darkness. These conflicts strengthen and enhance the Church's witness to a world that continuously suffers the pains of a fallen creation, eagerly awaiting their adoption and redemption from a loving God (Rom. 8:22-23).

Part 1: The City and the People of God

In the Beginning: The City in the Old Testament

The Bible begins with the story of creation. On the sixth day, the Triune God creates humanity - male and female, with a commandment to "multiply" and "subdue" the creation (Gen. 1:28, NASB). In the more detailed account found in the second chapter of Genesis, we are given further details that the first human was placed in a garden with the responsibility to "cultivate" and "keep" the garden (v.15). From these first set of instructions, one can construct a basic understanding that God's original intention was for humanity to populate the earth in a manner that suggests a sense of permanency and service, an ever-expanding garden that will extend its borders as any contemporary city. In fact, these instructions are similar to those that will be given to the Levites regarding how they are to minister in the Temple. They are not mere gardeners; they are holy servants of God. Humanity is given a place to serve God and grow in their relationships

with one another. They are not called to be nomads who wander from place to place. It is only when humanity chooses to sin (Gen. 3) does the original image of humanity living with God begins to break down. At its essence, sin creates separation from God and from each other, distorting the capacity for humanity to gather for a godly purpose. Although humanity was cast out of the garden and struggle to live the proper intention of the city, the concept of city is not removed from the human identity nor the plan of God.

The next eight chapters in Genesis (4-11) expand on the narrative of city building by a fallen humanity. They begin with the story of Cain - who, after murdering his brother, is fearful of his own life (Gen. 4:13-14). He acknowledges that being forced to wander is dangerous and therefore constructs for himself a city. While he is building a city for his own purposes, Cain is still fulfilling the proper intention of what a city should be: places of safety and refuge that God will later instruct Israel to build throughout their land. It is not sinful to build a city in and of itself. In no way does God hinder the continuation of humanity to dwell and live together even though they continually show that they cannot do this without mass violence and destruction, reaching the point where God floods the earth and begins again with a faithful remnant (Gen. 6-10). Eventually, this remnant would gather to build for itself a great city with a purpose to unseat the authority and power of God (Gen. 11:1-9). Instead of a city that displays the witness of God to the earth, they build a tower to escape the earth and to enter God's realm – usurping the very power of God. The city of Babel and her inhabitants distort the divine purpose of the city and are therefore exiled, a theme that will be revisited.

Immediately after the scattering of Babel, the reader is introduced to Abram and his call to form a new nation or people (Gen. 12ff). Once again, God establishes a

remnant to reestablish the divine order of populating and maintaining the earth for the sake of all creation. Part of this establishment is a call for Abram to leave the city that he is currently dwelling in and to seek a new land to establish a permanent residence for his future descendants, i.e., a city. Although Abram himself does not yet have descendants, he faithfully follows the leading of God and journeys to the land promised to him. Throughout his life, we see Abram, later renamed Abraham, display a life of being blessed when remaining in the land (Gen. 13:5-9) and finding difficulties when venturing outside the boundaries provided by God (Gen. 12:10-20). The camp or *city* of Abraham displays the promise of safety, provision, and cooperation.

At this point, one could continue to expound on a multitude of narratives that display the constant desire for God to work with a fallen humanity as they strive to live out their divine image. It was important to build this early foundation to display that God's original intention for humanity is found in living life in community. It must be noted that the passages that have been examined represent a period in which many of these cities display mythological attributes. While not arguing for or against any theories of historical and empirical evidence of the accounts of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, one must admit that these narratives are rather short in length and simple in their description. However, they reveal the purpose of the development of a theology of urban engagement. Nevertheless, they are limited in establishing a deeper outline for urban theology. Therefore, it is necessary to engage more tangible passages that demonstrate these basic urban principles to larger and more relatable examples to contemporary cities. For the sake of brevity, this project will focus on three cities in the Old Testament and how their experiences reveal the heart and mind of God.

The first city is perhaps the most infamous to those who have read the Bible. Sodom is mentioned thirty-four times throughout the Old Testament and another seventeen times in the New. While the colloquial accounts of Sodom portray it as a city destroyed for its “homosexual sins,” the scriptures are quick to show that the perversion of this city is far greater than sexual acts. Instead, we are informed throughout the writings of the prophets (ironically as warnings to Israel, the people of God) that the great sin of Sodom was the mistreatment of the poor and stranger (Ezek. 16:48-50). The messenger of God describes the situation, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.” This is similar to the language used in scripture to describe the injustice of Able, who was murdered by his brother (Gen. 4:10), and the people of Israel who were enslaved by Egypt (Exod. 2:23). One begins to see the city as a progenitor of systemic abuse and violence, a grim forecast of what was to come. Even Lot, the nephew of Abraham acknowledged that the city square, the place of hospitality, was not safe for strangers (Gen. 19:1-3). Once again, it is to be stressed that the sin was not sexual; rather, the people of Sodom were in rebellion against God’s design for the *city*. “Once again, the problem of solidarity arises... The evil of some is the evil of all, but the righteous of some is the profit for all.” The question arises, was there a way to save the city?

The answer to this question is provided within the text. Abraham bargains with God that if ten righteous people can be found, then God will spare the city for the remnant (Gen. 18:32). However, only four fled the city when the judgment was announced. The populace accepted their judgment in that they obviously did not relent or repent when offered the appeals of Lot nor when struck by blindness by the messengers of

God. It should be noted that Lot's future sons-in-law chose not to flee with them as well. They did not recognize the severity of their city's sin or the righteousness of the messengers. The sin was so entrenched in the community that they seemed incapable of change. This stands in stark contrast with a God who is willing to investigate and negotiate for the salvation of the city.

Sodom was not the only city that God sent a messenger to. The great city of Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire and one of the great enemies of Israel. The city was also known for its violence against the stranger. Specifically, they were a city of war that laid waste to any and all that stood in their way. Sharing with Sodom, the destruction of Nineveh was announced beforehand and spoken of through the prophets. Representing the social responsibility of a population, we can point out that the sins of Nineveh are not particularly individual sins. While not suggesting a Nuremberg defense of simply "following orders," we are aware that those who dictate the path to war are not always the ones responsible for the actual fight. It is acknowledged that the specific warrior class of those who lead the war efforts of Nineveh are the ones who will be cast down (Isa. 10) but, since the entire city profits from this destructive entity, it is equally culpable of the systemic sin that plagues the city. At the same time, the population can also benefit from the acts of the righteous, if there are any to be found.

Once again, a "cry" is presented to the city that has demonstrated such heinous actions against innocent victims. God sends the prophet Jonah, part of the offended party, to present an ultimatum to the city that, in forty days, the city will be destroyed. Unfortunately, many a sermon focuses on the narrative of Jonah's disobedience and repentance with a merciful God forgiving him. While this is an important part of the

narrative, it cannot be separated from the second half of the story. Just as Jonah has repented, the city itself repents; just as God showed mercy to Jonah, God shows mercy to Nineveh. What is interesting in both displays of repentance is that neither one is conditioned. Nowhere in the text does God announce that God will relinquish the judgment if the people repent; instead, the prophet announces that God will destroy the city (Jon. 3:4). What is unexpected is that Nineveh accepted this judgment. They fasted and wore sackcloth, and even the king made proclamations that matched the actions of the people. God relents and spares the city. There is hope and reassurance that God's urban design can bring about positive change and blessing for all of creation. All creation benefits from the repentance and restoration of Nineveh as the neighboring cities will be safe from the dominant power in the region. God proclaims that even the animals will be spared from the destruction of the violence and death that follows sin (Jon. 4:11). The potential for such a large city to demonstrate the power of God's love appears to be too irresistible to destroy.

The third city that must be considered is the holy city itself, Jerusalem. Unlike the previous cities, which could be identified as pagan and foreign to the people of God, Jerusalem is clearly the adopted city of God set to be an example to the other cities of this world. Does Jerusalem show an alternative to Sodom and Nineveh, or does it fall into the same trap of her heathen neighbors? The story of Jerusalem begins with the people of Israel asking for a king to be like the other nations (1 Sam. 8). In a pronouncement of judgment more than affirmation, God grants Israel their request. Eventually, it would be David, their second king, that would capture the city from his enemy and establish it as a capital for his kingdom and the earthly home for the Temple of God (Isa. 2). Ellul is

quick to inform us that David's desires are merely a reflection of God's and not the other way around. God is not concerned with being associated with a city, nor is God limited in any way by this association. If anything, the responsibility is on the people and kings of Jerusalem to faithfully live up to the expectations of God's holy design.

As the story unfolds, Jerusalem fairs no better than Sodom or Nineveh regarding living up to the expectations of a holy city, "... she is still a city. She carries man's mark, even in her election, even in her adoption by God... Her sins are those of other cities; she acts like them and is condemned like them." To simplify the situation, Jerusalem becomes an amalgam of both Sodom and Nineveh. Not only does she mistreat the poor, but she becomes a machine of violence and war herself, her own people being reduced to commodities to be used by the monarchy and nobles. This attitude is the very heart of idolatry to God, and it cannot be tolerated. Jerusalem's condemnation is rendered complete as the kingdom of Babylon (Babel of old) conquers the city, destroy the Temple, and exile the people. One can say that the punishment is a full eradication of Jerusalem and, therefore, Israel from the earth. However, God has made a promise, and there is a future for both Israel and the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 29:5-7). With the eternal promise of the Davidic dynasty and the holy city (2 Sam. 7:12-14), the eventual return of Israel and the reconstruction of the city and the Temple will be observed. Furthermore, readers are left with prophetic images of a *New Jerusalem* that will be far greater than the pre-exilic city that David and Solomon built. It is in this holy promise that we can move to the next section of this project and see how the New Testament narratives embrace the call and promise of the city considering the revelation of the Incarnate One.

City Without Walls: The City in the New Testament

Incarnation is God coming down to the creation to walk and dwell amongst God's created. It is an image of intimacy and community with the creation and an image that has existed since the beginning. It appears that God is not afraid to visit and inspect the creation, especially when parts of it cry out to God, seeking justice and mercy. Before departing to Sodom, we read that the Lord would "go down and see" (Gen. 18:21) if the cries were legitimate or not. In the same way, Paul reminds us that all creation itself is crying out to be redeemed (Rom. 8). The city, as it were, is once again plagued by sin and strife and needs to be inspected. This time God comes down to inspect the city in the flesh to judge it with the plan to redeem it as God has done throughout our history.

There is no denying that Jesus' ministry was urban in its design and function. One only must look at the language of Jesus in His teachings and parables that much of his experiences and the experiences of His followers demonstrated life and participation in an urban environment. The strongest support of this urban image of Jesus is found in the Gospel of Luke, where the opening scenes are a divine encounter in the Temple in Jerusalem that foretells the birth of John to a barren woman (Luke 1:9), then another divine encounter in the city of Galilee to foretell the birth of Jesus, this time to a virgin mother (Luke 1:26-31). The evangelist continues as we are told that Jesus will be born in the City of David (Luke 2:11) and properly dedicated and presented in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38). It should be rather obvious that the text is suggesting a retelling of the story of Israel. We see the message of God from the holy city to those outside it to be invited in by John, while in Jesus, we see the promise of God displayed in exile returning to the Davidic roots of Jerusalem (Luke 19:11). Jesus' earthly ministry will demonstrate the

belief that God is calling the people back from exile (during a period of dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the Roman empire) to return home and be with God once again. Of course, Jesus will not find refuge or safety in Jerusalem.

The city that Jesus is called to redeem is also the city that will reject Him. Once again, Luke describes a similar story that has been Israel's previous encounters with the city of God. Jesus looks down upon Jerusalem before entering it and weeps for He knows he will be rejected, and the city will fall once again (Luke 19:41-44). Like Sodom, the city is blinded to its true purpose of displaying God's redemptive hope, especially the Temple. Instead, we see in the death and resurrection of Jesus that God's plan for the city will remain, but the idea of city will change. No longer will the city or Temple be constrained to the limits of brick or stone. Instead, the People of God will be the city that houses the Temple to spread the redemptive story to the entire world.

Jesus tells His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they receive the "power from on high" (Luke 24:49), and on the day of Pentecost, they are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). At this moment, the newborn Church begins to grow within Jerusalem and then starts to spread outward to the surrounding cities and regions (Acts 8:1-8). The covenant given to Abraham is being materialized as the Gospel is drawing these city dwellers to the newly resurrected Temple - Jesus Himself. The ability of the apostles to carry this new Temple with them sees the shift away from Jerusalem to Antioch and eventually to the final frontier of Rome itself. With this continued movement, the Gentiles, the people of the *nations*, respond to the God they did not know (Acts 17:23).

It is written, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear

without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'"The author of those words, the apostle Paul, would be commissioned by the Spirit and the Church to proclaim the message of salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 15:40). As has been seen with the city of Nineveh, God is not opposed to reaching the Gentiles. The covenant with Abraham is for *all nations* to be blessed. "All" means all. Paul's Gentile mission was truly urban. While the term *city* is only used a handful of times in his letters, like Jesus, Paul's language assumes the recipients of his words were city dwellers. His ministry was in the city, and he did not have to tell his audience to enter the place they were already present and active every day. His work and ministry were to help these city dwellers forsake the cities of this world and enter the new city of the Church that houses the Temple within the life of every believer (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Therefore, Paul will have the ability to bring the redemptive power of the city of God to Rome and to Caesar himself.

With the destruction of Jerusalem along with the Temple in 70 CE, the writings of Paul become a reality as the Church will continue her mission as the city even though the physical representation is no more. Still, the Church is left with the promise that there will be a final Jerusalem. It almost begs the question, is God stubborn, crazy, or forgetful? Why would God continue this cycle of rebuilding the ruins (Isa.61)? Why would God still love a humanity that constantly fails? At the end of the day, it does not really matter what is in the mind of God except that God has not given up on the creation. God will not leave God's people in Rome nor Babylon. Those cities are not worthy of the final restoration of creation. They are prostitutes who cannot remain faithful to God (Rev. 17). Therefore, God provides a perfect city from Heaven, in the same manner, that God sent

the Son to be the future place of hope for the nations. In this not-yet city, New Jerusalem grafts the Church of today with the journey of Abraham of a future that cannot be fully seen but is eagerly longed for. It is in this time of longing that the Church, the current Jerusalem, finds itself today.

Exodus, Exile, and Revelation - Life, Death, and Resurrection of Biblical

Ecclesiology

It has been demonstrated that God's plan of developing a holy people is rooted throughout the biblical narratives. Once again, it should be stated that this by no means suggests that those who live in a rural or suburban context are living outside the will of God. In the examination of the city of Nineveh, one sees a picture of God who cares about the livestock of the area as well as the surrounding villages that would benefit from the peace granted by the redemption of the Assyrian capital. While it is undeniable that the urban concepts of place, permanency, and community are ever-present in the story of God and God's people, there are moments in the narratives where Israel and the Church find themselves outside the ideal plan of the City of God. the project will conclude this biblical treatise on three outliers – the Exodus, the Babylonian Exile, and the ongoing Diaspora, and how they shape and enhance the foundation of a practical and biblical ecclesiology.

Like the calling of Abram, the Exodus out of Egypt is a primary narrative that builds and shapes the imagery of Israel as a divinely appointed people of God. It is still the historical event that still defines the Jewish faith as a unifying element of shared experience. What is this shared experience? The reestablishment of a people who were

slaves in Egypt to be the children and rightful heirs to the land promised to their forefathers. In other words, the Exodus was an urban reset from the oppression of the Pharaoh (Exodus 1:11), who saw himself as a god incarnate, toward a covenant relationship with the True God who desired to dwell amongst God's children instead of simply exploiting them. Egypt is yet another example of cities in the vein of Sodom and Nineveh. God responds by leading God's people out of the situation. The people of Israel would cross the Red Sea, the border of the grip of Pharaoh – death, and sin itself, onto the path of holiness toward the Holy Mountain of God. Lohfink equates the Exodus narrative as the ideal imagery of Christian Baptism as a communal sacrament that asks not just the individual but the community itself to forsake the sinful narrative of the world and replace it with the design of Yahweh.

It is important to pause at this moment, for it is easy to see where the Church has used the Exodus narrative outside the function that God intended it to be. The Exodus is not to be used as a justification for the Church to leave and forsake difficult ministry assignments. It is not a call to leave the city for the safety and security of greener pastures. The continued exodus of the people of God will not be geographical in its design. Rather, the design of God's exodus is spiritual as it leads us to remember that we have crossed out of Egypt in the Red Sea and out of the Wilderness through the Jordan. We are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) who worship in a different manner within the confines of a "new city." In fact, the Exodus will be used throughout the history of Israel and the Church as a reminder that if we are not careful, we too will follow the path of Pharaoh and exploit those whom God has created to dwell with. When this occurs, the solution is not another exodus. Instead, God responds with exile.

It is vital that the Church does not see the Exile to Babylon as simply a punishment inflicted upon Israel for failing to live to their calling as a sacred city of love, justice, and mercy. Instead, it is important to see the Exile as an opportunity and a calling for Israel to reclaim and capture their purpose of developing cities that will be a blessing to the nations. Bakke uses the letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29 as a foundation for what God desires for those who will be sent to Babylon as well as a continuous call to the Church of today who are similarly sent to uncomfortable places of ministry. First is the directive that God has called Israel to be exiled and sent to a pagan land (Jer. 29:4). Second, God directs those we would call political prisoners to embrace their captivity by building houses and establishing families (vv. 5-6). Lastly, the prophet reveals their purpose is to seek and ensure the peace and prosperity of their captors (v. 7). In other words, God is informing them that this project of renewal will be one that will take time and effort; this will not be something done quickly or cheaply. Lastly, there is a promise (v. 10) that God will draw them back home as the plan is for Israel to reclaim their designation as the people who dwell in the City of God.

Israel's response can be demonstrated in the book of Daniel, which offers the difficulties and successes of revealing the design of God's City to pagan Babylon. In the first chapter, we read that God placed four teenage boys into a position of influence and power in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. Not only are they gifted and wiser than all the King's current court (Dan. 1:20), but they also begin to demonstrate an attitude of defiance toward the pagan ways of their new home (Dan. 1:8). This defiance will extend beyond dietary restrictions but will be displayed in open rebellion to the King, who pronounced the penalty of death among Daniel's three friends (Dan. 3:19). However,

their deliverance from the fiery furnace becomes a moment where Nebuchadnezzar declares that the God of these foreign boys is the true God of all creation (Dan. 3:28-29). Throughout the book, Daniel will end up serving kings from various nations who capture Babylon as God judges the various kings for their failure to live up to the design of God's city. This leads Daniel to petition on Jerusalem's behalf, for God's face to once again shine upon it (Dan. 9:16-19). What Daniel is truly seeking is a second exodus for Israel to the Promised Land and the Holy City on the Mountain of God.

Where are the people of God today? They find themselves between the final Exile and Exodus, where God establishes the true Jerusalem that will have no end, and we reign with our Lord Jesus forever (Rev. 3.21). The ministries of Jesus and Paul dealt with the tension of the here and the not yet here aspect of the Kingdom of God. It was appropriate in reaching the marginalized Jewish communities that were found outside of Jerusalem (for Jesus) and outside the Holy Land (Paul) as they were living in the wilderness or Diaspora, between the waters of the Sea and the Jordan. The urban churches of today live in this tension as they witness the injustice, violence, and addictions of poverty daily - praying for an exodus to a new city within the confines of the neighborhoods and people they love and minister to. This is to say that they are awaiting their final resurrection as a people. Exodus reveals to us the death of those powers that oppose God, while Exile is a struggle to live in faithful obedience to God for the sake of others. Therefore, the Diaspora is the longing hope for the resurrection of new life. It is the connection of the people of God to our spiritual ancestors who left fields, flocks, and fleshpots to journey to a land that we have not seen but are guided to by the One who created it. As we will examine in the next section, it is this life in tension that builds the reality of ecclesiology

as our journey through the wilderness with God forces us to examine our faith, hope, and love toward God and with one another.

Part 2: Conflict Based Ecclesiology

Building a Different Kingdom

The idea of conflict or tension is littered through the entirety of the biblical narrative. One cannot escape the cycle of humanity, and God engaged in a conflict between humanity's desires for individual power and greed (sin) and God's never-ending desire to restore and steer humanity toward a Kingdom of faith, hope, and love. Humanity's plan ultimately led to death and destruction, while God promises salvation and eternal life for those who desire to forsake the kingdoms and empires of the world and become fully grafted citizens of the Kingdom of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It should then be of no surprise that where the historical accounts of the biblical narrative end and where our understanding of Church history begins is a continuation of that conflict between kingdoms. Therefore, the heart of this section will demonstrate that the pursuit of ecclesiology will be one that engages in the conflict over which kingdom and whose mission will be followed and embraced by the Church. Using contemporary language, the Church must acknowledge that the State, the earthly kingdom/s, has and continues to formulate its own "ecclesiology" that embraces the desire to build a people into a nation with the purpose of sustaining the beast of poverty for the benefit of those who exploit others.

In 1493 Pope Alexander VI decreed through Papal Bull that the world, known and unknown, would be divided into two segments for the sake of trade and proselytizing.

The New World that was discovered in the West would be given to Spain, while the continents of Africa and Asia would be granted to their Iberian rivals, the Portuguese. The Pope's decision was a valiant attempt to prevent an escalating war between two superpowers, with the hope of simultaneously insuring an ecclesial foothold to the heathen world. Instead, the decree amplified the desires of European nations to create and expand their empires on the backs of indigenous people that can still be observed today. In other words, the Mission of God became secondary to the mission and formation of the Kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. Furthermore, the eventual backlash of colonialization was the rise of indigenous nationalism that equated Christianity as part of the culture of their oppressors and was something to be removed and sent back to the colonizer's home. While there is a temptation to celebrate and even promote the burgeoning nationalism of oppressed societies, the Church must understand that ultimately this rising need for a nation of their own is a victory for the ecclesiology or mission of the Empire/State and not the Kingdom of God which is why we have seen the majority world fall into the continued oppression of corrupt governments, dictators, and false collectives.

William T. Cavanaugh explicitly refers to the ecclesiology of the State as torture. While at first glance these seem outlandish or sensational, the truth is that torture has been and continues to be the *modus operandi* and a "carefully refined tool of state used in half of the world's countries today, and encouraged, taught, and funded by still other 'more civilized nations.'" The purpose of this torture is not to simply cause pain or discomfort but to radically individualize and fragment people away from community bonds so that eventually the only concern the victim has left is for the torture to stop, to become a willing participant in the goals and vision of the state's authority. This authority

does not have to manifest itself in purely physical violence. Cavanaugh retells that some of the most destructive torture placed on the people of Chile at the hands of Augusto Pinochet was limiting the access of political and economic power to those who were not friendly to or under the full mission of the state. This fragmentation leads to marginalization, which is the opposite goal of the ecclesiology of the Kingdom of God. In the community of God, the people are given their voice to speak prophetic messages of power.

A common theme of liberating Church praxis is the ability to hear the voices of those from the margins of society who represent a growing majority of people who are longing to be saved from their oppression. This assumes that our cultural structures establish zones of inclusion of various levels and degrees, and in between these zones are margins where people find the great difficulty of acceptance in the dominant culture. Classical missional ecclesiology establishes a praxis where the Church sends voices into these communities, often with a goal of extracting people out of these marginalized areas or transforming them into a new cultural zone of inclusion. In addressing this traditional model, Ruth Padilla DeBorst argues that in the history of Latin American missions, extraction was seldom, if ever, truly achieved and that the only hope for those in the margins was to pursue a praxis of liberation. Even a casual glance reveals that Padilla DeBorst's findings in Latin America are similar to the world over, as it is certainly the case of this project's local ministry context in San Bernardino.

What if we examine the concept of margins from a different perspective? Instead of the Church existing from dominant or a marginalized culture in worldly terms, one sees the margin of ecclesiology from above and from within as establishing a working

praxis. In other words, what if the neighborhood, “3rd Street,” was no longer identified as a marginalized community in the greater San Bernardino/Riverside metro area but a place where God establishes an access point to the Kingdom of God, i.e., holy ground? Going back to the Incarnation, we see that Jesus was a marginalized being. While much has been written about the marginalized communities of Galilee where Jesus lived, the very identity of Jesus as fully God and fully man is a margin itself. This is the same margin of ecclesiology that this project desires to join in a practical way. In other words, local churches are always on the margin because they rest between a reality where they encounter the wages of sin and the hope of salvation as “the whole creation groans” (Rom. 8:22). Therefore, the Church universal is always engaging in a praxis of liberation as all people, regardless of classification, need to be set free. The goal is always transformation since we are incapable of actual extraction from this world, for that belongs solely in God’s hands. As the people of God, their role is to transform all communities as they pursue their calling as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

One way to address the praxis of the margins is to embrace the concept that the Church is ultimately called to be the *Familia Dei*, or the Family of God, allowing the freedom for each member to be whom they are created to be a valuable child of God. Since she cannot extract herself from her neighborhood, The Church can choose to loath it, or she can choose to love it and to see it redeemed. She can choose to ignore it and let it collapse, or she can choose to take the risk of serving it. One is reminded of the old saying that one can choose friends, but one cannot choose family. Therefore, San Bernardino Bilingual embraces the need to radically welcome those who have been displaced or have no home to find an identity in the family of God and become 3rd Street

people. In many ways, this has become a literal identity as people who experience homelessness and other housing issues are allowed and encouraged to use the church's address as their own to gain access to services that require residency. In a place of vast homelessness and other housing insecurities, they believe that a family is a home, for a home is a place of love, acceptance, forgiveness, and protection.

For another avenue to address a praxis of the margins, a return to Padilla DeBorst is vital. She reminds the Church of her historic roots as a collective of smaller, called-out communities or *ekklesias* (often translated as church) who assembled for the sake of public concern. This new community is one centered in love granted by the Crucified Christ, who allows all people, regardless of earthly margins, to be united as citizens of a new Kingdom. She writes:

Citizenship under the rule of this loving community is not purchased or earned; it is not subject to migratory eligibility or dependent on skin color or ethnicity. Belonging, in God's new humanity, is a condition freely granted to all who admit to their created condition, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, recognize that their very breath depends on the living Spirit, look forward to God's complete restoration of the entire creation, and live in light of these confessions in the world.

With this new definition of citizenship, one that does not depend on borders and documents, we establish that 3rd Street is part of a new land. We have open doors and open borders and openly encourage the immigrant to establish roots. We are not looking to flee but to establish and flourish in this new land. Therefore, the church's practice is one of prophetic witness to this new reality that we live in - while continually teaching and equipping these tenets of citizenship to those newly transformed. Our overall praxis is one of transformational liberation through the intentional actions of discipleship,

community, and intercession. To simplify even further, we are in the ministry of freeing sufferers from the bondage of sin by giving them a home and making them a people.

To define this praxis further would go beyond the scope of this project alone; instead, that is the task of every local church as the specifics will be truly dependent on unique cultural contexts. For example, a church in the barrio, like 3rd Street, will see transformation as liberation from violence and addiction while justly pursuing economic equality. At the same time, a church in the same metro area that serves CEOs, business owners, and other economic influencers should see transformation as the liberation from greed and apathy while justly pursuing economic compassion. It is how Jesus can ask a potential disciple to sell everything and give to the poor while simultaneously encouraging the poor to pray for their daily bread. This is the Church of the Margin that can eliminate all other margins, not by ignoring them but by liberating them from above and from within.

Prophetic Voices – Suffering Servants

A biblical, immigrant, and liberating ecclesiology demands the Church to engage the world in a manner that is wholly different from the powers of this world. The Apostle Paul will remind his readers that their struggle is not against “flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world...” (Eph. 6:12). Therefore, the Church is to seek a model of ecclesiology that resists the means and methods of the state. It is beneficial to lean on the work of Henry Nouwen and his understanding that the Church does this through the means of an ecclesiology of *compassion*. The goal for Nouwen is to help the Church see the importance of

compassion as a foundational principle for her very existence. This is done by Nouwen working through three primary concepts: 1. God is compassionate. 2. Compassion calls and creates the Church community. 3. The Church acts compassionately.

The first concept for this ecclesiology is that God is compassionate in God's very nature. God does not merely act compassionately; God chooses to be in solidarity with us. This solidarity with humanity is displayed in movement as compassion moves us toward those who are suffering. This "downward pull" is truly personified in the servanthood of Jesus, whose compassion is not on maintaining the position of power or comfort, but to "express the divinity of God through servanthood." God is a compassionate servant to this world, and Jesus is the obedient Son who is grounded in this compassionate service. Jesus' mission was not in conflict with compassion. Rather, the compassion of Jesus is the faithful response to a compassionate God. This image or understanding of God is powerful and challenging. If the root of compassion is to *suffer with*, then a God of compassion means that God is willing to suffer. Does this question the classical characteristic of God as being immutable? It is not a debate this project has time to enter. However, to Nouwen, God is willing to allow Godself to be moved by a compassionate Spirit. It is this Spirit that led Jesus to the suffering of many, to heal them and to save them in the here and now as well as in the Kingdom to come.

A God of compassion requires a people who are compassionate. This compassionate community is those who follow and walk the path of the Obedient Servant. A simple way to describe this is that when we follow Jesus, then we find that our destination will be the people and places that Jesus serves. It is impossible for the Church to end up at a location other than those who are suffering unless we abandon or ignore

God's call. Echoing the life of Jesus, the community – the called-out Church will find themselves displaced to areas and people who are suffering. The fact that Jesus experienced the ultimate displacement from Heaven to death on a cross displays the example that the Church must faithfully express in our own lives. The miracle of displacement is that it is the solidarity we find in it that ultimately brings us together as individuals and closer to God. The Church is not called to be above humanity; instead, we are called to embrace the humanity given to us by God as we seek to draw other humans to the community. We are not called to lose our uniqueness but to discover the gifts given to us by God to serve a hurting world better. No longer is the Church to embrace a model of competition but of compassion – to find a way to use everyone's talents to maximize our ability to be in solidarity with others.

The third factor of this ecclesiology defines the practices of compassion that the community embrace to show the world that we are in fellowship with God and with our fellow human being. Nouwen outlines three specific practices of the disciplined follower of a compassionate God. The first and defining practice is patience. Patience is the practice of endurance that is ultimately focused on guiding us away from "clock time" and into the immediate moments of life. We are no longer slaves to the temporal understanding of the world, and instead, we are servants to the immediate need of a fellow sufferer. Time does not lose significance; instead, time gains true value because the compassionate understanding of time is no longer abstract measures of moments but of the transformative power of God's salvation in the world. The question then becomes how we will notice or understand when these moments of patience occur. Nouwen challenges the Church to become a people of prayer. Prayer, the second practice, is more than just

offering exaltations and petitions to God, which is the standard definition given by many believers. When prayer is viewed in this manner, then it is often neglected by the Church's impatience. Instead, prayer is to be one with the Spirit. The Spirit is the One who will guide the People's patient understanding of compassion as the Spirit leads them to those who need it. It is this intimacy with the Spirit that builds the community by allowing the Church to be one in solidarity with each other. It is this intimacy with God that allows her acts of service to be authentic displays of God's salvation on the human heart. It is what allows her ministries to be fully encompassed in the immediate and ultimate fulfillment of time for the Kingdom of God. This patient action, the third practice, is difficult for the Church to embrace faithfully. They are, after all, a people who are not immune to suffering. It is easy to pray that we desire the present moment to pass. Even Jesus asked if there was another action to respond to the moment that He faced in the Garden. Nevertheless, the Spirit guides the Church to action, to confront the powers that cause suffering as well as confront our own temptations and desires to act outside the will of the compassionate God. Nouwen does not go into specific details of specific actions as that would simply be impossible to list every possible action. Instead, Nouwen is more interested in showing narratives that highlight creative, non-traditional acts that demonstrate that compassion can respond to any and all situations of suffering that we may find people in. That compassion is not just a type of ministry but the very foundation of the Church's theological understanding of ministry. God does because God is compassionate. The Church does because the compassionate God calls her to follow and join in on God's compassion.

At this point, Bryan Stone has a better grasp of God and how the Church responds

through compassion. Stone's thesis is that compassion is defined by the ideas of liberation and community. It is safe to say that Stone would agree with Nouwen's assessment of compassion, but it is obvious that Stone would not be happy to leave it where Nouwen does. The idea of liberation would not be against the premise of Nouwen, but one could see Nouwen pause and ask if the call of compassion requires liberation in the present physical state. Nouwen seems to stop a little short of where Stone, and this project, would be comfortable and suggest that the solidarity with the sufferer is liberating in itself. It is hard to disagree with that since there are spiritual aspects of liberation, but at the same time, it should be difficult for one to sleep at night knowing that someone in their community is hungry and s/he does not seem to be called or notified to address that issue. It is hard to distinguish where the Spirit guides the Church to a spiritual, mental, and emotional healing experience and when that confrontation demands the provision of physical needs. If compassion moves one in their gut (the literal meaning of the word compassion in the Greek), then one must follow their gut. Stone shows how compassion as liberation deals with all these factors stronger than Nouwen. It should be observed that Nouwen's work as the Spiritual ecclesiology of compassion is needed to ultimately understand someone like Stone without immediately dismissing the concept that compassion is vital to the establishment and practice of the people of God.

When thinking about compassionate ministry, it is easy to assume that the discussion will veer inevitably toward local congregations engaged in charitable actions such as distributing groceries or clothing to those in need. At the same time, one could focus on larger ventures carried out by large Christian organizations that provide service on regional or even national levels. Regardless of which end of the spectrum one wishes

to participate in, compassionate ministry can be reduced to actions that are simply a means to an end for the “greater purpose of the Church” – salvation. Bryan Stone wishes to challenge the Church with expanding the traditional definition of compassionate ministry from merely an extension of what one does to an understanding that compassion is a theological pillar that helps order Christian belief and practice in all areas of ministry. In other words, Stone is not just advocating for a ministry that involves charity; rather, he unlocks a theological perspective that is rooted in compassion.

Stone admits that the concept of liberation comes with cultural baggage that makes it difficult to define. The fact that the Church, along with governments and terrorists, uses the term demands that *liberation* be unpacked. Stone suggests that a working definition that can be used as a starting point is “freedom from oppression.” Oppression is to dehumanize others for the gain of the oppressor. Therefore, liberation is the activity (ministry) of restoring humanity back to people. As the Church, we are actively engaged with restoring humanity as defined by the Image of God found in the perfect humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. Stone suggests that this ministry of liberation occurs on three levels that must be met to ensure a truly divine level of freedom: charity, empowerment, and justice.

The first level of liberation – charity - is familiar to many as it can be a harmless (to us) interaction that requires little to no effort or ongoing commitment. Dropping a few coins into the box at the grocery store does not demand us to witness or engage the actual oppression that needs to be alleviated. A liberating charity is one that takes up residence with the oppressed as well as takes sides with them. Charity, like the grace of God, must be incarnational – present in the daily lives of those who need it. It cannot be outsourced

to others or remain apolitical. In other words, liberating, compassionate charity will place demands on the Church to stand with the oppressed and stand against the oppressor.

Empowerment is the second level of liberation that focuses on the ability to give people the energy to free themselves from oppression. Stone suggests that “No one can liberate another person.” Instead, the Church can provide the physical and spiritual resources that the oppressed need to be fully restored as human beings. Liberation can only be achieved when the oppressed recognize that they themselves are not objects to be salvaged but are humans that are capable of being loved and treated with dignity. In fact, freedom cannot be achieved until the oppressed are empowered to the point that they can release their oppressors. The only satisfaction for the human soul is to seek and receive the power of God, which is found in a liberating community of mutual love.

The final level of liberating freedom is justice. The ministry of justice involves the task of disclosing God’s justice while simultaneously exposing human injustice. While the Church has not had a problem in the first task of disclosing God’s justice, the Church has been guilty of often reducing this justice to individual morals and legalism, which has been used as oppressive power. It is easy to reduce poverty to a set of individual moral decisions instead of engaging and exposing the systemic moral failings that lead to difficult choices. For example, Stone provides the stories of three women who have been on the receiving end of personal and systemic abuse that has led them to a place where their survival demands decisions and choices that the Church would condemn as sinful. Participating in the exposure and resistance of injustice unites the Church with the ministry of Jesus as we take up our cross and follow Him to resist the greatest injustice – death.

Intertwined with this understanding of liberation is the reality that this liberation can only take place in community. Stone insists that the very biblical foundation of humanity itself is found in the ability to live in a relationship with God and with one another. To deprive our neighbor of this capacity to form community is “absolutely abhorrent.” This is perhaps where the Church finds failure in compassionate ministry because we fail to build a bridge of community with those whom we may help liberate. A true compassionate ministry is not simply expanding the roster or membership rolls with those who can claim an individual moment of salvation. Rather, the compassion-based ministry of the Church seeks to expand the table where we can break bread and fellowship with one another – both the former oppressor and the formerly oppressed. To do otherwise is to miss the true aspect of salvation, which is the present and future participation in a Kingdom that has been set free from the tyranny of Egyptian slavery while awaiting the reconciliation of all creation from the oppression of sin and death.

Service to the Poor – Wesleyan/Nazarene Ecclesial Identity

David Hempton’s primary goal is not to write the definitive history of the Methodist movement. He admits early in his work that he merely wishes to add to the discussion and debate of other Methodist historians of what cannot be denied – that a small group of Anglicans, under the leadership of an emotional and theological eclectic man, would spark and rekindle Christianity in the North Atlantic world and expand to tens of millions of members around the world. Hempton’s thesis is a belief that the rise and fall of Methodism is not something that can be pointed to with a single event or

person. Instead, his belief is that the movement is an amalgam of the work of ordinary people and how they responded to an ever-evolving world.

The first concept that must be engaged is the tension between a desire for egalitarianism and the practical reality of authority. This tension is present throughout the history of Methodism on both macro and micro levels. Within the context of the Enlightenment itself, much of the North Atlantic world would be engaging in this discussion in nearly every facet of life. Europe, and her colonies, would be engaged in multiple revolutions as citizens began to question the place of divinely appointed monarchies with a pursuit of republican political theories that suggested that all were equal regardless of social class, and eventually, race and gender. Paired with this political change came the reality that the social structure of civilization was something to be improved upon instead of a pursuit of a form of anarchy. While there was debate over the type of authority or the appointment of authority, the idea of authority was still something that needed to be maintained. The question was, who established this authority?

Hempton identifies that this question of authority was at the heart of John Wesley's understanding of theology and shaped his understanding of ecclesial authority. Wesley valued the political philosophy of British Empiricism established by John Locke, who posited that all people could discover and receive knowledge from their own experience of the natural world. Therefore, religious knowledge was no longer reserved for only the ecclesial elite. The religious experiences of the miner, slave, or milkmaid are all equally capable of revealing the truth of God to a hurting world. Due to this understanding of revelation, Wesley pursued a movement that was based upon voluntary association instead of ecclesial permission or requirement. Of course, the obvious tension

of an association based upon consent is that eventually, there will be times where there is disagreement, and those in disagreement or on the margins decide to either remain in the fellowship or to remove themselves. In the case of Methodism, African Americans decided to eventually leave the association while women as a whole decided to stay despite a reduction in clerical positions.

This leads to the second concept that Hempton focuses on, the desire and reluctance to be countercultural. Once again, we can look at the age in which Methodism was birthed as the beginning of evolving social norms and mores. The strength of the movement was the way Wesley and others were able to construct a community where believers could practice their true humanity with each other. The bands, classes, and societies offered tangible ways to participate in compassionate ministries in their local communities. They achieved much by being a presence that would shape the social frameworks of their towns and cities. The early Methodists were active in practices that resisted the social injustices of slavery, economic and gender inequality. So why did Methodism decline? Hempton's argument is that Methodism thrived in times of opposition as a counter-cultural force. In other words, Methodists succeeded in building community but struggled with a true understanding that the community was to be one of liberation. Instead of a true understanding of liberation, Methodists gravitated toward the Enlightenment understanding of egalitarianism. Hempton writes, "Methodism at its heart and center had always been a profoundly countercultural movement. It drew energy and personal commitment from the dialectics arising from its challenge to accepted norms in religion and society. It thrived on opposition, but it could not long survive equipoise."

An example of this is the negative reflection of Frederick Douglass with a local

Methodist congregation. His experience emphasizes the strength of a church in opposition while simultaneously demonstrating the worthlessness of maintaining the status quo.

While interested in joining a local Methodist church due to its radical practice of a biracial congregation, he endured the indignity of being segregated out of sight of white parishioners but walked out when the black congregants had to wait until the whites had left the service to be offered the grace of the Lord's Supper. The act of social accommodation outweighed and, in the case of Douglass, destroyed the witness of the countercultural display of the Gospel that drew him there in the first place.

The writer of this project was drawn to these concepts because it is what he had come to love and struggle with within his Christian life. He was not raised in a Christian home, and his first true encounter with Jesus was in the Church of the Nazarene. It is the writer's opinion that it was the "legalism" of the church that led him to salvation. Coming from an alcoholic family, the temperance stance of the Nazarenes was equally shocking and uplifting to him as a child. While many of his contemporaries would complain or rebel against such stances, he embraced them. They were countercultural to a boy who had grown up in the world. He was also fortunate to be a part of a local congregation that called and empowered women into ministry. It made sense to Him. After all, his mother had always been the lynchpin that held the family together when his father essentially abandoned them. His family was the proverbial "that family," and he was one of "those people." The very people the earliest Nazarenes believed they were called to reach and serve.

When he left the safety of his local church and enrolled in college at Point Loma Nazarene University, he began to see that other Nazarenes were not as "traditional" as he

was. The writer saw where the holiness roots of the denomination were in tension with the Evangelical tradition that seemed to be more concerned with political and social control than sanctification. This continued with his seminary education as it became obvious to him that these two distinct camps were in constant tension, and the numerical evidence was showing that American Evangelicalism was not growing the church. Many of his friends have left or been “forced out” of the denomination, seeking greener pastures. He is not sure he could ever leave, but in no way can he embrace what himself, and Hempton, believe will be the decline of Wesleyan Methodism – the refusal of challenging a perceived Christianized culture for the gain of respectability. Therefore, the writer feels called to the city and go back to our literal roots. The question remains, is he a “good” Nazarene or someone who pushes on our denominational authority? Perhaps he is both? The offspring of the Methodist movement – the Holiness churches are carrying the message and energy of ecclesial holiness throughout the world. Seeking the least of these and calling the faithful to be separate from and simultaneously in solidarity with the world is a formula that seems to work. Most of the world does not seem to truly prosper under the guise of modern economic and social policies. Perhaps there is still time in the Church of the Nazarene to go back. Perhaps there is still one great revival to unleash upon the world. If anything, an urban ecclesiology inspires the Church to try because the legacy of Methodism and Wesley is that God seems to bless the “impossible” missions that sanctified people embark on.

Chapter 4

Everyone Means Everyone: A Local Model of Urban Ecclesiology – Biblical, Immigrant, Liberating

Introduction

The previous chapters of this project have demonstrated an understanding of what an urban ecclesiology is and how it fits into the Christian witness's greater account. However, when it comes to ministerial reality, the theory of an urban ecclesiology is wasted if it cannot be implemented and used in a local congregation. Therefore, this section's focus will be to demonstrate how a local, urban church can discover its place in the ecclesial picture while remaining faithful to its community context. To do this, the local ministry context of the San Bernardino Bilingual Church of the Nazarene in the 3rd Street Neighborhood of San Bernardino, California, will be used to represent an active church that is in the heart of an urban center that is committed to faithfully remaining and serving in their current location.

Many urban churches are currently practicing an understanding of what has been defined as an urban ecclesiology. An active congregation should not find difficulty in adapting the framework that has been presented thus far. There remains an assumption that the trends of the suburban-based church growth movement of the 1990s and early 2000s can be readily and easily adaptable to multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual

ministries. This assumption places urban churches at a disadvantage as time, money, and effort are essentially wasted on ineffective models and plans of ministry that do not meet the ecclesial needs of urban churches. While it is understood that the project's specific context cannot and will not be a plug and play solution, the goal is to provide a picture that other urban churches can relate to and hopefully identify areas of tangibility that can be used to construct their own local ecclesiology that will help them frame their own ministerial vision and mission.

Theologically this is called the *scandal of particularity* or a contextual theology in that by addressing specific cultural aspects such as place, time, and language, one can learn about people and transfer those lessons to other cultures to engage people further. The fact that Jesus engaged 1st century Galilee allows the Church to observe lessons to affect other cultures even if those cultures are different from those experienced in Galilee. Orlando Costas brings the Church further by reminding us that even the specific culture that Jesus chose to encounter sets the tone for all further encounters. For example, by choosing Galilee over Jerusalem, Jesus steered the evangelical mission of the Church to engage the very least of society and therefore access to all of society regardless of cultural context.

While theology does not exist in a vacuum, the same is true about people. It is important to see people before seeing culture, and it is just as important not to remove culture from people. Culture has a relationship and impact on people that place them into a context for engagement with each other. For example, it is easier for two people from the same culture to communicate and interact with each other, but it is possible for people from two different cultures to engage and communicate as well. This is where the reality

of contextual theology comes into being. It is imperialistic to assume that one culture has full access to the full revelation of God. God cannot be fully known by any single culture, but a greater understanding of God can be constructed by observing and listening to others as they share their reflections and experiences of God. A common image that has been used by multiple authors (echoing the Apostle Paul) is that the Church is at her best when it is a symphony of beautiful music being played with a variety of unique instruments to produce a unified composition. Each with its own distinct range and sounds, united for the purpose of transforming the hearts of all who listen.

What then is contextual theology? Ultimately the answer is simply any theology that is actively engaging the life of another. To engage in such an activity, one must transfer value to another person that their life in their specific place of being is important to be entered into for engagement for the purpose of redemption. Essentially, the phrase contextual theology is redundant. How can theology exist outside a context of engagement? Why would the Church desire such a theology? One must return to Gustavo Gutierrez, who reminds us that the first centuries of the Church engaged in theology as a spiritual exercise, one of meditation and reading of the Bible to be “geared toward spiritual progress.” The goal was movement in the same direction to discover the nature of God. The nature of God is to walk with humanity in the cool of the day, to know and be known by us. Therefore, the call of the Church is to walk with this world, to know it, and to be known by it in order that they might know the God who desires to walk with them. Contextual theology is the call to practice the incarnational attitudes of the God who walked and dwelt on this earth so that none shall perish and for all to be saved.

Part 1: Finding our Place in the Biblical Narrative

Urban Manifestations

David Busic offers three current manifestations of active city ministries. The first is Established Churches that, as their name implies, have maintained their presence in the urban core by maintaining property and facilities in prime locations. While these congregations have strong roots in their local community, some struggle with the costs of maintaining large structures that are no longer filled to maximum capacity as the neighborhood experiences a changing demographic. Some have adapted by offering their facilities to other congregations (often an ethnic-based one) or other community services such as schools. At the same time, these congregations are often filled with members, often older, who have a love and understanding of urban ministry that they can share with newer generations by serving in conjunction with or providing needed mentorship for those who desire to extend the ministries going forward.

The second manifestation is Immigrant Churches that spring up in areas where larger gatherings of specific cultural populations are transplanted to the community. It is important to make a note that this immigration does not have to be foreign or in a different language necessarily. For example, there have been occasions where northern cities became destinations of refugee populations of southern blacks who immigrated seeking jobs and fleeing from racial discrimination. Regardless of how or who has immigrated to urban centers, the reality is that there is a great need for assistance from, as well as an openness to the Church. Busic will go so far as to say that this openness is perhaps the greatest opportunity toward reaching and making disciples in our current time and place.

The third manifestation is Compassionate Ministries-Based Churches. Busic reminds us that this is the most common manifestation of urban ministry that exists in the Church of the Nazarene today. This is “due to the fact that compassion is woven into the ecclesiological fiber of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.” These ministries are not just concerned with providing care for those who suffer from the realities of poverty but are often engaged in advocacy for eliminating the systemic issues that create and maintain poverty that causes so much suffering in our cities. Compassionate Ministries-Based Churches can seek and find outside partners and financing for ministerial needs that are not available to other congregations.

Observing these current manifestations is helpful but is in no way satisfactory in establishing a biblical context for an urban ecclesiology. Busic is not offering these manifestations as static categories; however, there is a reality where we become paralyzed by establishing or identifying our local ministry with one of these manifestations. It is important to be descriptive within our ministerial reality, but these manifestations should be understood as fluid positions that help us address our neighborhoods. In other words, it is helpful to know where we currently stand before mapping or outlining a potential journey of movement to another ecclesial destination. It is in this journey that a local congregation truly becomes a biblical church.

Being a biblical church has become a colloquial phrase to mean a variety of things. Often it is used as a descriptive moniker to divide or separate a local congregation from others based upon a set of suggested moral or political values or principles. This project is not concerned about identifying or defining such values for each local congregation. Instead, the goal is to offer an understanding that being a biblical church is

a local congregation's ability to find itself in the biblical narratives themselves as a direct response to the scandal of particularity. Another way to address this is to look back at the many representations of biblical "cities," such as those outlined in the previous chapter, and find similar cultural and ministerial contexts.

A City on A Hill

In the introductory chapter of this project, the city of San Bernardino was demonstrated to be a place that struggled with the effects of poverty. While there are neighborhoods within the city that live in affluence and safety, the plurality of the populace participates in a daily struggle to survive. To those living in this struggle, they can easily identify with the iniquities of the large cities of the Bible. Some would see the lack of hospitality to the poor and the immigrant as a demonstration of a modern-day Sodom. Simultaneously, others could see a contemporary Nineveh who needs a vital call for repentance to the violence that affects those not favored by the city's elite.

Upon further examination, the evidence would describe the city of San Bernardino as Babylon. While once great and powerful, San Bernardino is in constant conflict with surrounding urban neighbors who are a potential threat to their power and status. Inside her gates, there is a city within the city that demonstrates ability and influence that exceeds those of their wisest advisors. The local congregations are exiled in this city, and many of them are involved in the wellbeing and welfare of the city even if the city does not truly demonstrate a concern for the Church outside the services we can provide. This should come as no surprise, for it mirrors the ministry of Jesus and the early apostles who

garnered ministerial success outside the walls of Jerusalem and found multitudes on the fringes and margins in Galilee and the Diaspora of the Roman Empire. We are a people in exile. At the same time, we will continue to serve and pursue the peace and prosperity of our current location until God establishes us to be the Holy City for all eternity.

There is great power in social movements, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God is no different. When one delves into the Galilean ministry of Jesus, one witnesses the power of the gathering of the multitudes, even when these crowds were those designated as unimportant or from the bottom of society. Costas states, “When the Gospel makes “somebody” out of the “nobodies” of society when it restores the self-worth of the marginalized, when it enables the oppressed to have a reason for hope, when it empowers the poor to struggle and suffer for justice and peace, then it is truly good news of a new order of life – the saving power of God.” Therefore, we can conclude that something good *can* come from 3rd Street and those places within our urban communities that are looked over and cast aside. Costas would argue that one of the problems in today’s evangelistic ministries is that there is a desire to start in Jerusalem instead of the margins of Galilee. The result is that often the church becomes co-opted by the power and benefits of the select few and neglects the more powerful voice of the harassed multitudes whose cries are constantly heard by God. Thus the onus of being a beacon, a city upon a hill (Matt. 5:14), falls upon the urban church to minister in the locations that are crying out for salvation.

The Biblical Ministry of Presence

The boy Samuel heard the voice of God twice before being instructed on how to

respond to the calling of the Almighty. It could be said that he was awakened by the calling of God but not woke to the reality that God desired a presence to present a prophetic message that would impact the nation of Israel. Similarly, the Church seems to be “awoke” to the struggle of poverty but is it “woke” to receive and implement the message of God? Eric Mason defines woke as “no longer being naïve nor in mental slavery.” When it comes to the issue of poverty, the Church is still in this state of mental slavery, from responding to the clear call from God to pursue the biblical task of liberation. This slavery manifests itself due to a lack of belief or preservation of privilege. Regardless of the reason, urban churches must establish a framework for themselves that will keep local communities woke to the call of justice. A biblical, urban ecclesiology will provide a framework for proclaiming the Good News to the poor. This framework will consist of two foundational pillars: The Church must be Present, and the Church must be Prophetic.

God does not flee from those who are suffering. God’s presence amongst the poor and marginalized is proof of the mission to redeem creation for what is not assumed cannot be saved. Therefore, San Bernardino Bilingual must establish a meaningful presence in the city to declare the radical proclamation that God is there and that God demands a transformative response. Since our cities continue to receive immigrants - domestic and abroad, it is imperative for the urban church to be a welcoming presence of hope and refuge in the name of Jesus. Our goal is not to “move on up” or flee the city but to embrace the land that God has given us and work for the full redemption of all “nations” that we encounter here. A foundational principle that SBBCOTN has worked with is the necessity that our neighborhood speaks at least two primary languages.

Therefore, all materials are presented in English and Spanish to assure the community that everyone is welcome and that such barriers are being torn down on our campus.

The second action the Urban Church must participate in is being a prophetic word and deed to both equip and challenge the city. Mason describes the prophetic voice of the Church as being “big picture” in vision and still maintains a “street-level impact.” Not only is it a foretelling of God’s plan for the journey forward, but it is also a sharing of the heart of God in the here and now. This vision requires prophetic leadership who are willing to be pro-active and incur the risk that all prophets are subject to. We cannot sacrifice the practice of urban liberation for the sake of suburban security. Perhaps the difficulty in growing this prophetic voice is that we limit the role of prophet as a preacher and not think of them as an intercessor, as one who is willing to stand in the gap between God and the city. How does a sermon on a Sunday morning address the corruption of a city council or the unfair treatment of a police department that is overstressed and understaffed? Can we walk in our neighborhood and be noticed by sight? What is the reputation of the church to local businesses? Are we asked to pray for those who are weary and seek rest?

The prophetic example of Jesus reminds us that urban ministry is not “outsider” based. While we live in a time of specialization where local churches are bombarded by experts, it is essential to see that the scandal of particularity does not shy away from the empowerment of local resources. While it may seem that 3rd Street lacks resources, and in many ways, we do lack materials that are provided from outside the neighborhood, we are constantly reminded that the greatest resource is the very people with whom we dwell. The ministry on 3rd is not any individual’s ministry but the ministry of the people for the

people. Therefore, we consider our immediate outreach center as a half-mile radius around our campus. Most of our membership and leadership live within ten minutes of the facility. Costas believes it is essential that an urban ecclesiology, and thus the vision of urban ministry, be participated and led by the shared life of the community and the community of faith that serves it. God desires to use the people of the city to proclaim the saving message of redemption to the city. Who is better to demonstrate the power of transformation than one who has been transformed?

Throughout history, the city has erected walls and dug moats to establish barriers of who is free to access or leave the community. While the initial pursuits of these barriers may, in fact, have been for benevolent purposes, the reality is that they often serve as hindrances for people to gain the true liberties and benefits that the city has to offer. What provided safety and security for the few resulted in deathly poverty for the masses. An urban ecclesiology equips the church to establish gates and bridges that overcome the barriers so people can freely continue the journey of life that God has designed for this world.

Part 2: Fellow Immigrants Searching for Home

Mobile in Nature

There needs to be a distinction between a congregation that embraces the

ecclesiology of immigration and a congregation that embraces immigrants. While it has already been mentioned the need and value for local churches to reach immigrant populations, a church that models an urban ecclesiology will do far more than simply help immigrants transition into a local community. A church that becomes immigrant in its accessibility will not only be a beacon of hope for those longing for freedom and opportunity but will also be a community that is on a journey itself seeking its own city of refuge. At first, this may seem to be a contradiction to the concepts of presence and the importance of establishing roots in a local community. However, our goal is to avoid the temptation of Babel, which believed that their building and legacy were more important than the call and design of God.

The New Testament Church was in a constant state of movement. Jesus spent much of His time traveling throughout Palestine, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and encouraging the multitudes to follow Him. Jesus would describe this immigrant ministry as one where He did not have the luxury to even rest His head (Luke 9:58). Furthermore, Jesus would send out the disciples to the surrounding neighborhoods of Galilee to reach even more people. So how does this movement manifest itself today in an ecclesial culture that embraces locations, buildings, and signage? A key to our identification in San Bernardino is to view our campus as a hub. Like the bus hub located downtown, the idea is that our campus is a central location where people can transfer from one journey to another. The hub, like any other bus stop, is not the destination for those who travel but a location that helps people get to that destination.

Being a hub is something that should not be foreign to the Church's understanding of ecclesiology. While the Temple in Jerusalem held important value to the people of

Israel as far as their religious and cultural identity, it was not a location where the majority of Israel would dwell themselves. Instead, the Temple represented that God chose to dwell amongst the entirety of creation as God's presence is not something for Israel to own or hoard for themselves; it is to be revealed to all nations. Typically, the average Israelite would visit the Temple a few times a year, yet the ability to love and serve their neighbors back home occupied much more of their time. The same is true for the typical church member who might faithfully attend services a few times a week but is then sent out into their neighborhood, homes, and jobs. As a local church, we must equip our people to minister on the move, for the world does not seem to be in any hurry to slow down.

We have observed in the biblical narratives that God has called people to be sojourners on a mission to live in a Kingdom that is here and not yet here at the same time. Unfortunately, the Church can exist in a neighborhood but not be a part of the neighborhood regarding influence or importance. When Israel was in exile, they demonstrated to foreign kings the importance of following God as they pursued the peace and prosperity of the land in which they found themselves. Therefore, we must be willing to engage in our communities and participate in the everyday activities of city life. The local church as a city hub serves this function of being a source of direction and guidance for the variety of routes that the city engages in. Charles Van Engen states:

The church is not a social agency – but is of social significance in the city. The church is not city government – but God called it to announce and live out his kingdom in all its political significance. The church is not a bank – but is an economic force in the city and must seek the city's economic welfare. The church is not a school – but God called it to educate the people of the city concerning the gospel of love, justice, and social transformation. The church is not a family – but is the family of God, called to be a neighbor to all those whom God loves... The church is not a community development organization – but the development of

community is essential to the church's nature.

While we cannot force our influence upon the city and those who inhabit it, we would be foolish to abandon this influence. Equally foolish is to suggest that our ministries do not represent the community development that Van Engen speaks of. For example, one of our partners in ministry at SBBCOTN is Cornerstone Community Health Inc that provides free health care services to the community. Through the work of CCH on the campus, the community is exposed to a variety of services such as affordable housing, income assistance, access to social security, mental health services, and Medicare services. During an interview with Ms. Jakki Paik – president of CCH, the “success” of the clinic on the church campus is related to the work of the church since the church provides the legitimacy and trust that is needed by the clinic. Our community, like other urban neighborhoods, is suspect of those who is deemed as outsiders and need someone to vouch for them before they are willing to be trusted by the community, even a doctor. Having a pastor or lay leader direct someone to the clinic has a greater influence than a medical professional, social worker, or even a family member. Once again, the church, acting as a hub, can intercede and stand in the gaps for the city to help it connect to God and to each other.

Adaptable to Challenge and Change

Since urban communities are pluralistic in nature - influences, opinions, and agendas entangle people and lead to potential paralyzation or confusion for the community and the church itself. Only a brief glance at the Church in the United States

will display several failures where the Church failed at leading the culture to the proper destination. Slavery, discrimination, and segregation were often justified by large segments of the Church, and as a result, the Church has lost influence in several areas of contemporary society regarding our place as the city hub. There will be times where the Church's guidance will be rejected by society as our prophetic calling will instigate challenges and changes for the city and its residents. However, we are not immune to being challenged ourselves and must also listen to the possibility that God can and has used nontraditional and even outside witnesses to remind us of our place in the ministry of reconciliation.

The most tangible way that this is done is through the practice of what Kathryn Mowry calls reciprocal hospitality. In this understanding of hospitality, the congregation recognizes that we are fellow strangers who are seeking answers and acceptance of ourselves. By embracing a spirit of humility, the church recognizes that there are gifts from the community that can enhance the testimony of the church. An example of this is from our recovery meetings that are attended three times a week. Two of these meetings are "secular" Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous groups that are subjected to the rules and regulations of these national organizations. The reason we partner with these groups is that they have an established reputation and network that our local ministry does not have outside our local sphere of influence. NA and AA have resources for their members, such as their valued address book that lists the time and locations of every official meeting in a city. This gives us an immediate reputation and an open invitation to our hub. At the same time, the Church of the Nazarene has been a traditionally dry denomination where much of our early work was amongst those who struggled with addiction. However, over the

decades, many of our members and clergy do not have experience with handling addiction. Therefore, it is essential for congregations to find expertise in areas where deficient. As Jesus reminded His disciples, "he who is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:50).

The above examples are helpful to see how the church can and should be challenged by the community to serve better the community needs that God has placed before us. Additionally, the church will have to adapt and be more than challenged to refine our ministry methods, but there will be times when the church will have to change our ministry methods or introduce new practices that the congregation has not experienced before. Biblically there is a historical shift that takes place during Israel's exile in Babylon. The temple that Solomon built was destroyed, and the people were displaced. Therefore, a new practical method of worship needed to be implemented by the Jewish people. What resulted was the creation of the synagogue – local gatherings where the scriptures were read and interpreted for the benefit of the faithful. When Israel returned to their homeland, the synagogue concept made the journey back to the Holy Land even though the Temple would be rebuilt. Throughout the gospels, we witness these synagogues as entry points for Jesus to proclaim the Good News of God to Galilee's urban centers. In fact, most of the preaching ministry of Jesus would occur in these local gatherings than in the Temple.

The Apostle Paul and the early church would build upon this as their ministry reflected the concept of smaller gatherings in homes that mimicked the Galilean synagogues in the form of instruction and fellowship. Even in Jerusalem in the first days after Pentecost, the earliest followers had access to the Temple but still daily gathered in

koinonia – a divine fellowship that embraced a life that was lived and participated in on a daily and local level. We see this embraced today in parish churches where the goal is not to establish large churches necessarily but to bring local churches into neighborhoods. Continuing the language of the hub, the Church, by listening to the community, recognizes that additional bus stops, access points for local neighborhoods, are needed to serve the community's needs.

Practically this has been demonstrated by the renewed ministry vision of SBB. The very name of the church reflects an attitude of change that presented itself as from the community. For at least two decades, the community surrounding the church has reflected a growing Latinx community where a large portion communicates in Spanish. While the church has attempted to be welcoming to this sector of the community, little to no effort was embraced by the congregation to graft this population into the church family. When the church was replanted five years ago, the leadership team decided to make a significant change that we would be a bilingual congregation where everyone would embrace the concept of the *stranger*. Not only would we love the stranger, especially the resident aliens in our midst, but we would equally retain our status as strangers and aliens as well. We would surrender our comfort and power of dominance as much as we could to live and learn life together. This is, of course, a work in progress as not everyone has the gifts and graces to be bilingual literally. However, two groups of people are learning to communicate together in an unfamiliar language. What is truly being developed is a powerful transformation of our hearts being bilingual – able to love in more than one language and not limited to our own abilities.

Surrender the Safety of Home to Engage the Lost

One of the key elements of being an immigrant is the decision to leave behind what is known for an unknown future and hope in a land that is not fully experienced. Many of today's immigrants are political refugees or fleeing dire situations in their homes of origin. While it is easy to assume that many make the journey into American cities as a simple choice of pursuing a better life, there remains a risk in leaving the "safety" of family, language, and culture. When the Israelites fled Egypt, there were complaints and desires to return to their captivity and "safety" instead of dealing with the risks of the wilderness. In the same way, the urban congregation as a fellow immigrant is asked to surrender our safe places to seek the lost and hurting people of our communities.

Virgilio Elizondo describes this immigration movement as the *Galilean Journey* as it reflects the ministry of Jesus amongst the marginalized and culturally insignificant people of Galilee. In this journey, Jesus confronted the injustice system that disenfranchised these people from the cultural elites of Jerusalem. By being God Incarnate, Jesus demonstrated God's favor to release the captive and rescue the "lost" at the expense of prestige and power that could have awaited Him in the Temple courts. In fact, it was this ministry to the margins that unseated the balance of power and would eventually lead those in Jerusalem to attempt to squash a potential of social rebellion, with the end result being the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus would prophesy that a prophet is not accepted in his/her hometown, and it should be no surprise that the Son of God would not be accepted in the home of God's Temple. In the same way as disciples of Jesus, we are instructed and compelled to follow in His footsteps and carry our cross daily. Why do we do this? The simple answer is that we follow Jesus, past the crucifixion, and into the

hope and promise of resurrection.

As mentioned earlier in this project, violence is one of the major aspects of poverty that plagues urban communities. City churches deal with potential violence on a regular basis, and SBB is not immune. While overall, there is a sense of peace on our campus, there are times where tempers flare, and threats of violence are exchanged. There are nights where gunshots are heard, and it is not uncommon for sermons to be interrupted by the shrieks of police sirens cutting along 3rd Street. One of the writer's pastoral visits was to the apartment complex known as "The Yellows." It will never be forgotten being directed to enter through the apartment's back entrance as the front entrance was barricaded with a large dresser to prevent potential break-ins. This creates tension in our community as we establish to make the campus a place of sanctuary to realize that we cannot escape the city's violence. While we do not seek harm for ourselves and others, we cannot be so naïve to believe that we should be somehow above it or free from what our community faces. We must walk in solidarity along the same streets that our members walk when they gather their groceries and children on their return journey back to their homes.

It is natural to think of the concept of safety as purely a desire to be free from physical harm. However, urban ministry exposes us to the emotional turmoil that a literal understanding of compassion requires. There are phone calls in the middle of the night from members who have relapsed and are at risk of self-harm. There are visits to Two Northeast, which is the psych ward at the local VA Hospital. There are disciples who fall away from the church for a variety of reasons. Even though there are assurances that it is not the pastor's fault, it still hurts. Simply, it is easy to see the multitudes of "failures"

and missed opportunities over the years where the burdens of this world choke out the early responses of the Gospel. Nevertheless, without the risk, the successes and victories would appear flat and mundane. The joy of the resurrection is based upon the disappointment of pain and death. The celebration of liberation is rooted in the severeness of our previous enslavement.

Part 3: Seek First the Kingdom and God's Liberation

Being a Voice for the Voiceless

There is no way to deny the suffering of the poor that live amongst us. When looking at the parables of Jesus, many of them point to the reality that the poor and suffering were often seen but ignored or written off by others in society. A good example of this is found in Luke 16, where the poor beggar Lazarus is overlooked daily by an anonymous rich man. What is worse is that this Lazarus rests just outside the gate of the rich man's home. Every day, this rich man ignores Lazarus's horrible plight, whose existence is described as a pitiful state of endless suffering. Worse yet, is that in the parable's second act, the rich man makes a bold request for Abraham to send Lazarus over to quench his suffering. What does this reveal? First, the rich man knows the beggar's name. Lazarus was not anonymous or even a stranger but was known – a neighbor. Second, the rich man begs for Lazarus to be beckoned to comfort the now suffering rich man. The rich man has not learned a moral lesson at this time. He still expects to be served by those from a perceived lower station in life.

What can we learn from this parable? We learn that the poor are not hidden away from society regardless of how much energy we might expend on ignoring them. The

second thing is that even when the Church recognizes the poor, we must be careful that we do not exploit them for our own gain. The local church's prophetic call is not to find a larger donor base or to increase membership rolls. Instead, the role of churches, especially urban congregations, is to proclaim the good news that crosses all social borders with a love that breaks down all lines of status. This is why Bryan Stone will conclude that the local church is a sign or sacrament that reveals the kingdom as a liberating community. Stone is quick to remind us that although we are a sign of the liberating community, we are not that community ourselves as salvation is the work of God and not something the church can distribute on its own.

How does the community see our church? Do they see SBB as a sacrament that manifests itself as a means of grace for those who are crying out to God? The truth is that there are many a Lazarus who reside outside our gates – literally and figuratively. We know them by name as they visit the campus for the variety of ministries available on a given day. While we attempt to alleviate the immediate effects of poverty with clothing, showers, and food, there is another suffering that is not so physically obvious. There is a need for an actual community that restores the dignity of the poor by restoring their voice to express themselves freely. The church exists to listen to the pains and praises of those who enter our sanctuaries. Do we know people's dreams, hopes, inner longings? Perhaps we dismiss these at face value as they may present themselves as drunken ramblings, hallucinations, or angry tirades. Perhaps, like the rich man to Lazarus, we never allow them to become close to us.

In the parable's final act, the rich man pleads with Father Abraham to send him back so that he can warn his brothers of the torment that awaits them if they continue the

same path. He is rebuked. Abraham reminds them that God has already sent Moses (the Law) and the prophets to reveal the will of God. It is the place of the church to continue to be the prophetic voice to the nations. We speak on behalf of the poor and weak who suffer as well as those who cause the suffering of others by ignoring God's call of liberating community. The true call of liberation amongst the poor and weak is the restoration of their power to not only rise in the afterlife but to see the restoration of their oppressors join them in the arms of a forgiving Savior. The parable serves as a warning, but every warning has a glimmer of hope. The hope is that the church can be the place where rich and poor can live and worship together as both are liberated, forgiven, and sanctified as new citizens of the new Kingdom. Only then can the voices of the weak be amplified, and the silence of the powerful be eliminated to form a united chorus as the world hears our testimony of what the Lord has done for us.

Does Anyone Care that We are Here?

When doing short-term mission work in the South Pacific, the regional leaders reminded the ministry team of the dangers of leaving a void. They explained that it was easy to enter a new community with vitality and innovative ideas when the risks of failure or long-term consequences are not a responsibility that we would have to endure. While we had the freedom and privilege to exit the situation whenever we desired, the community was not afforded that luxury. Often the result is a ministry void that is created by those who leave that cannot be filled by the local church. It is the local church that must have a strong presence in the community. If there is to be a void in the neighborhood (and Lord help us never to have such a void), it is because the congregation

has lost its presence and prophetic voice, in other words, if the church itself were to leave or cease to exist. In fact, one would have to ask if the church was ever-present in the first place if its absence is not felt in the community.

Local churches must be able to identify the gaps and voids in their communities and see what they can do to fill them. On 3rd Street, there are many areas of need, as has been mentioned in earlier chapters. Important needs such as food, healthcare, social services, and addiction treatment are scarcity in the neighborhood, but they are available outside the confines of our campus. The sad reality is that while our ministries and impact in these areas would be missed, the community would find alternatives and make do. What then do we offer? We cannot underestimate the healing power of the full Gospel as it pertains to the forgiveness of sin and the elimination of condemnation and shame, which are liberating deeds themselves.

In Luke 4, Jesus is handed the scroll of Isaiah in Jesus' hometown synagogue in Nazareth. After reading the passage, he will describe His ministry's purpose and design, which has become the foundation of contemporary compassionate ministry of service to the poor and suffering of the world. A closer examination of the text will reveal that Jesus does not state that He will do these acts of grace and mercy but that He has come to *announce, preach, and proclaim* the will of God to the marginalized people of the world. Of course, this does not negate the Church's command to participate in the fulfillment of these actions but is a reminder that the call to proclaim this message must always be present, especially if the physical manifestations of this proclamation are not available or possible at this time. For example, one cannot offer a shower if the pipes are broken, but we can always proclaim the belief and promise that God desires us to be clean and

healthy, and we will trust that God will make available the means to continue to provide a needed service. Hence, the resource that is ultimately provided is hope.

The proclamation of hope primarily takes place at two locations on our campus – the pulpit and the olive tree. The pulpit is a heavy, handcrafted bulwark that was created by a member of the church from repurposed wood from a prior church restoration project. It is noticeable, if not the principal image on the platform. Visiting speakers often find it imposing and a throwback to a different era of Church history. For those in the congregation, it is a reminder of our historical roots as a holiness denomination where the proclamation of God’s message of freedom and liberation from sin is available to all who call on the name of the Lord. Outside the sanctuary, halfway to the fellowship hall (food distribution center) and dining area, rests the old olive tree. For decades, the tree has existed, as demonstrated by its roots pushing away the bordering planter that serves as a bench. During operational hours, the pastor or another mature member of the church will establish a presence there where people can approach and seek counsel, shoot the breeze, or rant over their trials and tribulations. Regardless of the cause, the goal is the same – to find rest and comfort from the world with the hope that the small reprieve will lead to the promised jubilee, even if for only a few hours. This is what every urban church can offer to their community that cannot be found elsewhere in the city, a place at the feet of Jesus.

Keeping it Real

The final principle of liberating ministry I wish to highlight is perhaps the greatest point of contact between our theological understanding of ministry with practical

application. The concept and practice of family are firmly presented in the biblical witness as well as affirmed in Latinx culture. Numerous studies have shown that the familial bond of Latinx families is incredibly strong, especially among recent immigrants. Often, the immediate family is the only source of comfort or familiarity in communities defined by the chaos of urban uncertainty. Jesus and his disciples affirmed that the Church's role is to be the Family of God who affirms each other and bears the burdens of one another. Nearly fifty percent of households in the 3rd Street neighborhood have children, and a third of the total population is under the age of fifteen. Our Sunday worship service reflects this, with a third of our weekly attendance consisting of young children, with half of our congregation having children in the home. Therefore, our ministry vision must be focused on the understanding that any ministry or activity must acknowledge the possibility that children will attend or be a concern for those who do attend.

As a Latino, this writer's experience in Latinx culture was one that the idea of family is not solely based upon DNA. It was quite common to be introduced to people as Tio or Tia (Uncle or Aunt), with all the children being cousins or primos. Although he discovered later that they were not actually related, the practice of family was fluid and open to expansion. It was easy for him to transition into the local church's life as an older child due to this familial understanding. In many ways, the writer was adopted into a large family with many Tios and Tias and a large group of primos whom he could play and learn from while receiving protection and sustenance in times of need. Our local church's active vision must be open to this understanding of family where we embrace those looking to belong and for us to be open to providing support while we disciple the

neighborhood for Christ. With family comes identity, and with identity comes value. A family church has an increased opportunity to be a place where identity and value can be discovered and nurtured with the outcome of building a healthy pride for ourselves and our neighborhood, seeking a transformational future of hope.

It is fitting to conclude this plan with the theological principle where we began - the Scandal of Particularity. Jesus was born in 1st Century Palestine while it was under Roman occupation. Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem and became a refugee in Egypt before settling down with His family in Nazareth. Because Jesus was able to live and touch a specific time, place, and culture, Jesus can touch and heal all times, places, and cultures. Since Jesus walked in Nazareth, He knows what it is like to walk down 3rd Street. Jesus manifested the principle of being fully bilingual: able to speak the Divine language of the Father as well as the language of creation, to bring God and creation into a relationship of reconciliation.

Thousands of years before Jesus made his journey of immigration from Heaven to earth; God called a man named Abraham to engage in a journey of immigration to a land Abraham had never seen. Abraham was promised that he would be a father of a great nation that would be a blessing to all other nations on the earth. The journey of Abraham and the return journeys (Exodus, Exile, and Diaspora) of his descendants to the Promised Land is the biblical witness's foundational narrative. Eventually, Jesus would remind us that all people are to be grafted in the family of Abraham as we journey to the promised Kingdom. What do we find in this Kingdom? We find the great virtues that define our identity and call – faith, hope, and love. God has chosen that the primary revelation of faith, hope, and love is through the development of people or a family that is established

to adopt all people seeking those who desire to belong.

Being a bilingual family needs a binding agent that will cement the bonds where we come together. This glue is compassion. It is compassion that will humble us to learn another language and culture and give it a place of value equal to our own. It is compassion that will empower us to join as one body willing to lift others up while being lifted ourselves. It was compassion that led Jesus to weep at the death of a non-related brother as well as weep over a city that would reject their own salvation. Both times Jesus would provide what the situation ultimately needed; rather, Jesus was willing to suffer with those who could not see. He did not let His place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords reduce His compassion as a mere transaction but an opportunity for transformation. The Good News is that 3rd Street is not left out of this calling to be a bilingual, compassionate family. In fact, we are given the power and authority to knock down the gates of Hell and see the Kingdom of God as we journey across the wash and through the field of 3rd Street.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Implications and Possibilities

Radical Improvement in Individual Lives

The difficulty of evaluating an effective ecclesiology is deciding which metrics to use to measure what is considered a success. Traditionally, the metric of choice was numerical data that reflected simple increases or decreases in such areas as attendance, membership, and financial giving. In the area of compassionate ministry, these numerical metrics can be extended to include meals served, groceries delivered, showers provided, and articles of clothing distributed. One can see how such statistical analysis can be easily used to monitor a local congregation's actions over a period. In no way is this project opposed to using such data to measure a church's ministry's impact on a community. The hope for this final chapter and for SBB is to demonstrate that a congregation that seeks and implements an urban ecclesiology will be able to demonstrate clear and concise measurements of improvement for the lives of those in their congregations as well as the lives of those who inhabit the community that surrounds an urban church.

The drawback of settling for purely a numerical metric for urban ministry, and ministry in general, is that it is difficult to assess the value of numbers without understanding the context that produced them. At the same time, in our ever-growing consumeristic culture, numbers can be used to inflate the effectiveness of a product or service. While McDonald's can claim billions of hamburgers served, there is nothing in

that number that suggests the quality of those hamburgers or how much each customer was satisfied with their product. Similarly, an urban church can be effective in producing large quantities of goods and services to their community while the neighborhood itself continues to decline. How then does an urban church measure effectiveness or reflect on areas of needed improvement if numerical data is not always reliable? A series of vignettes of individuals and families that have witnessed the benefits of a church embracing an urban ecclesiology that is biblical, immigrant, and liberating will be presented to answer this question

Vignette: The Praying Abuela – Amalia

It is a fact that every congregation needs grandmas. Many a testimonial given over the years includes the faithful grandmother who never stopped praying for God to interact on their behalf. We are blessed at SBB that we have a few grandmothers that shower our ministries in constant prayers and provide a faithful witness that God has provided and that God will continue to see us through. Amalia is one of our abuelas (grandmother) that has faithfully attended the ministries at 3rd Street for several years. While she has spent her life in the United States, Amalia's primary language is Spanish, but she is able to communicate in the local pigeon of *Spanglish* that many speak throughout Southern California on an everyday basis. Regardless of the languages of this world that she speaks, Amalia can communicate directly to God.

Amalia has been a follower of Jesus for decades, and her primary concern has not been for her own life or salvation but for her children and grandchildren's spiritual and physical well-being. Amalia loves her church, even if there are times where she does not

understand everything that is said. SBB is her church, and she has no desire to go elsewhere. However, her prayers were that her son and grandchildren would come to church and find a relationship with Jesus. Joel, her son, is bilingual, but his family is not. While Joel is proud of his Latinx heritage, he is also a product of growing up in Southern California, and so his cultural upbringing is a mix of Mexican and American cultures. The fact that Joel found a church that embraces that mixture of cultures has helped him embrace a relationship with a Savior who understands his mestizo heritage.

The prayers of Amalia extend beyond just her and her family. She is a loving person who serves as an abuela to all in the church, regardless of age. One can always count on her for a greeting with a warm smile and hug. More importantly, she is a person that one can trust when she says that “she is praying for you.” As a pastor, it is comforting to know that one has a spiritual abuela who lifts them up to the Lord each day. It is empowering to have the certainty that one’s family, especially one’s children, always have someone in his/her corner. Perhaps the gift of Amalia and our other abuelas is that this pastor’s children will have access to their mestizo culture as they never met his abuela, who showered him with love and acceptance. For them, Amalia is their abuela who kisses them every Sunday morning and, along with her grandkids and tells them all how much they are loved and prayed for.

Vignette: Esmerelda – Finding a Place of Rest

Like many others, Esmerelda’s first contact with the church was through the compassionate ministry looking for food for her family. Several years ago, her mother, Maria, had a debilitating stroke that confined her to a wheelchair. Part of her doctor’s

prescription for possible recovery was regular physical therapy appointments. This instruction was problematic as Esmerelda often works multiple jobs to make ends meet as she is often providing shelter for her mother, her sons, and her eldest son's family. As an undocumented Latina, she is forced to take menial jobs that pay under the table and provide no health benefits. She is also forced to work the most undesirable shifts, making it impossible to make physical therapy appointments for her mother. When she discovered that the free clinic on our campus provided physical therapy services, she began to come every week as her mom received the vital healthcare she needed.

A side effect of Esmerelda's regular attendance was that her youngest son – Kenneth began to enjoy the children's church program on Wednesday nights. This allowed Esmerelda a one-stop center where her entire family could benefit, and she could find an hour of rest from her hectic life. Eventually, this attendance on Wednesday night expanded to Sunday morning as Kenneth invited his cousins and neighborhood friends to go to church. This presented the family with an interesting problem. Maria liked our church and the services we provided, but she did not feel fully included because she only understands Spanish. Her grandson, who loved attending the church, speaks and understands primarily English. In the middle, Esmerelda, who is fluent in both languages, felt pressure to provide for her family and their communication needs but did not have the time to attend multiple churches or services. What appealed to her was that our Sunday morning service was bilingual.

It would be more accurate to say that our Sunday service is growing in our ability to be fully bilingual. While the literature and songs were presented in both languages, the challenge was how to present a sermon in both languages. While the pastor is not fluent,

he can speak some Spanish, and, in the beginning, he was preaching in both English and Spanish, translating his sermons from English into Spanish in live time. It was not easy to follow for both the English and Spanish speakers, even though the Spanish speakers appreciated inclusion efforts. One Sunday after the service, Esmerelda approached the pastor and asked if he would like help during the sermon with interpretation. Since then, Esmerelda has been the church's interpreter, and we maintain our bilingual aspects throughout our service.

More importantly, what SBB provides for Esmerelda cannot be measured in purely physical measures. She is an unmarried, single mother who also happens to be a non-documented Latina immigrant. However, in the church, she is a vital member who provides an important ministry to the community. For her and her family, SBB provides her a place of refuge and rest from an unforgiving world where she can be together with her family for a few hours a week, who are normally fragmented and separated throughout the week. While her identity to the world might be one of shame or invisibility, she is a precious daughter of God who is accepted and loved in the church. She is a faithful servant of Jesus who helps communicate the powerful proclamation of hope that is needed in the city.

Vignette: Breaking the Chains - Jimbo

Every neighborhood has *that guy/girl* where virtually everyone knows who they are and where to find them. There are several reasons why someone is *that guy*, and the reasons can be benevolent or nefarious such as the guy who hangs outside the liquor store asking for change every day or Ms. Diva, who hosts community meals for the homeless

and hungry once a month. If one seeks the neighborhood's local news and feelings, one must find these people, as they are the best source of information. When it comes to SBB, Jimbo serves as the *guy* that everyone knows.

Jimbo is a diminutive Caucasian in his mid-sixties. A single glance of him would reveal his past as a former motorcycle gang member as he still retains his long goatee beard as well as his slight bowlegged gait that was earned from his thousands of miles of riding over the years. Perhaps the best way to describe Jimbo is to say is that he looks like a guy named Jimbo. He was born and raised in San Bernardino and has spent most of his life in the area. According to him, the longest periods he spent away from San Bernardino were when he had stints in prison. These neighborhood “vacations” were the primary reason why he is so well known in the 3rd Street neighborhood. For years, Jimbo (and another current board member of SBB) was the local manufacturer and dealer of methamphetamine. Seventeen years ago, Jimbo had a radical encounter with Jesus Christ that led to him regaining his sobriety and purpose in life.

Jimbo works for and at the church. His official title is that he is the church’s maintenance person responsible for the campus's management. However, he is also a vital part of the compassionate ministry as he is responsible for the grocery distributions that occur three to four times a week. Every item of food that is handed out has passed through Jimbo’s inspection. If one is hungry or needs help with anything in the 3rd Street neighborhood, Jimbo is the guy you ask for. This help extends into sobriety as well. As an active participant in the NA groups on the campus, Jimbo is the biggest encourager and ride provider to the Salvation Army detox center that is a mile and a half around the corner from SBB. The redemption of Jimbo has gone full circle, from user to dealer to

recovery sponsor.

While his story of redemption and sobriety is powerful, Jimbo will be the first to share that there are consequences to our choices and that our past impacts and affects the present and future of those we live with. Jimbo's youngest son, DJ, has struggled with drug addiction for most of his life. Five years ago, Jimbo took DJ to the Salvation Army. After six months, DJ graduated from the program and rededicated himself to the Lord, and has maintained his sobriety. He currently lives with his father as well as Nate, his eight-year-old son. The goal for both Jimbo and DJ is to provide a home that would see Nate forsake the life of drugs altogether and begin a new legacy for the family. The goal of SBB is to help them break the chains of the generational curse that nearly destroyed the family. With help from the church, there is a renewed sense of hope that God can liberate them and other families in the neighborhood.

Urban Renewal and Improvement

There is no separation between the lives of individuals and the community they live in. Every person who is delivered from the beast of poverty benefits the neighborhood as a beacon of hope to others that they, too, can find victory. At the same time, an improvement of the community can provide vast benefits to the individual lives of those who live in the community. While not advocating the capitalist adage that a rising tide raises all ships, it is difficult to deny that a healthy community that is free from economic inequality, violence, and addiction would be a desirable community that would greatly improve the opportunities of all of those in the community. In this section of the project, the desire is to convey how an urban ecclesiology can establish partnerships with

outside agencies that serve the community to benefit all people in the community regardless of their ability or desire to help the local church.

An example of this was evidence of the abolitionist movement prior to the American Civil War. There were several groups and organizations that sought the end of slavery and did so for nearly two hundred years before the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. The growing movement in the years before the war owed much of their emphasis on the revival movement of Charles Finney in the Second Great Awakening. Finney's revivalism method popularized a more Methodist inclusiveness of personal feelings and experiences with God as well as the idealized or perfected society that the scriptures steered the faithful to. Black abolitionists used this revivalist appeal to share with whites the horrors of slavery, relying on the testimonies of former slaves of the brutal treatment and punishments doled out by their so-called worldly masters. Due to the influence of the church on the community at large, the fight against slavery was able to expand from logical debate to a matter of injustice that could not be endured in the hearts of many in the nation.

Vignette: Touching the Untouchable – Orchid Court

Orchid Court is a facility that houses people who have mental illness who do not present themselves to be a danger to themselves or to others to require a greater form of institutionalization. The facility is located a couple of miles down the road from SBB, and the facility transports them to the church campus for Sunday and Wednesday services. Due to the provision provided by Orchid Court, we have been asked that they not be allowed to participate in most of our compassionate ministries except for meals and the

worship service itself. According to the facility director, SBB is the only church in the area that will allow its clients to attend. Having worked with this group for several years, the reasoning why many churches would balk at the inclusion of Orchid Court is understandable as their illnesses often leave them in little control of what many could be called socially acceptable behavior or hygiene.

Due to their constitutional rights, the Orchid Court clients can freely exit and enter the facility throughout the day. This results in the reality that many at the facility wander the local neighborhoods with no supervision. There are times where this lack of supervision has led to altercations between clients of Orchid Court and the communities that surround the facilities. It is not uncommon to see the physical results of such altercations, such as scrapes and fresh bruises appearing from week to week. So, while we at SBB are concerned about their spiritual welfare, there is a need in the lives of those from Orchid Court that the church is not traditionally trained to handle.

Ultimately, one could argue that there is little benefit to the church to invite such a population to join its congregation. It is difficult to work with people who risk the local church's image while being a population that presents their own risks as people with disabilities are at higher risk of abuse from family and others. Therefore, the church must take responsibility for all of those who enter our campus, and we must offer protection from those in danger, whether that danger comes from themselves or those charged to serve and protect them. We become advocates for the weak and vulnerable. There are opportunities that God gives the Church to pursue justice and liberation for the sheer principle of justice and liberation itself. While it is nearly impossible to define such metrics in a denominational report, there is a higher level of accounting where the ledger

credits those actions done to the least of these.

Vignette: Cornerstone Community Health Inc. - From Hep A to Covid-19

One of the lessons that the people of Israel experienced in the wilderness was how to organize and live in a community structure. Included in the many laws and observances that Israel was to follow are public health standards and practices designed to protect the community from a variety of diseases that could easily and quickly spread throughout the camp. There is a clear understanding that God is concerned for the well-being of the entire community and that the city's physical health is important to God, and we are called to place the health of the people as a priority.

Southern California experienced multiple outbreaks of Hepatitis A in 2019 as well as the early part of 2020. Most of these outbreaks resulted from large populations of unhoused people or housing insecure who did not have public access to clean water and sanitary restrooms. Hepatitis A, a virus that infects the liver, is spread through fecal matter and blood contact, primarily through unwashed hands. The virus is rather easy to combat as effective hand washing, and the use of hand sanitizer will kill the virus and prevent the spread of disease. In the winter of 2019-2020, San Bernardino had an outbreak of Hepatitis A that was spreading through the homeless community, and the county's department of public health had difficulty in reaching this population with vital information that was needed to stop the spread of the infection.

The Cornerstone Community Health clinic that operates on the SBB campus was genuinely concerned with the public health crisis that they were seeing. While their clinic provided access to the affected population, the number of contacts was limited to those

who visited the clinic. They expressed this concern with the church attempting to increase awareness to more people. Over a period of several weeks, time was given during the Wednesday night worship service to address the outbreak. This culminated in a presentation from the Loma Linda University School of Public Health, which included a question-and-answer time. After the presentation, every participant, around a hundred people, received a bottle of hand sanitizer. It became the largest public demonstration given by the clinic and School of Public Health.

This event's significance would not be truly felt until a week later when the state of California began the process of being the first state in the US to shut down due to Covid-19. The weeks that followed would see large numbers of illnesses and death throughout the world, yet the data demonstrated that the homeless population of San Bernardino was not immediately affected by Covid-19. At the time, the CDC and the media had saturated the country with the truth that one of the best methods of fighting Covid-19 was to wash and sanitize our hands. It would be impossible to measure empirically how many in the 3rd Street neighborhood have been spared due to these public health messages from the clinic and church. However, eight months later, we have not seen a significant outbreak of Covid-19 in the neighborhood at the time of this writing, especially amongst the homeless population. At the same time, it would be difficult to deny that providing education and supplies has positively affected the neighborhood during a global pandemic.

Vitality in Dying Churches

It should be obvious at this point that the metrics that measure growth and success

in an urban ecclesiology will look different from an ecclesiology demonstrated in a rural or suburban community. There is more than simply seeing an increase in numbers when measuring vitality in urban churches. When it comes to life, there is a level of quality that cannot so easily be measured. For example, a garden can be technically vital and full of life, but a closer examination reveals that the life present is nothing more than weeds and thorns. However, there can still be a remnant of valuable, delicious produce that is hidden to a casual glance in such a garden but has the potential to yield year after year.

David Busic hints that the future of ministry in the Church of the Nazarene rests in spotting, nurturing, and reproducing these remnant crops. Instead of focusing on maintaining large churches that are currently being productive outside the city, the COTN should be seeking to establish smaller parish churches that are limited in their geographical reach. While it is noble to attempt to reach an entire city for Jesus, it is much more likely to find effectiveness in establishing a prophetic presence in localities or neighborhoods in the city. At SBB, we have a community garden where we grow a variety of vegetables. Our garden is small, and in no way could it provide a bounty of fresh produce for our neighborhood; however, the garden can provide quality produce that can be used in our weekly meals - providing a healthier option for the families and friends who join us in the breaking of bread.

A local congregation that adopts an urban ecclesiology will notice a difference in the vitality of its members and the local community. Virtues such as peace, hope, joy, and love cannot necessarily be graphed on a chart, but they can be identified and experienced. Leaders who grasp such an ecclesiology will be able to experience the revitalization of ministerial life amongst the people as they respond to the efforts of reaching their

depressed, decaying, and dying neighborhoods. The tears of joy from the saints have been observed from the church as a dozen children are singing and reciting Bible verses at the conclusion of a neighborhood VBS program. They are not weeping due to the current number of children, which pale to the numbers of such programs of the past. Instead, they are rejoicing that God is still present, and people are still responding in the neighborhood, and that salvation is still available in San Bernardino.

Recommendations for Others

Where do we Begin?

The hope for this project is that other urban congregations would be encouraged to reexamine their churches' vision and mission to see if a new ecclesiology is warranted to redirect their current ministry direction. At the same time, this project can be used by churches in suburban or rural areas that are planning to plant an urban congregation by avoiding potential pitfalls or areas of discouragement. By focusing on ecclesiology, churches' goal is not to invest time, energy, or other resources in a method or program. In fact, An urban church that invests itself in adopting an urban ecclesiology will be better equipped to choose and facilitate programs that will practically serve their community.

The main benefit of establishing a local ecclesiology is that the size of the congregation does not matter. When SBB launched in February of 2015, it started with a total of ten committed members. Out of that group, three of them were children, bringing adult participation, including the pastor, to a staggering seven adult members. At the time of this writing, the Sunday morning attendance averages in the fifties, with Wednesday evenings averaging attendance numbers in the eighties to nineties. As mentioned earlier,

numerical metrics are not always the most useful, but these numbers are only stated to reference that small congregations with limited financial or congregational resources can still participate. Establishing an urban ecclesiology is not a trend or gimmick that requires expensive conferences, curriculum, or experts. Therefore, this final section of the project is to give a practical guide of how an urban church can better discover its place in God's design of the city.

If Anyone Lacks Wisdom

Perhaps the most daunting task of any journey is the first step. One can only imagine how difficult that first step becomes when it is in a direction that appears to be the opposite of where others are going. Although we are taught to “go against the flow,” this is a platitude that we tend to associate with the Church moving opposite of the world. However, now might be when local churches need to go in a different direction from other congregations or even our own denominational trends. It is not being suggested that we must abandon our denominational or theological integrity. We can become a breath of fresh innovation that many denominations need. L. Gregory Jones writes that the Church is “hungry for innovation that is traditioned, that connects us to the best of our past and to our deepest yearnings and hopes for a life-giving End.”

The first step of becoming a congregation that hungers for this type of innovation is to embrace the call of discipleship or a continued attitude of learning. It would be arrogant to suggest to a community that we know what is needed without first listening to their experiences. How do we listen and learn about our neighborhoods? The number of resources available to us should be welcomed as an encouraging push to discover a

community's basic information. Demographic data is available from a variety of sources and can be easily researched online. Along with this demographic data, there are groups who interpret this data to create things like the Child Opportunity Index , which attempts to inform the community of their strengths and needs. Every local church should be able to have a basic view of the community that the congregation serves.

Along with statistical and demographic data, other ways of understanding the neighborhood existed. One of the easiest and most effective means of studying a neighborhood is to visit it on a regular visit. When was the last time the pastor and leadership of the church took a walk in the neighborhood? A walk through the neighborhood at various times and days in the week will offer a glimpse of the neighborhood's day-to-day activity. What are the sights, sounds, and smells of the neighborhood? Are the people friendly? Are there children present? Where do people do their shopping? Where do they eat? It is ok if one does not know the answers to these questions at the top of his/her head, but as James 1:5 reminds us if anyone lacks wisdom, they should ask, for God freely grants such a request.

Early in my ministry in San Bernardino, I overheard another pastor describe the neighborhood as an unsafe place. He mentioned to a group of volunteers working on a building project that he would not walk down to the convenience store down the street. There is no need to shame or belittle this pastor for sharing his fear and concern. However, the pastor did not realize that many church members lived in that neighborhood who walked to that store on a regular basis. Not once did I ever hear this pastor share an attitude of changing the neighborhood to make it safer for the community. Instead, his attitude was one escape and avoidance. In the pursuit of Incarnational ministry, the church

must walk in those marginalized areas that the community calls home.

The Leap of Faith

It has been demonstrated that throughout the biblical and historical witness, the people of God have been on the cutting edge of social innovation. However, Jones reminds us that this has not been observed in the last forty years or so. He suggests that the reason behind this shift is that the Church has distanced itself from the communities and sectors that would benefit most from a transformational vision. Instead of direct contact, the Church has decided to involve itself in social advocacy and service providing. While these practices are needed and beneficial, they can also be limited by maintaining a degree of outsourcing or anonymity that prohibits true solidarity with the community. Local churches need to be seen and embraced as part of the community and not as carpetbaggers who seek opportunities for their own benefit. The best forms of advocacy come from within, and the same can be said with service providers who know and are known by those being provided for. Eventually, a church that practices an urban ecclesiology will have to take a leap of faith and jump into the neighborhood.

This leap does not have to be a foolish endeavor. Planning and gathering resources are wise practices that will help prepare the church and the community by listening and learning from newer discoveries that reveal themselves once ministry occurs. Six months before our relaunch/replant of the Sunday services, SBB and our mother congregation engaged in Sunday evening worship services. These services helped prepare SBB by giving us a glimpse of what a sanctuary full of people would look like. Simultaneously, the community was given a glimpse of what ecclesial life on a Sunday

would look like. Every little aspect of a church service, such as the music, ushering, and children's programming were refined and updated to meet our ecclesial beliefs.

Early on in this process, we decided that the Eucharist would become a focal point of our services. The question was how we would do this. There were two primary concerns – hygiene and connection. Since many in the community had backgrounds in more liturgical traditions, there was a desire to maintain a pastoral/priestly connection of coming forward to receive the elements. At the same time, the legitimate concern of hygiene was a factor as we have members and guests who are unhoused and do not have access or are not educated in proper hygiene practices. The dilemma was, how do we make this practice as inclusive as possible while maintaining the element of human touch? It was decided that we would practice a very traditional view of intinction where the pastor touches the bread and dips it into the common cup, and places the elements into participants' hands. During the ritual, the pastor publicly cleans his/her hands to demonstrate that the practice is sanitary.

There will be challenges that arise as a congregation embraces something new. These challenges should not frighten us into pursuing what we believe God is calling us to do. There will be moments where a church decides to slow down or even pause for a moment to reflect or catch its breath. These are excellent times to gather the people for prayer and reflection as they seek God's direction. There is an element of risk that comes with every opportunity of faith. At the same time, there is also an element of risk that comes with every opportunity of faith that we do not take. The only way to truly test the waters is to get out of the boat and follow Jesus.

Not Against Flesh and Blood

Urban churches need to understand what God has called us to do in the city. We are to proclaim the biblical of liberating salvation that can cross and transcends all physical and cultural borders. In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reminded the local church that their struggle was not against flesh and blood but against powers and forces of darkness (v12). Due to the message we bring, there will always be tension between those who benefit from the beast of poverty and those who wish to destroy the beast. Nevertheless, our message of liberation includes those whom the beast uses in its attempt to destroy and discourage us. The enemy is not the drug dealer, the corrupt government official, or the gang member, as they are all victims themselves of the powers of sin and darkness. They are potential and desired brothers and sisters that are worth the risks and efforts to see them redeemed. At SBB, we believe there are ultimately two groups of people – those who know and follow Jesus and those who do not know Jesus... yet. It is not them and us, but us and not yet us.

The enemy of the city is clever. It knows that by using people to carry out the schemes of oppression that the Church is tempted to damage and destroy those we are called to bring life to. The prophet Jonah was greatly disturbed to see what he viewed as his enemy – the people of Nineveh, forgiven and spared by the mercy of God. He simply could not or did not want to see God redeem those who had caused so much destruction and pain to his people. Of course, the problem with such thinking is that it goes against the entire testimony of the Bible. The City of God is an all-inclusive beacon of light that draws the nations to forever participate in the salvation of God. The problem with the word “all” is that it literally means *all*. The problem with the word “everybody” is that it

literally means *every body*. God has made it clear that we are to go into our cities for the benefit of all and everybody. There does not exist an asterisk that exempts a specific population. What is exempt from the Heavenly Kingdom is sin, suffering, and death.

Every moment that we forsake the city is a moment where people suffer and God's will is being ignored. Our hope rests in the mighty work of God that has been demonstrated from the very beginning of creation and continues to this day. It is time to reclaim the promise given to our father, Abraham. It is this promise that has lifted and provided for God's people, and every attack against this promise has ultimately failed. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Rome could not quench the Holy Fire of God's Spirit living amongst God's people. It is the same Fire that burns in the hearts of the faithful that serve between the Wash and the Field on 3rd Street. It is the same Fire that burns in countless neighborhoods where the followers of Jesus continue to proclaim the Good News to the poor. It is the same Fire that shakes the Gates of Hell, makes the demons tremble, and forces the mightiest knees to bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. If such a Fire burns in our hearts today, then what can stand against us?

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Appendix

Tables and Figures

Table 1. San Bernardino City Demographic Data

	2000	2010	2018
Population	185,382	209,924	
221,130			
Avg Income ^a	\$45,138	\$45,964	
\$41,027			
Renters (%)	47.6	49.7	
53.2			

Ethnic/Race (%)		
White	28.9	19
15.3		
Black	16	14.2
13.2		
Hispanic	47.5	60
64.2		

Source: Data collected from Southern California Association of Governments.

^a Adjusted for inflation to 2018 dollars.

Table 2. Neighborhood “3rd Street” Data for San Bernardino Bilingual 2018

Population ^a	10,392
Income Factors	
% in poverty	52.3
% < \$25K	43.4
% < \$45K	71.9
Percent Renters	63
Ethnic/Race (%)	
White	9.6
Black	13.5
Hispanic	71.6
Language Spoken (%)	
English	46.4
Spanish	49.8
Total Foreign Born (%)	24.6

Source: Data collected from United States Bureau of Census.

^a This number represents the population of those who live in a half-mile radius from the church.

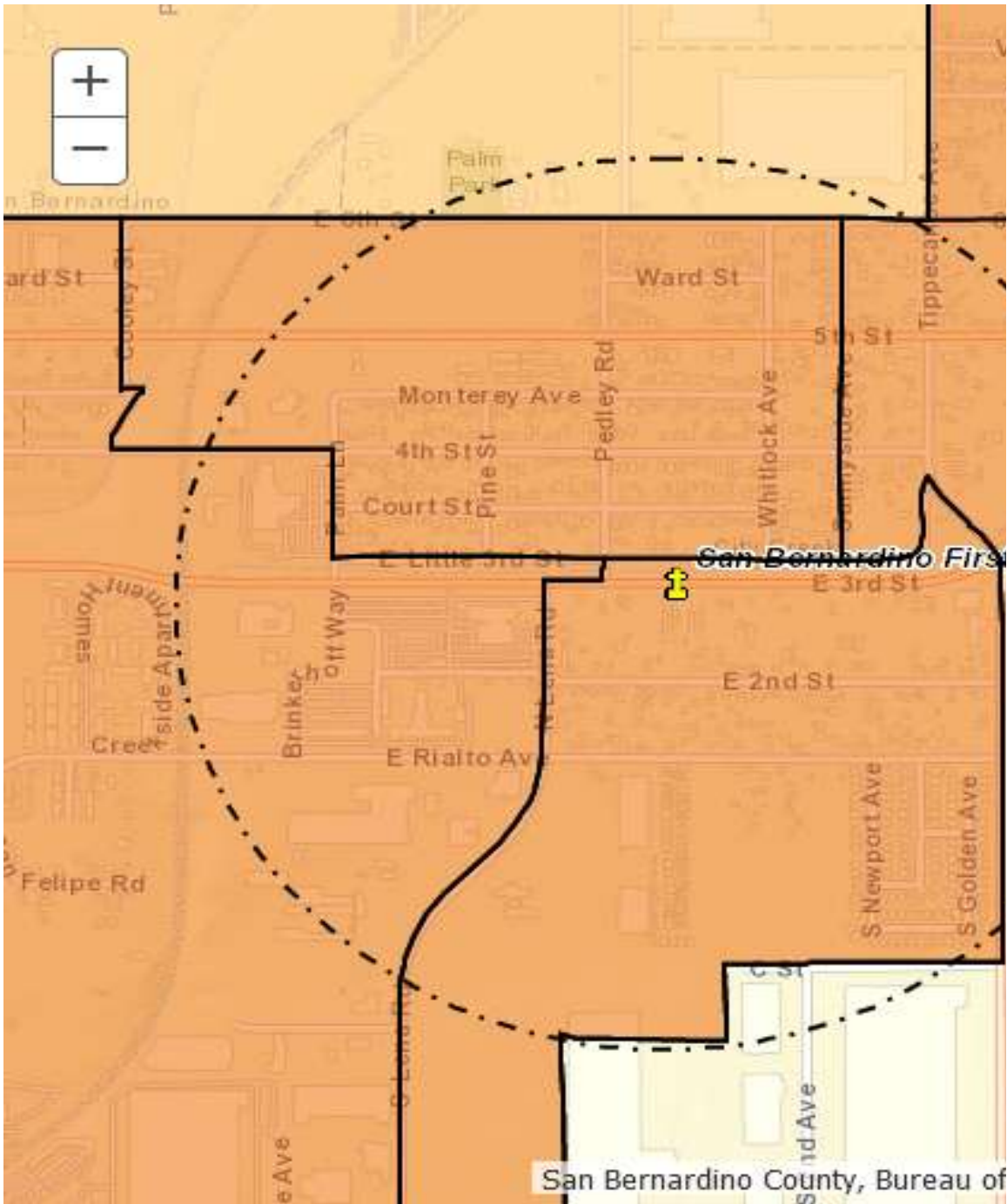
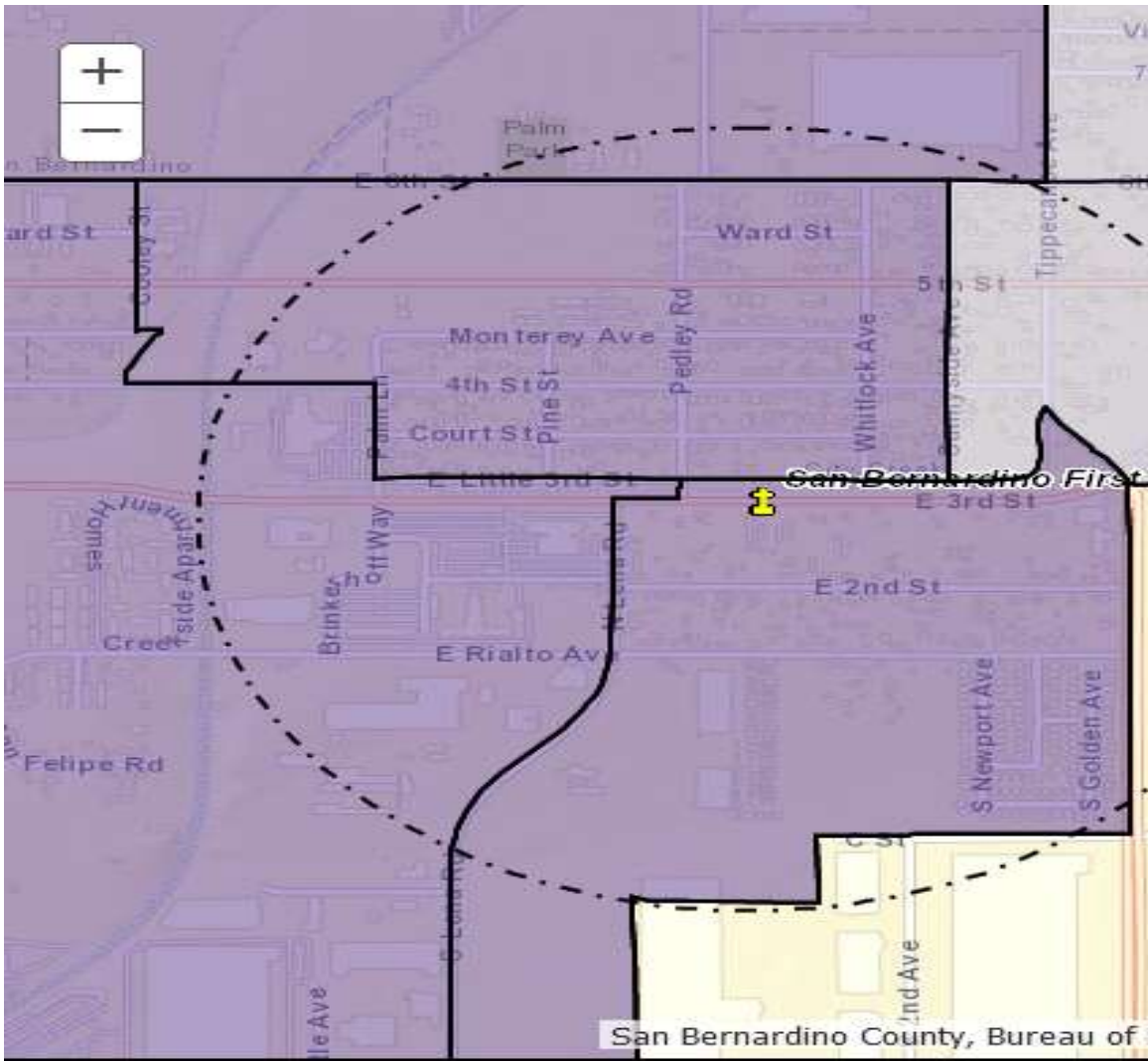


Figure 1. *3rd Street Neighborhood*. Nazarene Research



Families with children as a percentage of all households

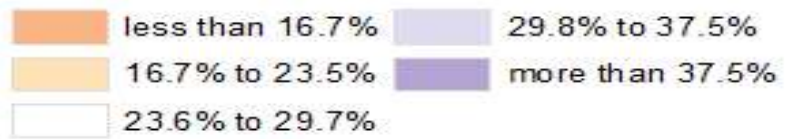
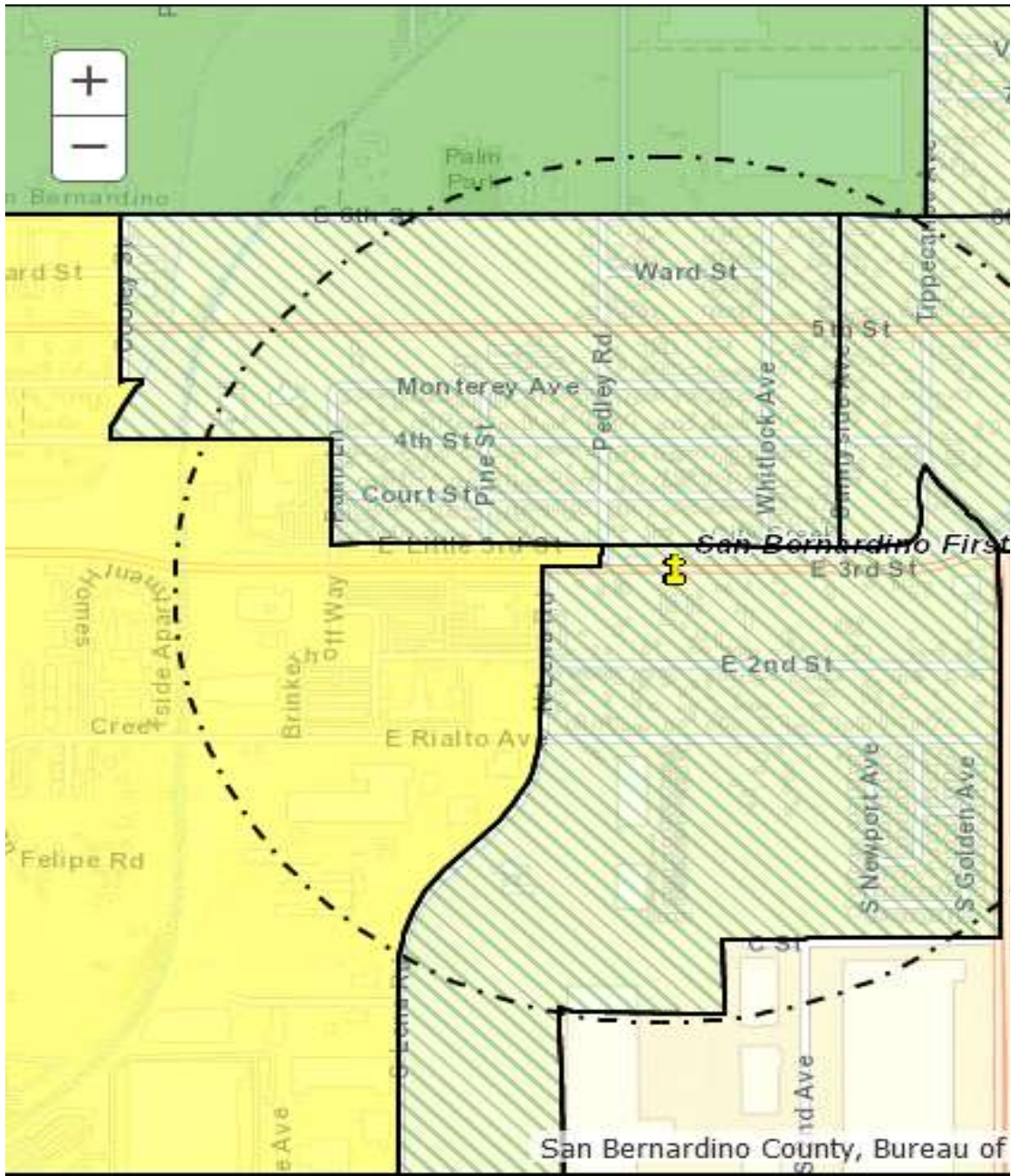


Figure 2. *Family distribution map*. Nazarene Research.



Largest race in the block group

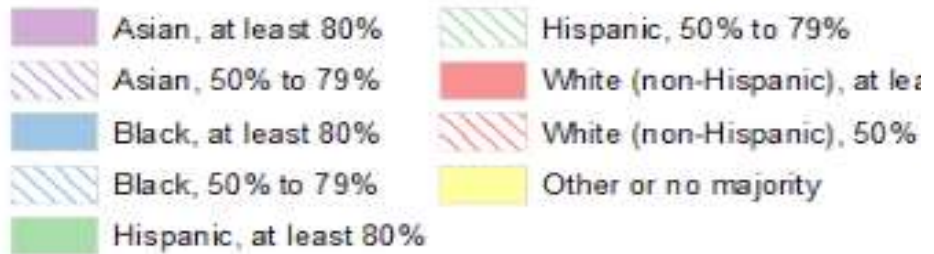


Figure 3. *Racial/Ethnic majorities in the neighborhood.* Nazarene Research.



Figure 4. *San Bernardino Bilingual Church of the Nazarene*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 5. *The Olive Tree*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 6. *Outside the Front Door*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 7. *Across the Wash*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 8. *The Wash*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 9. *The Wash pt Two*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 10. *The Field*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 11. *2nd Street – Across the Field*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 12. *3rd Street facing East*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 13. *3rd Street facing West*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.



Figure 14. *Taking a shower from the Pipe*. Photograph by Steven Martinez.