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CONSTRUCTING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRIES FOR THE TWENTY-  
FIRST CENTURY AT SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES

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

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

BY

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JUNE 2010



**Constructing Christian Education Ministries for the Twenty-first Century at  
Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles**

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2010

The intent of this ministry focus paper is to examine past and present trends of Christian education within the context of a postmodern Church and society. This ministry focus paper reviews trends within the Baptist denomination, with a specific focus on the Christian education ministries of Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles and the trends within the African American Baptist Church.

A personal definition of Christian education includes the following statement: Christian education is the process of educating, empowering, transforming and liberating the people of God. Christian education can be conceived as “the heartbeat” of the Church because it is the only ministry that has the ability to significantly impact and nurture people across their life spans, from preschool through senior adulthood. A broad definition of Christian education embellishes every teaching and learning experience encountered by the Christian community. Guided by the aforementioned definition, this ministry focus paper addresses two issues. First, it addresses how the Church is educating and equipping the people of God to fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ in the present as well as in the future. In other words, it addresses how the Church is exemplifying the Great Commission given by Jesus: “Go into all the world and make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20). Second, this ministry focus paper addresses how the Church is transferring the Christian faith tradition to the next generation of Christian leaders.

Several models of ministry were constructed while considering the needs and composition of the membership at Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles. The primary intent was to present models for Christian education that will address the changing context of ministry in the twenty-first century and provide for the needs of the whole people of God.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, DMin

Words: 284

To my parents, Clyde and Mae A. Butler, who provided a strong foundation  
and have continually been my inspiration

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I began to reflect upon the transitions that have occurred in the field of Christian education in recent years, particularly with the rise of mega-churches and contemporary forms of ministry. I have had numerous opportunities to serve as a staff minister for several churches in the positions of Minister of Education, Director of Christian Education, and Ministry/Resource Consultant. It has been my observation that, in this world of high technological advances populated by Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Millennials, and others, Christian education has not advanced to address issues encountered within a rapidly changing Church, culture and world.

Linda Isham, in her book, *Charting Our Courses*, declares, “The church appears to be in wilderness times, in comparison to Moses and the children of Israel, wandering in the wilderness.”<sup>1</sup> Isham arrived at this conclusion because she observed that “our traditional models of implementing Christian Education ministries were no longer effective and new models had not been developed.”<sup>2</sup> Although several churches have implemented “cutting edge” or contemporary forms of ministry, Isham correctly describes the majority of Christian churches, where traditional models of ministry remain.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda R. Isham, *Charting Our Course: Renewing the Church's Teaching Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

As part of my personal commitment to Christian education, I began to search for new models of ministry that were successfully being implemented to reach people of diverse lifestyles and ages. While encountering the courses presented in the African American Leadership Cohort for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Fuller Theological Seminary, I was exposed to various components pertaining to the discipline of Christian education to further substantiate the need for developing new models of ministry.

As a Minister of Education, I have attended numerous conferences, seminars, and workshops sponsored by various denominational organizations. Many have focused on strategies for church renewal and church growth. Underlying most agendas is the need for contemporary models of Christian education. Christian education is a vast discipline and undergirds the teaching and learning components of ministries within the Church, community, and other organizations. Christian education encompasses worship, prayer, preaching, teaching, mission, stewardship, leadership development, evangelism, and other areas that will be addressed in this ministry focus paper.

The intent of this ministry focus paper is to examine past and present trends of Christian education within the context of a postmodern Church and society. During the past thirty years, research has indicated a steady decline in the enrollment and attendance figures for people involved in Christian education ministries in many denominations. This ministry focus paper will review trends within the Baptist denomination, with a specific focus on the Christian education ministries of Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles and the trends within the African American Baptist Church.

Upon reviewing several sources pertaining to Christian education, one will note a common thread. Change is necessary and “business as usual,” in reference to traditional

models of Christian education, is no longer an effective means for implementing Christian education ministries in the twenty-first century. In certain locales, Christian education continues to be designated for “children only,” or limited to the traditional Sunday school program. In the discipline of Christian education, change should be an expected outcome as opposed to a process to be avoided.

A personal definition of Christian education includes the following statement: Christian education is the process of educating, empowering, transforming and liberating the people of God. Christian education can be conceived as “the heartbeat” of the Church because it is the only ministry that has the ability to significantly impact and nurture people across their life spans, from preschool through senior adulthood. If one envisions that Christian education is “the heartbeat” or “the pulse” which keeps everything operating, functioning, moving towards God’s intended purpose for the individual, the Church, community, and the world, then one should be able to perceive evidence of growth evolving around us. Additionally, this perspective should highlight the significance of an ongoing Christian education experience within the life of the believer.

A broad definition of Christian education embellishes every teaching and learning experience encountered by the Christian community. Guided by the aforementioned definition, this ministry focus paper will address two issues. First, it will address how the Church is educating and equipping the people of God to fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ in the present, as well as preparing for the future. In other words, it will address how the Church is exemplifying the Great Commission given by Jesus: “Go into all the world and make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20). Second, this ministry focus paper will

address how the Church is transferring the Christian faith tradition to the next generation of Christian leaders.

Part One will examine past and present trends and offer several definitions of Christian education. This section will expound upon the paradigm shift within the ministry of Christian education as influenced by a postmodern Church and society. Current research will be presented to substantiate the present state of affairs and the need for constructing new models of ministry. The history of Second Baptist Church as well as that of denominational affiliates will be addressed for purposes of further clarification.

Chapter 1 will highlight the present state of affairs and major challenges facing Christian education ministries in the twenty-first century. An overview of various terminology utilized to define Christian education will be addressed. One of the major problems for this subject area is reflected in the discovery that, during the past thirty years, there has been a steady decline in the number of people involved in Christian education ministries. These challenges will be viewed in congruence with the influences of postmodernism. An examination of ongoing research will further reveal a changing context of ministry. A description of present Christian education ministries at Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles will also be featured.

Chapter 2 will focus on the historical background within the discipline of Christian education. This ministry has evolved from traditional Sunday school classes to a multi-faceted ministry known as Christian education. The organizational structures of the past and present ministries will be examined in order to further comprehend present trends. Included in this section will be a presentation of the history of Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles. Second Baptist Church was the first African American Baptist

Church established in the greater Los Angeles area in 1885. This historic church celebrated 124 years of faithful service to God and the Los Angeles community during an anniversary worship celebration that was held May 17, 2009. An overview of the major African American denominational affiliates will be portrayed; these include American Baptist Churches USA; National Baptist Convention USA, Incorporated; and Progressive National Baptist Convention, Incorporated.

Part Two will emphasize the biblical antecedents and theological perspectives that provide insights towards understanding past and present trends within the ministry. This information is necessary for constructing new models of Christian education and reinforcing existing models. Additionally, the foundational principles embedded in the Great Commission and the meaning of “discipleship” will be highlighted.

Chapter 3 will expound upon several scriptural references related to teaching, learning and spiritual growth. These passages will be contained within the Old Testament and the New Testament as represented by the Judeo-Christian heritage tradition. An emphasis on the meaning and practice of discipleship, modeled by Jesus and his disciples, will provide insights for reflection.

Chapter 4 will examine Christian education from a liberation theology and practical theology perspective. This component will address issues surrounding social justice and empowerment, along with faith and politics. This chapter will also consider the priestly and prophetic role of Christian education while offering methods for creating ministries “beyond the walls” of the Church. In the arena of Christian education, the focus has primarily remained within the confines of the church.

Part Three will review various Christian education models operating within the African American Church and culture. This section will also discuss potential challenges and barriers as a precaution for constructing new models of ministry. Generational characteristics will be discussed in order to obtain insight pertaining to the multiple needs that may be prevalent within a congregation. Finally, several models of Christian education will be presented for implementation to address the diverse ministry needs within the twenty-first century.

Chapter 5 will highlight several Christian education ministries that are presently being implemented within African American churches. Many of these ministries are developed to address the needs at various age levels. In some cases, these ministries are also divided according to gender, in order to address the specific and varying needs of men and women. Generational influences and characteristics will be reviewed as factors impacting current trends. A discussion as to how these ministries are surviving in a changing culture will be explored.

Chapter 6 will present new models for implementation within the ministry of Christian education. These models will be discussed in comparison with traditional models for ministry. Several models will be constructed while considering the needs and composition of the membership at Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles. An intergenerational model for Christian education will be envisioned as a tool for connecting across the diverse age level ministries. The primary intent is to present models for Christian education that will address the changing context of ministry in the twenty-first century and provide for the needs of the whole people of God.

CHAPTER 1  
PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

**Defining “Christian Education”**

As a starting point for a definition of Christian education, this ministry has the responsibility of educating, empowering, transforming, and liberating the people of God. Christian education involves the process of educating people in order to equip them to become disciples of Christ. The word “disciple” means “a learner or follower” of the teachings and lifestyle of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the Scripture utilized as the foundational principle for the ministry of Christian education has been Matthew 28:19-20, known as “the Great Commission.” In this passage Jesus instructs his disciples, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The above definition is widely utilized and accepted within most churches and represents a “Christocentric” focus; one that is biblical and Christ centered. Every ministry of the Church should teach something about God. Jesus, who is known as the master teacher, came into this world to teach the people that “his ministry, first and

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<sup>1</sup> *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, s.v. “disciple.”

foremost, was a ministry to God on behalf of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus did not permit people to determine his ministry but was receptive to the will of God. A Christian education ministry that has a “Christocentric” focus will seek God’s direction for organization and planning by prayerfully asking where is God leading the ministry. The continuous goal is to educate believers to become “mature, confident, and committed disciples of Christ, who are equipped and motivated to change their world and claim their families, friends, workplaces, and communities for God.”<sup>3</sup>

Today, the Church has devised various methods to implement this educational process which will be discussed throughout this ministry focus paper. However, it should be acknowledged that before the term “Christian education” was developed, the Sunday school department or movement was established for Christian educational purposes. Christian education continues to be primarily instituted through Sunday school classes. These classes are organized by age or grade levels in most churches. Dedicated administrators and committed teachers have served in this ministry since the late 1800s.

In Sunday school, Scripture is taught within the context of major biblical narratives, and doctrines of faith are discussed among attendees. Sunday school has been the building block for the expansion of numerous Christian education ministries. However, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there has been a decline in members and families attending Sunday school nationwide. This is an area of critical importance that is presently being examined among several denominational bodies. In most cases, the majority of people who attend Sunday school classes are in the age ranges of 5 to 17

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<sup>2</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Hilliard Jr., *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 112.

years and 50 to 80 years or older. There is a significant proportion of 18- to 40-year-olds missing from this vital ministry.

The ministry of Christian education has continued to develop to include the mind, body and spirit, also defined as a “holistic approach” towards Christian maturity. This approach includes teaching and learning Scripture through Sunday school classes and Bible studies; and participation in various ministries, for example: fellowship and outreach, health and wellness, business and finance, mission, worship, music, and others.

Generally, people who are engaged in Christian education ministries tend to comprise the leadership body of their church. Individuals who have been indoctrinated within the traditional structures of the church have been empowered to serve in leadership positions not only in the church, but, also in social, community, civic, and political organizations. Therefore, leadership development is a major goal accomplished within Christian education.

Another aspect widely utilized within the discipline of Christian education is the path towards spiritual growth, spiritual formation, or faith formation. This ministry comprises Bible study, prayer, meditation, fasting, journaling, retreats, worship, music, and testimonies. A phrase related to this ministry is the process of creating a dynamic “spiritual and relational vitality” which recognizes the importance of building relationships within the church or organization, in addition to addressing spiritual enrichment.<sup>4</sup>

When considering the ultimate purpose of Christian education, another perspective that will lead towards empowerment and transformation is acknowledging

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<sup>4</sup> James H. Furr, Mike Bonem, and Jim Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change: A Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 16.

that Christian education attempts to develop an “alternative consciousness” among those who are exposed to the various components of this ministry. This means that, when an individual views the world through the mind or teachings of Christ, the individual will be able to see beyond the immediate surroundings, with a sense of faith and hope that is grounded in Scriptures and nurtured by the Christian Church. Christian education acknowledges that there is more to this life and this world than one is able to perceive on a daily basis. As Hebrews 11:1 states, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” Walter Brueggemann, in his book, *Prophetic Imagination*, writes, “It is the task of the alternative prophetic community to present an ‘alternative consciousness’ that serves to criticize the dominant consciousness and energize the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality.”<sup>5</sup> As this “alternative consciousness” is developed, realized, and shared with others, the disciple making process will continue to evolve.

Another holistic definition is offered by the following statement in *Christian Education in the African American Church: A Guide for Teaching Truth* by Lora-Ellen McKinney:

Christian Education is the means of educating Christians. Too often we limit Christian Education to biblical and theological realms. It must extend far beyond this. We live in a multifaceted society that is becoming more global everyday. We seek to empower people to be ready and able to effectively engage the society and its cultures. The world is seeking answers and we in the body of Christ must mature to be just that – the answers. It is through holistic Christian education that this occurs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Lora-Ellen McKinney, *Christian Education in the African American Church: A Guide for Teaching Truth* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 5.

Although churches search for new models of implementing Christian education, there are a multitude of treasures to cherish and utilize as a springboard for future ministries. Many in churches today will share testimonies of salvation, faith, endurance, and power, received from that “old time religion” or traditional forms of ministry. An ideal model of Christian education will embrace the best of the past as well as the innovations of the twenty-first century.

Although the ministry of Christian education includes Bible colleges, seminaries, para-church ministries, and other venues, for purposes of this project, the dominant focus is the local church. However, it is important for the local church to establish partnerships with the aforementioned ministries. Some churches have partnered with Bible colleges and seminaries to sponsor extension programs on site for the church and community. In addition, some faculty members are willing to speak or facilitate a conference or seminar at the local church. On the other hand, seminaries have employed local pastors and staff ministers as full time and adjunct faculty members. When these partnerships are established, the Christian education ministry will be enhanced immeasurably.

In defining the term “Christian education,” it must be recognized that this ministry is ever-changing, always evolving, as one focuses on the vast methods of educating the people of God in order to empower, transform, and liberate the mind, body, and spirit. Therefore, the Church should be open to change and to new experiences as God continues to reveal God’s plan for the individual, the Church, the community, and the world.

### The Latest Research

Historically, Christian education has been the primary ministry charged with promoting biblical teachings, Christian principles, and faith formation. The major challenge today is that churches have a decline in the number of people who take advantage of these learning and growth opportunities.

The Barna Research Group has reported the following statistics related to weekly Sunday school attendance and discipleship classes for the adult Christian population within the United States. Results indicated that there has been a fluctuating decline in the number of adults attending Sunday school classes between 1991 and 2006 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Adult Sunday School Attendance<sup>7</sup>

Year	Attendance
2006	24%
2005	20%
2004	21%
2002	25%
2000	19%
1999	19%
1998	23%
1997	23%
1996	27%
1995	17%
1994	21%
1993	22%
1992	22%
1991	23%

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<sup>7</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Christian Education/Sunday School, 2006," <http://www.barna.org> (accessed December 8, 2008).

In his article accompanying the data, titled “Christian Education/Sunday School, 2006,” Barna reveals additional insights in order to comprehend attendance patterns.<sup>8</sup> Results reveal that the highest percentage of adults attending Sunday school was 27% in 1996; the lowest was 17% in 1995; and most recent, 24% in 2006. The average attendance for adults attending Sunday school appears to be 22% of the total population in the United States. These percentages may vary for individual congregations.

Additional insights presented by Barna’s studies reveal that in a typical week, 27% of women compared to 21% of men attend Sunday school. Married individuals are more likely than are single adults to attend a Sunday school class in a typical week, 24% to 16% respectively. Mosaics and Boomers are the generations most likely to attend Sunday school in a typical week. Adult Sunday school classes ranked in the middle ground of those elements that influenced visitors’ decisions regarding whether or not to return to churches they had visited. Only 26% ranked it as extremely important, while 23% listed it as pretty important and 30% listed it as somewhat important. It ranked ninth out of the list of twenty-two factors.

In the area of discipleship, of the 16% of churched adults involved in discipleship, 69% rely upon small groups for their growth. Of the 16% of churched adults involved in discipleship, one-fifth (20%) rely upon Sunday school and 11% attend other classes to grow spiritually. Overall, results indicate that Sunday school continues to be a dominant path chosen towards spiritual growth and development; although the average attendance is represented by only twenty-two percent of the United States population.

In order to further comprehend the attendance patterns for Christian education, it is necessary to examine broader religious practices of faith. This information is

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<sup>8</sup> The Barna Research Group, “Christian Education/Sunday School, 2006.”

significant for developing ministries within the local church. In 2001, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York conducted a survey titled the “American Religious Identification Survey” (hereafter, ARIS) which is the primary source of religious information for the U.S. Census.<sup>9</sup> The results of the ARIS survey pertaining to the status of Christianity in the United States reflect a changing culture. According to the study, “The proportion of the American population that can be classified as Christian has declined from 86% in 1990 to 77% in 2001.”<sup>10</sup> An article on the “Religious Tolerance.org” website, which cites the ARIS study, quotes National Opinion Research Center’s “General Social Survey” of 2004: “The number of Protestants soon will slip below 50 % of the nation's population.”<sup>11</sup> The ARIS study reflects a “shift away from Christianity and other organized religions: The United States appears to be going through an unprecedented change in religious practices. Large numbers of American adults are disaffiliating themselves from Christianity and from other organized religions. . . . But, until recently, affiliation with Christianity had been at a high level -- about 87% -- and stable in the U.S.”<sup>12</sup> According to the ARIS study, “By about the year 2042, non-Christians will outnumber the Christians in the U.S.”<sup>13</sup> The “Religious Identification” article also states, “From 1972 to 1993, the General Social Survey of the National

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<sup>9</sup> Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar, “American Religious Identification Survey,” 2001, [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research\\_studies/aris.pdf](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_studies/aris.pdf) (accessed December 8, 2008). The results of the survey are summarized in an article titled, “Religious Identification in the US: How American Adults View Themselves,” on the “Religious Tolerance.org” website, [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_prac2.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_prac2.htm) (accessed December 8, 2008.)

<sup>10</sup> Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, “American Religious Identification Survey.”

<sup>11</sup> National Opinion Research Center, “General Social Survey of 2004,” as quoted in Religious Tolerance.org, “Religious Identification.”

<sup>12</sup> Religious Tolerance.org, “Religious Identification.”

<sup>13</sup> Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, “American Religious Identification Survey.”

Opinion Research Center found that Protestants constituted about 63% of the population. This declined to 52% in 2002. Protestants are believed to have slipped to a minority position sometime between 2004 and 2006 for the first time since the year 1776.”<sup>14</sup>

While Christianity appears to be declining, the religious populations that are experiencing growth include Islam, New Age, Hinduism, Buddhism, Native American spirituality and paganism. This growth is attributed to the fact that more people are residing in the United States from countries where these religions are dominant. In the United States, Christian church growth may be found in new suburban communities where new churches have been established. These churches tend to attract new believers or the unchurched population. Also, the rise of Christian mega-churches continues to demonstrate growth in membership, although these churches are in the minority as compared to total church population.

### **The Influences of Postmodernism**

The term “postmodernism” is difficult to define because it is depicted as a movement in history that is considered a period of transition; the movement into postmodernism is also defined as a “paradigm shift.” C. Jeff Woods, author of *Congregational Megatrends*, writes, “A paradigm is a way of viewing a system based on a set of assumptions; therefore, a paradigm shift is defined by a dramatic alteration in the set of assumptions held by a particular individual or group.”<sup>15</sup> The word “paradigm” was a Latin word originally meaning “pattern.” A drastic change occurred after the Modern

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<sup>14</sup> National Opinion Research Center, “General Social Survey of 2004,” as quoted in “Study finds number of Protestants is falling,” *Houston Chronicle*, July 24, 2004, posted on the Free Republic bulletin board at: <http://www.freerepublic.com> and cited in [ReligiousTolerance.org](http://ReligiousTolerance.org), “Religious Identification.”

<sup>15</sup> C. Jeff Woods, *Congregational Megatrends* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1996), 11.

era that affects worldview, philosophical thought, mindset, societal norms, and lifestyle. The age of postmodernism can be observed in various disciplines that include art, music, literature, architecture, education, business, religion, and others. When searching for a precise definition, many descriptions are presented in attempts to explain this broad term and significant movement within history.

Postmodernism is generally presented in contrast to the modern era. The modern era is considered to have begun in the fifteenth century and continued through much of the twentieth century. In his book, *AquaChurch*, Leonard Sweet explains, “[The] Modern Era was dominated by ordering life according to rational, scientific means, the relegation of religion to private choice and the emergence of capitalism.”<sup>16</sup> Modernity is often viewed as the past or traditional mode of existence. During this period, there was a certain standard of life that was adhered to by most people. There was a standard of living, which was modest, and within the confines of affordability. A strong work ethic was embodied in order to provide for the family and prepare for the future.

Religion was given a high priority, and most people in a given community were connected with a local church. A church was chosen based upon affiliation with a particular denomination or persuasion of faith. Basic doctrines of the church were proclaimed, and most people believed the tenets of the faith. Sweet writes, “If the Modern Era was a rage for order, regulation, stability, singularity, and fixity, the Postmodern Era is a rage for chaos, uncertainty, otherness, openness, multiplicity, and change.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Leonard Sweet, *AquaChurch* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 1999), 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Perceptions related to postmodernism have been both positive and negative when interpreted by various scholars. According to Ray Anderson, author of *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, postmodernism resembles the communities of faith found in the New Testament rather than those communities in the modern period.<sup>18</sup> In the New Testament era, Anderson explains, people were not confined to interpreting world experiences and faith by reason alone, but were receptive to the spirit of Christ empowering their lives. People of diverse cultures and lifestyles began to find common ground as they established the Church and promoted the cause of the gospel. Individuals separated from the established norms and traditions to discover a new way of life that had never been experienced before this period. Jesus preached a radical message that transcended the establishment of Jewish faith and cultural beliefs. It was a time of a radical departure from the standard of living, worshiping, and perceiving reality.

Woods references the work of Douglas John Hall in his book, *Has the Church a Future?*, who would agree with Anderson and explain that today's Church is similar to the early Church in that "congregations are seeking to minister to the people in their immediate communities. Today's church must go out into the community to attract people because the church has lost the appeal to society."<sup>19</sup> Embedded in this statement is the Great Commission, Jesus' words to "go into all the world and make disciples."

Woods also references Paul M. Dietterich in his article, "What Time Is It?

Transformation"; Woods writes:

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<sup>18</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 21.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Has the Church a Future?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), as quoted by Woods, *Congregational Megatrends*, 19.

In contrasting modern and postmodern church, Dietterich identifies two eras in the life of the church that provide additional insight towards understanding the events of a paradigm shift. “The first era is designated as ‘The Establishment Church,’ which is dated from A.D. 1789 to 1960. This was a time when the church grew rapidly; mainline denominations experienced rapid growth; ‘Christian’ and ‘American’ became synonymous; educators and politicians came from churches; the ‘haves’ gave to the ‘have-nots.’ The second era is designated as ‘The Post-Establishment Church,’ which is dated from A.D. 1960 to present. During this period freedom not to participate in the church emerges; science and technology advance; religious pluralism develops; church shopping develops; and privatization becomes the norm.”<sup>20</sup>

Today, many people are rejecting the traditional structures and practices of the Christian Church. This is noticed specifically for the younger generation, designated as the young adult population, eighteen to thirty-five years old, comprised of young Generation Xers and older Millennials.<sup>21</sup> In the age of postmodernism, it has been reported that some Generation Xers reject the faith traditions of the past and may be found to practice non-Christian religions or denounce a religious preference or commitment. Eddie Gibbs, in his book, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*, contends, “Some will incorporate elements of Christianity, but they are equally likely to turn to New Age Beliefs, Native American religions, Eastern religion and paganism.”<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, many are in search of the “spiritual” connection through traditional and non-traditional means. It is common to hear the following statement: “I don’t have to belong to a church to serve God or to be a ‘spiritual’ person.” This is an accurate statement; however, throughout Scripture is shown the model of the gathered

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<sup>20</sup> Woods, *Congregational Megatrends*, 19. Woods quotes Paul M. Dietterich, “What Time Is It?” in *Transformation (A Newsletter of the Center for Parish Development)* 1, no.3 (Fall 1994): 1-7.

<sup>21</sup> Generation X includes those with birth years between 1961 and 1981, and the Millennial generation includes those with birth years between 1982 and 2001. Therefore “young adults,” that is, those currently between eighteen and thirty-five years of age at the time of this writing, span the two generations.

<sup>22</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 230.

community worshiping, serving, learning, and growing together, as one body. The local church community is also known as “an extended family” in which fellowship is a significant aspect of spirituality. It has been stated that “spiritual and relational vitality is the life-giving power faithful people experience together as they passionately pursue God’s vision for their lives.”<sup>23</sup>

In this age of postmodernism, a paradigm shift continues to develop within churches and society that significantly impacts church ministries. There is a need to identify the various assumptions that are made in churches regarding biblical background and doctrinal belief. For example, it has been assumed in many churches that most members have been exposed to Christian teachings throughout their lifetimes; that everyone has the same or similar doctrinal beliefs; and that most people are familiar with basic stories and themes in the Old Testament and the New Testament. These assumptions must be exposed and the truth brought to light so that churches can minister based upon the needs and backgrounds of their members.

For many years, teaching the Bible in a local church was sufficient Christian education because everyone, even the unchurched, had grown up in a Christianized culture and knew at least the basics of what Christianity was all about. This is no longer true. The local church can no longer assume that the people it is trying to reach have at least a basic knowledge about the Christian faith. Because of today’s postmodern culture and the increasing number of people in this country who were raised in other cultures and faith systems, more Americans than ever before are growing up without knowledge of the teachings of Christianity.

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<sup>23</sup> Furr, Bonem, Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 16.

Strategizing to develop new models of Christian education for the twenty-first century will require an examination of the paradigm shifts within the life of a congregation and its surrounding community. It is important to acknowledge that there are many events competing for one's time and energy in today's fast-paced culture, which may include employment, school, sports, meetings for various organizations, and others.

In the Second Baptist Church community, most members commute on a regular basis via Los Angeles' overcrowded freeways when traveling to work and church. This commuter factor has greatly impacted various ministries that are held at the church, especially during the evenings and for weekend ministries. These include Christian education classes, choir rehearsals, prayer meeting, special programs, and others. Several years ago, members lived within walking distance of the church, and the church was the center of the community. This was a time when children's, youth, and adult ministries flourished on a weekly basis, and there were stronger relationships between the church and community.

Another area to explore for developing new models of Christian education is technology. Three technological advances in the twentieth century have introduced a global, postmodern, post-Christian cultural shift: television, cellular phones, and the Internet. Rapid changes have taken place and occur daily within the technological realm. It is described as the age of the computer, iPod, cell phone, Black Berry, MP3, Palm Pilot, cable, satellite dish, emails, text messaging, and other methods of communication and entertainment such as Facebook, My Space and the recent hype created by Twitter. Technology must be considered as a significant tool for reaching across generations

within a multi-sensory environment while utilizing auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic methods of teaching, learning, and growing. In this age of diversity, it has become recognized that people learn and receive information through various sensory modalities. In the past, the lecture format was the dominant teaching strategy. However, postmodernism has presented many avenues and opportunities for change. A most popular and highly discussed topic within the discourse of postmodernism is the advance of technology or the digital age. This movement can also be described as the age of heightened stimulation through auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic channels.

### **Christian Education Ministries at Second Baptist Church**

Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles is a predominantly African American church that was established in 1885. The church has been designated a historical landmark by the Los Angeles Preservation and Restoration Society. The church has a longstanding history of being committed to and supportive of the ministry of Christian education as the pastoral leadership has consisted of highly educated, seminary-trained clergy. The current pastor, Dr. William S. Epps, has faithfully served for twenty-one years and promotes Christian education throughout the year with inspiring, challenging, and empowering sermons preached in dynamic worship services. Additionally, he is the instructor of a weekly Bible study, and an adjunct faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary. He is widely recognized as an outstanding leader, preacher, and educator.

In the early 1960s, the church erected a premier two-storied Christian education building, with multiple classrooms for Christian education classes. The educational component expanded to include the Children's Center Incorporated, which has been in

continuous operation since April 1966, as a community service of Second Baptist Church Los Angeles. It was the first childcare center opened in the United States under Title V. The center serves ninety-eight children, ages two to five years. At the nearby Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Center for Early Development, fifty more preschool children are served.

Christian education at Second Baptist Church consists of diverse ministries developed to address the needs of today's contemporary society that promote faith development and spiritual growth. Christian education has a broad scope that presents numerous opportunities for learning and growing.

A Christian Education Commission is responsible for the organization, administration, supervision and implementation of the entire educational program of the church. The commission also has the responsibility to plan special weeks and days that include Holy Week Services and Christian Education Emphasis Week. The following ministries assist in the implementation of the proposed programs: Sunday church school, children's ministries, youth ministries, young adult ministries, adult ministries, senior ministries, leadership development and Bible study ministries, recreation, camp ministries, and vacation Bible school. Additionally, the Charles T. Epps Theological Education Emphasis Week is implemented annually.

The Sunday school ministry is organized to include classes and experiences designated for various age levels: nursery (2 to 3 years), preschool (4 to 5 years), primary (6 to 8 years), juniors (9 to 11 years), junior high (12 to 14 years), senior high (15 to 17 years), young adults (18 to 35 years), adults (36 to 55 years), and seniors (55 years and older). Sunday church school classes are held succeeding the eight o'clock worship service.

New Member Orientation classes are also implemented during Sunday school hour to introduce members to Baptist faith beliefs and practices, to expose members to the history and ministries of Second Baptist Church, and to promote ongoing fellowship. Prayer and weekly Bible study are held on Wednesday evenings. Subjects discussed during weekly Bible study have included: Women in the Bible, Experiencing God, The Mind of Christ, Advent, Lenten Lessons, and reflections from a *Daily Devotional Journal* compiled by Pastor Epps. Short-term Christian education classes assemble Saturday mornings throughout the year. Topics presented have included: Through the Bible in One Year, Baptist Life and History, and African American History and Culture. Additional ministries that encompass Christian education principles are: women's ministries, men's ministries, praise dance ministry, community relations ministry, social service ministry, health and wellness ministry, bereavement support ministry, caring ministry, family ministry, music and performing arts, plus others.

The structure of the ministries at Second Baptist Church is considered a model of a total church ministry that is holistic in nature. When Christian education is recognized as undergirding the total life of the church and community, this mindset will enable individuals to view the numerous possibilities available within a given congregation. In order to develop new models of ministry for the twenty-first century, it will require a greater vision for the ministry of Christian education. Although Sunday school, Bible study, and other teaching and learning opportunities remain to be the foundational structures, Christian education must represent the total life of the church, community and world. However, it must be recognized and addressed that the greatest challenge facing Second Baptist today is that the church has developed "something for everyone," but

there has been a decline in the number of people who take advantage of these growth opportunities, especially the young adult population (aged eighteen through thirty-five).

Generations are missing the tremendous experience of studying the Bible, learning about God's love through Jesus Christ, and the power received by the Holy Spirit, which will enable individuals to face circumstances of life with a sense of faith and hope. Historically, the African American Church has shaped and produced leaders within the Church and the community, and that leadership was often initiated as individuals attended Sunday school programs and fulfilled leadership roles in the local church. In African American communities today, many of the children are growing up outside of the walls of the church, unexposed to the values, teachings, training, and experience that have historically helped to shape African American leaders in almost every phase and area of life. However, the Church continues to be a viable source as a training ground for developing strong leaders, responsible citizens, and for nurturing and empowering people of Christian faith.

## CHAPTER 2

### A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

#### **Traditional Sunday School**

In order to construct Christian education ministries for the twenty-first century, the foundational stages of the Sunday school movement should be examined. The earliest Sunday schools initiated in the United States were actually patterned after the Sunday schools established by the Church of England. The origin of the Sunday school movement can be traced to a school for poor children organized by Robert Raikes on Sundays in Gloucester, England in 1780.<sup>1</sup> Raikes established a school because the children of the poor were often abused, uneducated, and were found to be destructive of property throughout the city. The first Sunday school was successful towards improving the educational, emotional and social conditions of the children. The school was characterized by adult support, focus on children, an appreciation of the dignity and worth of the students, literacy training with a religious base; paid leadership, no local church affiliation, and rewards for Scripture memory.<sup>2</sup> In 1785, William Fox expanded Raikes' concept and systematically designed a religious education program for the poor;

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<sup>1</sup> Sid Smith, "Historical Perspective on the Growth Oriented Sunday School," in *Black Baptist Sunday School Growth*, compiled by Olivia M. Cloud (Nashville: Convention Press, 1990), 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

this was considered the catalyst for further promotion of a school system on Sunday.<sup>3</sup>

The first American Sunday school was established in 1785 by William Elliot. The school was held at his home in Virginia and included slaves among the other poor children. The movement was implemented by the Methodist Church in 1786 and, according to Sid Smith in his chapter, “Historical Perspective on the Growth Oriented Sunday School,” it was characterized by: “1) openness to poor children, Black and White; 2) literacy focus; 3) faculty appointed by the bishop, elders, deacons or preachers to serve without pay; 4) eight hour meeting periods; 5) books compiled by a council for the purpose of teaching, learning, and piety.”<sup>4</sup> During the early stages of development for the Sunday school, it was possible for a school to be planted by an individual, a church, or a denomination.

The first Sunday school organized by an African American was established in 1787 by Richard Allen in Philadelphia. Allen later became the founder and first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The movement became popular as it spread to other states. These early schools maintained the following characteristics, as summarized by Smith: “1) they were modeled after public schools; 2) their students were members of the congregation; 3) they existed for training in morals; and 4) they were sponsored by a local church.”<sup>5</sup> Katy Ferguson, a former slave, was the first African American woman to organize a Sunday school, in 1793. This school was established in her private home in the city of New York. The students who attended this school were

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 126 -127.

<sup>4</sup> Sid Smith, “Historical Perspective,” 128.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 129.

Black and White children. Later, the school relocated to a local church.<sup>6</sup>

As the Sunday school movement continued to expand through churches and communities, Sunday schools were also launched among members of the Baptist faith. The first Baptist Sunday school was organized by Samuel Slater in 1797 in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Slater's school was comprised of poor and neglected children who lived in the near vicinity and his school was designated for "free children." Bible reading, religious instruction, and the fundamentals of common education were the heart of Slater's Sunday school.<sup>7</sup>

In order to promote Sunday schools to a broader population the American Sunday School Union was organized in 1824. This organization commissioned Sunday school missionaries who traveled throughout the country to plant schools and assist communities towards developing Sunday schools. The statistics reported for this type of endeavor are remarkable. Reports indicate that "under its influence some 100,000 Sunday Schools were organized by 1905, and about 600,000 teachers and 4,000,000 pupils were being instructed. Between 1895 and 1905 about 1,100 churches had grown out of the Sunday school movement."<sup>8</sup>

In summary, the first Sunday schools were holistic in nature and provided training in literacy, basic living skills, discipline, social skills and religious education. In today's terms, some of the Sunday schools would have been considered mega-schools, especially those with a large enrollment of students. The Sunday school concept can also be compared to the early stages of promoting Christianity in the New Testament gospels, as

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<sup>6</sup> Sid Smith, "Historical Perspective," 129.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 132.

well as church planting in today's communities. There were individuals who sponsored schools in their homes which is similar to the house churches of the New Testament. In other cases, the local church or the denomination provided the impetus for the school. Again, this support often occurs for church planters. The Sunday school movement was a catalyst for promoting Christianity and religious education in the United States, especially among slaves, the poor, uneducated, and the entire African American population. This movement also served as a catalyst for promoting church growth and development. The ministry developed through the Sunday schools was an excellent example of the implementation of the Great Commission. It was evident that although the Sunday school movement was targeted to educate the poor and uneducated, it rapidly spread to include "all people" from diverse social economic levels, ages and cultures. There was also a missional component to this development as missionaries were sent to various places to plant Sunday schools. It is noted that some of the schools were racially integrated prior to the Emancipation Proclamation.

In her article titled, "Wade in the Water: A History of Christian Education in the African American Church," Yolanda Y. Smith explains that "during the 1880s, the African Methodist Episcopal church began to produce church school literature solely for black Sunday schools and later established a Christian Education department to oversee education and leadership programs."<sup>9</sup> This time period is considered the initial stage of transitioning from the Sunday school model towards the development of the broader Christian education ministry. Smith continues, "After the emancipation, black Sunday Schools began to deteriorate since increased attention and funding went toward the

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<sup>9</sup> Yolanda Y. Smith, "Wade in the Water: A History of Christian Education in the African American Church," *The AME Church Review*, October-December 2007, 109.

secular education of freed slaves and the formation of black colleges.”<sup>10</sup> This was also a time period where more African American churches began to surface nationwide, which led to an increase in church planting as opposed to planting independent Sunday schools. As churches were planted, the Sunday school ministry focused on teaching the Bible and principles of Christian lifestyle.

### **The History of Second Baptist Church**

According to Juan Williams and Quinton Dixie, authors of *This Far by Faith*,

Black religious organizations at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were depicted as being weak. The question facing every attempt to organize an independent black church was simple and daunting: how do a people just one generation away from chattel slavery find the political, educational, and economic resources to create strong institutions? Even with a deep faith in God it seemed impossible for former slaves to build any institution without the support of the dominant culture.<sup>11</sup>

Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles was organized on May 13, 1885 by a group of faithful people who desired to have an African American Baptist church in southern California. The church began to expand and grow as African Americans became aware of a new church in the area. It has been documented in various church manuals and records that in addition to a weekly worship service, the church also organized Sunday school classes for the community. The classes were well attended and contributed to an increase in membership growth during the early stages of development.

During the year of this writing, the church celebrated 124 of faithful service to God and the Los Angeles community during worship services focused on the theme, “Commemorating the Past, Celebrating the Present and Embracing the Future.” It is an

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<sup>10</sup> Yolanda Y. Smith, “Wade in the Water,” 108.

<sup>11</sup> Juan Williams and Quinton Dixie, *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African American Religious Experiences* (New York: William Morrow, 2003), 126.

exceptional phenomenon that since its inception, the church has only had eight senior pastors who have rendered outstanding leadership representing many entities throughout the church, local community, the nation, and internationally.

The history of Second Baptist has been reported in several church documents, which includes annual reports, membership manuals, anniversary programs, souvenir journals, and the like. Reverend S. C. Pierce, the organizing pastor, served for two years, 1885-1887. The Sunday school was established during the first year of his administration and this was considered a great attribute to the early stages of church growth. Reverend C. H. Anderson succeeded Reverend Pierce and during his pastorate from 1887 to 1907, he was instrumental in leading Second Baptist, along with a few other churches, to affiliate with the Los Angeles Baptist Association. Later, the Western Baptist Association was organized to support African American churches across the state of California. Additionally, the membership was able to purchase property and built the first church in Los Angeles.

Reverend J. L. McCoy, the third pastor, served the church from 1908 to 1915. During his tenure, the church liquidated all outstanding debts and the mortgage on the existing facility was burned. Reverend McCoy died unexpectedly and it was one year before another pastor was called to Second Baptist. The fourth pastor, Rev. H.D. Prowd, served the congregation from 1916 to 1920. He left Second Baptist to serve as a missionary in South America. The fifth pastor, Dr. Thomas Lee Griffith, Sr., served from 1921 to 1940. He led the church in erecting the current facility, which was designed by an African American architect, Paul R. Williams, who became one of the preeminent American architects of the twentieth century.

The sixth pastor, Reverend J. Raymond Henderson, served from 1941 to 1963. During his tenure he was able to eradicate the debt on the church building. The buildings now known as Henderson Community Center were purchased, mission work was expanded and the Velva Henderson Christian Education Building was erected and dedicated to the honor of his wife.

The seventh pastor, Dr. Thomas Kilgore, served 1963 to 1985. Dr. Kilgore's ministry extended beyond the pastorate of Second Baptist Church. He served his denomination as President of two conventions: the American Baptist Churches USA, Inc. and the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Additionally, he was active in the ecumenical movement of the National Council of Churches, and served as advisor of community affairs to the president of the University of Southern California for more than eleven years.

The eighth and current pastor, Dr. William S. Epps, began his tenure at Second Baptist Church October 1, 1987. Building on the foundation established by his seven predecessors, Pastor Epps has charted a course for the membership which will continue to fortify its witness to Christ within the greater Los Angeles community. In addition to Dr. Epps' pastoral responsibilities he serves in the following capacities: adjunct professor of preaching and advisor for the African American Leadership Cohort at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena; former editor for the *National Baptist Voice*, a publication of the National Baptist Convention, Inc.; nominee for Vice President of the North American region, Baptist World Alliance; member of the American Baptist Churches, Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of Managers and several other ministerial organizations. Dr. Epps is also the author of *What Would Jesus Say? A Daily Devotional Journal*. Most

recently, he has been further recognized for his homiletic and exegetical expertise in the book, *More Power in the Pulpit*, edited by Cleophus J. Larue. This book includes the voices of ten of America's most influential African American preachers, who are also recognized as the most prominent figures in the life of the black church. The motto consistently proclaimed by Pastor Epps is, "Service is the price you pay for the space you occupy." All people ought to pay for the privilege of having a place in time and space by rendering service commensurate with their capacity. Life is truly precious and "where much is given much is required" (Luke 12:48).

Second Baptist Church has a longstanding history of being a leader among churches and communities within Los Angeles and nationwide. Until the end of World War II, the church's sanctuary was known as having the largest seating capacity west of the Mississippi owned by African Americans. The maximum seating capacity is approximately two thousand. Therefore, Second Baptist was the first and last church in the Los Angeles area to host Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. between 1957 and 1968. The church also served as his West coast headquarters during the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, the sanctuary served as a meeting place for many assemblies that included religious, political, civic and social events.

As was mentioned in the first year of organizing, 1885 to 1886, the church established a successful Sunday school as an extension of its ministry. This highlights the importance of Christian education from the beginning stages of church planting. Second Baptist has a reputation for being a "teaching church." Moreover, pastors and members have served in various leadership roles within denominational affiliates, social and service organizations, and political and educational sectors, among others. Many of these

leaders have faithfully served the church as Christian education administrators, teachers, learners, or held an office within other ministries of the church. Some of the outstanding leaders engaged within the church and community have included the following: Attorney Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr.; Congresswoman Juanita Millender McDonald; Judge Albert D. Matthews; and Dr. Geraldine Washington, president of the NAACP, Los Angeles Branch; and many others. Furthermore, the children and youth of Second Baptist have been exposed to many of these leaders and several have been influential as teachers and mentors for the younger generation.

Historically, Second Baptist Church has been engaged in dynamic methods of Christian education. A church archives has been established and maintains an extensive collection of the church's history and its connection to the greater Los Angeles community. Presently, the documents from the archives are being categorized and digitized by the archival department of University of Southern California. In the near future, the archives will be accessible online to the public. Several researchers have studied the life and history of Second Baptist because of the church's reputation as a leader among the African American church population and within African American denominational organizations for more than 120 years.

The above historical insights emphasize the importance of churches being knowledgeable concerning their history. This topic should be included within the ministry of Christian education. At Second Baptist, a historical presentation is presented in New Member Orientation classes. Members are informed of the beginning church planting stages during the late nineteenth century, significant developments throughout the twentieth century, and dynamic ministries for the twenty-first century, as well as the

projected vision for the future.

In addition to the church's individual history, Christian education should also include the importance of the church's relationship to the larger body of faith. In their book, *The New Life: A Baptist Perspective*, Allan R. Knight and Gordon H. Schroeder write,

Baptists share with other evangelical denominations belief in the great doctrines of the church, including the Bible as God's Holy word; belief in the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ; and the ultimate triumph of our Lord over sin and death. . . . In addition to these great truths, Baptists stress the following distinctive beliefs: the Lordship of Jesus Christ; the supremacy of the Scriptures; the priesthood of all believers; believer's baptism; regenerate church membership; separation of church and state; religious freedom; the independence of the local church; and the evangelization of the world.<sup>12</sup>

These components of the Baptist faith are also taught in the New Member Orientation classes once individuals become members of Second Baptist Church. It is important for churches to present courses addressing doctrinal beliefs within the Christian education ministry.

Baptist churches are the largest Protestant group in North America today, with a total of approximately 31 million members in the Baptist denominations.<sup>13</sup> As a Baptist fellowship, Second Baptist is affiliated with the following national and international denominational bodies: American Baptist Churches, USA; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.; the Baptist Cooperative Fellowship; the Baptist World Alliance; and the World Council of Churches; in addition to various local, state, and regional associations. However, the Church

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<sup>12</sup> Allan R. Knight and Gordon H. Schroeder, *The New Life: A Baptist Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1993), 45-46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

maintains an ecumenical stance when selecting Christian education curriculum and resources.

### **Denominational Affiliates**

Most churches have obtained the basic organizational structure for Christian education ministries from their denominational bodies. Yolanda Y. Smith explains,

Denominational involvement has advanced Christian education in three basic ways: 1) it led to the establishment of denominational Sunday schools, Sunday school unions, Christian education departments, youth organizations and publishing houses; 2) denominations began to develop and distribute their own literature and curriculum; and 3) they implemented training programs for pastors, church leaders and Sunday school teachers.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, when constructing Christian education ministries for the twenty-first century it is imperative to examine the past and present denominational structures. These structures have developed and changed over the course of the twentieth century and continue to evolve within the present twenty-first century. While examining the denominational affiliates within this section, the primary focus will comprise the various components of Christian education ministries for American Baptist Churches USA, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., and the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Second Baptist Church has maintained a longstanding affiliation with all three of these denominational bodies.

#### American Baptist Churches USA

Second Baptist Church was introduced to American Baptist Churches USA through relationships established with First Baptist Church of Los Angeles. It has been

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<sup>14</sup> Yolanda Y. Smith, "Wade in the Water," 109.

reported that several founding members of Second Baptist were former members or attendees of First Baptist Church of Los Angeles during the late 1800s. First Baptist Church was most supportive towards the development of Second Baptist Church and its affiliation with American Baptist Churches USA. Today, according to the denomination's website, "American Baptist Churches [USA] is one of the most diverse Christian denominations, with 5,500 local congregations comprised of 1.3 million members across the United States and Puerto Rico," all engaged in "God's mission around the world."<sup>15</sup>

A review of historical documents pertaining to the early stages of the Sunday school movement within American Baptist Churches USA reveals an extension beyond the walls of the Church for promoting education and mission. The American Baptist Historical Society and American Baptist Home Missions operated a railroad chapel car that traveled across the Western region of the country to promote the gospel message. The chapel car primarily traveled to areas where churches had not been organized, between the 1890s and the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> In addition, in many cases, before there was an established church building, there were home fellowships, Bible studies, various fellowship groups, and prayer bands, organized to pray for the future church. This model is also recorded throughout the New Testament gospels, as believers traveled to different homes and places to promote the gospel message. Jesus instructed the disciples that they were to live as "witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Traditional Sunday school classes within a local church have been organized by

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<sup>15</sup> American Baptist Churches USA website, "Home page," <http://www.abc-usa.org> (accessed June 10, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> American Baptist Historical Society, "Chapel Cars of America," <http://www.abhsarchives.org> (accessed June 10, 2009).

age groups. Initially, the groups were broad-based, consisting of primarily two divisions, children and adults. Adult and children Sunday school lessons were published by Judson Press, the publishing house for American Baptist Churches USA, since 1824. As churches began to experience an increase in membership, classes for children were divided into separate groups to coincide with their school age: preschool, kindergarten, elementary, junior high and senior high school. Most church school classes were in session on Sunday morning. This remains to be the primary time for classes to be offered within the denomination's churches today. However, various churches have established additional options for meeting times, such as Saturday school or on numerous days throughout the week.

Presently, American Baptist Churches USA, through its National Ministries, Discipleship and Christian Education subdivision, offers a vast array of Christian education ministries to support local churches. The recent thrust has been focused on discipleship. A significant trend that has occurred within the twenty-first century is that Christian education has expanded its horizon from the standard international lessons taught within a Sunday school class towards the act of being and making disciples. A disciple-making congregation focuses on the scriptures found in John 15:1-2, 5, in order to guide this process: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit; because apart from me you can do nothing."

There are nine qualities that have been identified to distinguish a disciple-making congregation: 1) spiritual and relational vitality; 2) vital, transforming worship; 3) a focus

on mission; 4) gifts and calls as the basis for ministry; 5) a commitment to equipping; 6) shared ministry and mission; 7) spirit-led organization; 8) holistic small groups; and 9) commitment to evangelism and numerical growth. This year, the denomination's National Ministries, Discipleship and Christian Education subdivision has chosen to emphasize the following three qualities: spiritual and relational vitality; focus on mission and shared ministry; and mission. A *2009 Discipleship Planning Guide* has been developed as a resource to churches to assist with planning and implementation of the Christian education/discipleship ministry.<sup>17</sup>

It should be mentioned that within the discipleship model, the traditional Sunday school model continues to be embraced as the most significant and prevalent means towards enhancing spiritual and relational vitality, equipping, small groups, and evangelism. The following age group divisions are utilized for the discipleship model, as presented by the National Ministries, Discipleship and Christian Education subdivision: zero to two, preschoolers, younger elementary children, older elementary, early adolescents, adolescents and adults. The disciple-making process presented by ABCUSA is holistic in structure and involves the total life of the believer within the context of church, family, community, nation, and international concerns (i.e., children in poverty, race and gender, health care, economic crisis, equality, peace, justice, and human trafficking, and the like). The denomination provides opportunities for Christian education, discipleship, spiritual growth and development through various ministries, workshops, conferences, and publications.

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<sup>17</sup> National Ministries American Baptist Churches USA, *The 2009 Discipleship Planning Guide* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2008).

National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

Second Baptist Church has maintained a longstanding affiliation with the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (hereafter, National Baptist Convention). The National Baptist Convention, the largest predominantly black denomination in America, was founded in 1895 by the merging of the Foreign Mission Baptist Convention of the USA, the American National Baptist Convention, and the Baptist National Educational Convention. Christian education has been the central focus of the convention from its inception and several organizations later evolved to promote this ministry, including the National Baptist Publishing Board, the Sunday School Congress, and the Baptist Young People's Union Board (BYPU).<sup>18</sup>

As the National Baptist Convention continued to expand the agenda for Christian education, the Congress of Christian Education was established and promoted as the major teaching and training division of the National Baptist Convention. During its annual convention, approximately three hundred courses are developed for pastors, teachers, leaders, adults, youth and children. The Congress of Christian Education has met in its annual sessions continually since 1906. The denomination's website reports that the largest Christian education convention was held in 2005 in Houston, Texas with nearly 35,000 delegates were in attendance.<sup>19</sup> When reviewing the conference agenda, a wide range of certificated and non-certificated courses were presented to address Christian nurture and spiritual maturity, as well as pertinent issues facing the African American community. The following departments and divisions are included throughout

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<sup>18</sup> Yolanda Y. Smith, "Wade in the Water," 109.

<sup>19</sup> National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., "A Christ Center Congress," <http://www.nationalbaptist.com> (accessed August 15, 2009).

the convention's annual program: Biblical studies, Christian education, history, theology, leadership development, church administration, church growth and discipleship, youth development, and fine arts, along with several specific ministries of the local church.

In order to further promote the ministry of Christian education, the National Baptist Convention maintains the Sunday School Publishing Board (hereafter, the SSPB). The SSPB is one of the largest religious publishing companies owned and operated by African Americans in the world. The SSPB has been distributing curriculum for Sunday schools and other Christian resources since 1915 and proclaims its motto, "Bringing you closer to God, one book at a time."<sup>20</sup> In addition to the Congress of Christian Education, National Baptist Churches supports the annual SSPB Christian Education Conference. This year the conference will focus on developing discipleship, spiritual formation and Vacation Bible School ministries in the local church.

Another resource for the denomination is *The Baptist Training Union Series* (hereafter, the BTU), which is a curriculum published by the SSPB and developed for discipleship training purposes, to be utilized within Baptist Training Unions organized in local churches. There is also a quarterly publication named *The Christian Education Informer*, which is the official publication of the Christian Education Department of the SSPB. It is designed to inform members of the activities occurring at the district, state and regional levels of the National Baptist Convention. During the course of a year, local churches affiliated with a specific denomination generally attend conferences and meetings organized by regions, states, and local associations for inspiration and education.

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<sup>20</sup> Sunday School Publishing Board website, "Home page," <http://www.sspbnbc.com> (accessed September 10, 2009).

Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

The website of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. proclaims, “The Congress of Christian Education exists to promote the education mission of Progressive churches by strengthening the church school, training church leaders and equipping the laity for a lifetime of fruitful services to humanity. Progressives believe that there can be no liberation without education. The truth will make us free!”<sup>21</sup> The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. was established in 1961 and was involved in the Civil Rights struggle along with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The organization defined itself as politically progressive and active. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed each annual convention until his death.<sup>22</sup> Many of the leaders of the civil rights movement became active members of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.; therefore, this convention was known throughout the African American community as the primary Baptist witness for social justice in America.<sup>23</sup>

The The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. provides Christian education resources for children, youth, and adults in partnership with the David C. Cook Publishing Company. The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. implements a Congress of Christian Education similar to that of the National Baptist Convention. However, its annual meeting is held simultaneously with the annual national convention of the denomination, rather than meeting as a separate convention. Numerous courses are offered during the Congress of Christian Education, primarily geared towards pastors,

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<sup>21</sup> Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. website, “Home page,” <http://www.pnbc.org> (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Williams and Dixie, *This Far by Faith*, 252.

<sup>23</sup> Marvin A. McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 264.

ministers and leaders within the Church. Areas of focus include the following: Missionary Education in the Local Church, Liberation Theology in the Pauline Epistles, Developing a Viable Health Ministry, the ABCs of Handling Money, Developing Leaders for Children's Ministry, Strategic Planning in Congregations, Minister's Seminar, The Audio-Video Ministry in a Technological World, the Dynamics of Praise and Worship, The Church Responds to Domestic Violence, Strengthening Your Prayer Life, Reaching and Teaching Young Adults, and others.

The various conventions continue to develop new forms of ministries and resources to respond to a changing church within an every changing society and culture. There are numerous resources that are available to assist churches towards enhancing the ministries of Christian education through training and continuing education opportunities provided throughout the year. All of the denominational conventions have set a priority to educate and train leaders and members of the Church and the community. It is also a priority to continue discovering ways and means of reaching the younger generation in order to prepare them to assume leadership responsibilities within their local churches, the denomination and the greater society.

## CHAPTER 3

### BIBLICAL ANTECEDENTS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The term “antecedents” is defined by Dr. Ray S. Anderson in his book, *The Soul of Ministry* as “some aspect of God’s earlier ministry that can now be seen in a new and liberating way through God’s continuing ministry.”<sup>1</sup> Christian education traces its formation in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation giving credence to the significance of this discipline. The major focus of this chapter will be to connect God’s earlier ministry through God’s people and the Church to God’s present ministries within the Church and society. An examination of Scriptures from the Old Testament and the New Testament serve as the source for this endeavor.

#### **Biblical Antecedents in the Old Testament**

Throughout Old Testament Scriptures the word of God places great emphasis on education. Teaching the next generation was considered so important to the ancient Hebrews that it was the central proclamation of the Jewish law and faith. Teaching is a major theme throughout the Bible. In *Introduction to Biblical Christian Education*, Werner C. Graendorf writes, “To the Hebrew, the concept that God was teacher emerged

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<sup>1</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 22.

from the nature of God. God was revered as creator, covenanter, and sustainer. Priest, prophet, king, sage and scribe were all viewed as interpreters in one way or another of the grand drama of the Lord in history and in revelation.”<sup>2</sup>

The book of Deuteronomy is comprised of numerous commands to the people of God to teach God’s ways and God’s mighty works to their children. As biblical texts are reviewed with a focus on teaching, there are many texts in the Old Testament scriptures related to preparing the people of God to acknowledge the one and only God. One passage has become embedded in the Hebrew consciousness more deeply than any other: the instruction of the *Shema* contained in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 set the agenda for the home and the nation. This passage proclaims, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” So great was instruction in the eyes of God’s chosen people that they equated it with life. Proverbs 4:13 states, “Take hold of instructions; do not let go. Guard her; for she is your life.”

The moral and biblical education of the children was accomplished not in a formal teaching period each day but when the parents, out of concern for their own lives as well as their children’s, made God and his Word the natural topic of a conversation

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<sup>2</sup> Werner C. Graendorf, *Introduction to Biblical Christian Education* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1981), 27.

which might occur anywhere and anytime during the day.<sup>3</sup> This is the aim of Christian education, for Scripture to be ingrained in the lives of the believers to the extent that it will become the topic of daily conversation. Many scholars in the field of Christian Education have expressed concern that biblical knowledge is not being passed down to the next generation. In order for this to transpire, as learned from the above passage, Scripture should be discussed in the home, within the family, as well as in the church.

Children should be exposed to conversations by parents and other adults discussing matters of faith. This is an intergenerational approach to Christian education that has been passed down from ancient Hebrew culture to the present day. However, in order for adults to emulate a model for children, the adults must be prepared and encouraged to share God's word at home, along with other life encounters. According James Perkins in *Building Up Zion's Walls*, "In order to make our homes places where our children will learn of the ways of the Lord, they must hear us speaking of the goodness of God in our daily conversation. They must not think that the only time we invoke the Lord's name is at church or when there is a crisis at home and we have nowhere else to turn."<sup>4</sup>

Another passage that discusses familial instruction is Proverbs 22:6, which states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." This Scripture also undergirds the mission of children's ministries, Sunday school, youth programs, and the like. The family and the local church should provide opportunities for children to learn biblical truths in order that they may continue to grow spiritually, as

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<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S:1 (Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 274-275

<sup>4</sup> James C. Perkins, *Building Up Zion's Walls* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 13.

they are prepared for leadership roles in the future. Churches should assess how the training of children and youth actually occurs within the context of the life of the church.

Throughout the book of Deuteronomy the teaching and learning process is emphasized by use of the words, “statutes,” “judgments,” “commandments,” “law,” and the phrase, “the word of the Lord.” For example in Deuteronomy 4:1-2, the following words are proclaimed: “Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.” In their book, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck discuss the verses above:

The words **Hear now** introduce the practical conclusions to be drawn from Israel’s experience in the wilderness. Because of the Lord’s faithfulness, mercy, and judgment displayed in her recent history, the nation was responsible to obey His **decrees and laws** unconditionally. “Decrees” may refer to permanent rules of conduct, statutory laws which are immutable, while “laws” may refer to case laws, decisions handed down by judges. It was crucial that Moses **teach** Israel this Law, for the motive clause **so that you may live and . . . take possession of the land** indicates that a full enjoyment of life is based on obeying God’s Law.<sup>5</sup>

The narrative continues with Moses’ instructions in Deuteronomy 4:5-11, in which he states,

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let

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<sup>5</sup> Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, S. 1, 269. The boldface type is in the original.

them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.”

These verses reveal that receiving and obeying God’s laws and commands will bring fullness of life. The Israelites were constantly reminded by Moses that they should never forget their past history and they were to always teach their children concerning being obedient to God and the history of their people. According to Perkins, “Developing a family lifestyle in which we go one step further and immerse our children in the Word, teach them the meaning of Scriptures, show them how we live by the Word, and apply it to our daily lives requires even greater diligence and commitment on our part.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Biblical Antecedents in the New Testament**

Jesus gave a model of the teaching and learning process at an early age, as reported in Luke 2:42-47:

When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

This narrative is significant because it acknowledges the involvement of children within the teaching and learning process. It also allows children to identify with Jesus because it specifically states that Jesus was twelve years old. Again, an intergenerational dialogue is mentioned as Jesus listens to the teachers and asks questions.

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<sup>6</sup> Perkins, *Building Up Zion’s Walls*, 13.

Another model involving the teaching and learning process that is presented in the New Testament is that of the early Christian Church reported in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts chapter 2:42-47, it is stated that “The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and participated in fellowship with other believers as they met in various homes. They praised and worshiped God together.” Embedded within this passage is an example of believers being excited, motivated and committed towards promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, there are several components of the Christian education ministry included, such as teaching/learning, fellowshiping, and worshipping. Also, these components are generally included within small group ministries, home fellowships or cell groups. Donald Hilliard, Jr., in his book, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, promotes this passage to emphasize a biblical model for healthy church growth. According to Hilliard, from this passage the local church should be able to envision the following principles practiced by the early Church for growth: 1) sound preaching and teaching, 2) a church of community, 3) a church of prayer, 4) a church of power, 5) a church of compassion, 6) a church of unity, 7) a church of joy, 8) a church of worship, 9) a church of good reputation, and 10) a church that trusted God for the increase.<sup>7</sup>

According to Hilliard, while each church is unique, there are certain foundational elements necessary for every church that desires to grow which include the following: 1) vision, 2) the centrality of Christ, 3) biblical preaching, 4) purposeful prayer, 5) dynamic worship, 6) sound doctrine, 7) comprehensive Christian education, 8) holy living, 9) tithing, and 10) focus on people. Although Hilliard presents these components as a strategy for church growth, historically these components have been the major building

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<sup>7</sup> Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 11-12.

blocks of the Christian Church from the New Testament Church to the present age. These elements would not be dependent upon the size of the church, because a small church community would also strive to implement these components within the life of the church.

Another passage related to the teaching and learning process is found in 2 Timothy 1:5-7 as the apostle Paul writes to Timothy “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” In this narrative, Timothy is charged to deepen the roots of a faith legacy passed on to him by a faithful and faith-filled mother and grandmother. Paul charges Timothy to “fan into flame” or “stir up the gift” of God within him and to conduct his ministry with the God-given spirit of power, love and self-discipline or a sound mind. This is a passage that is embedded with inclusive language within the teaching/learning process because it includes males (Timothy) and females (Lois and Eunice) as having a significant role within the body of Christ. There are numerous narratives in the Bible that are inclusive of both men and women serving a significant purpose in the God’s redemptive plan, however quite often these passages are overlooked or omitted.

How Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, passed on their faith to Timothy is not explicitly described. Perhaps they prayed together, studied and discussed God’s word, or engaged in conversations about the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Perhaps they gathered with other Christians for worship and fellowship. What ever the case may have been, they were “highly visible” and well known, for the

writer of this epistle states, “I am reminded about the faith of your grandmother and mother” (2 Timothy 1:5).

For these names to have been recorded and passed down through biblical history further emphasizes that Lois and Eunice were not just ordinary women. They could have been preachers, teachers, community activists, traveling evangelists, or disciples. In this case they were women of faith training up a child in the way that he should go, telling the story about a risen savior, knowing that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing the word of God” (Romans 10:17). This passage also makes a connection with the Old Testament scriptures and themes throughout the book of Deuteronomy; the charge to remember the acts of God in the past and to pass on the faith to the next generation. A potential model for intergenerational dialogue and ministry is contained within this pericope.

In the New Testament, there are several passages in Scripture that address the purpose and necessity for developing Christian education ministries within the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul compares the body of Christ to the human body. Each part has a specific function that is necessary to the body as a whole. The parts are different for a purpose, and in their differences they must work together. The Church is composed of many types of people from a variety of backgrounds with a multitude of gifts and abilities. It is easy for these differences to divide people, as was the case in Corinth. But despite the differences, all believers have one thing in common: faith in Christ. As members of God’s family, individuals may have different interests and gifts, but they are all united by the Spirit into one spiritual body. These are guiding principles to teach and emphasize within all ministries of the local church.

In addition, Ephesians 4 also addresses the significance of unity within the body of Christ. Paul proclaims, “There is one body and unity does not just happen; believers have to work at it.” Often differences among people can lead to division, but this should not be true in the Church. Instead of concentrating on what divides, people should remember what unites: “one body, one Spirit, one future, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God” (Ephesians 4: 1-6). To build unity is one of the Holy Spirit’s important roles. The Holy Spirit leads, but people have to willing to be led and to do their part to keep peace.

Ephesians 4:12 and 13 reveals that God has given the Church an enormous responsibility: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up; until we all reach unity in the faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” This involves preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administrating, building, and many other tasks. If people had to fulfill this command as individuals, it would be a most difficult task. But God calls people as members of God’s body. Some individuals can perform one task; and some individuals can perform another. However, people can obey God more fully together than any person could alone. It is a human tendency to overestimate what can be accomplished alone and to underestimate what can be accomplished as a group. But as the body of Christ, people can accomplish more together than anyone would dream possible working alone. Working together, the Church can express the fullness of Christ.

The New Testament states that Christians are “members of one another”; this indicates a relationship of interdependence or a certain connectedness. In Paul’s letters to

the Romans, the Corinthians, the Ephesians and the Colossians, he pens the word “body” (*soma*), more than thirty times to illustrate the functioning Church. Approximately fifty percent of the time he uses the word (*soma*), he is referring to the human, physical body, with its many parts and members. In the other half, Paul applies the term to the Church – the body of Christ. Paul taught the New Testament believers that no individual Christian can function effectively by themselves; they need each other. Each member of the body of Christ is important, and every member of the Church is important. Therefore, no member should say, “I don’t need you.” In order for the body of Christ to function as a whole or as one, members must have a sense of belonging and a sense of importance within the Church. Romans 14:19 states, “So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up”; and 1 Thessalonians 5: 11 further admonishes, “So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.” Christians are to encourage one another which involves being sensitive to the human need for encouragement and offering supportive words and actions.

Another New Testament passage that connects to the Old Testament passage found in Deuteronomy 6:5 is Matthew 22:36 and 37, in which Jesus responds to the Pharisee when asked the following question: “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses?” Jesus responds, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” The Old Testament develops and amplifies these two points: love of God and love for others, who are made in God’s image. Therefore, it is imperative that this biblical

antecedent be emphasized throughout Christian education ministries and the life of the Church, the community, and the world.

A final topic to review in this section is leadership development as embodied the New Testament writings. Christian education ministries also promote leadership development throughout the teaching/learning process. In the New Testament it is revealed that function was generally emphasized more so than position. The primary function that leaders served in the New Testament was empowering the people of God to achieve God's purpose. In his book, *Spiritual Leadership*, Geoffrey V. Guns explains that four distinct functions of leaders are mentioned: 1) example – leaders served as an example to the people and they modeled the example of Jesus; 2) nurture – leaders had the responsibility of spiritual parenting, caring, feeding, protecting, ministering, teaching and disciplining; 3) equip – leaders were charged with the responsibility of preparing people for the work of ministry; 4) service – Jesus has called his church to be servants to the world.<sup>8</sup> The Church of the twenty-first century can learn a great deal from the models and teachings of the New Testament. All of these components are necessary for educating, empowering, transforming and liberating the people of God through the Christian education ministries of the Church.

### **Discipleship and The Great Commission**

“The Great Commission” is a phrase that is foundational to Christian educational ministries. A simplistic explanation of this phrase is that “every believer has been commissioned by God, through Jesus Christ, to tell someone about Jesus.” Christian

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<sup>8</sup>Geoffrey V. Guns, *Spiritual Leadership: A Practical Guide for Today's Church Leaders* (Lithonia, GA: Orman Press, 2000), 65.

educational ministries also often refer to the fact that every believer should be a “witness for Christ.” In the Baptist faith tradition, once individuals believe and accept Jesus Christ into their hearts and into their lives, they are baptized and encouraged to grow through studying God’s word, worshiping the Lord, and establishing a relationship with God and others. The word “disciple” means to be a follower or learner of Christ. In the Church, Christian education ministries are provided to assist individuals to enhance their spiritual growth and development.

The scripture that is most often used for discipleship is the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, in which Jesus commissions his disciples by proclaiming, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go into all nations and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.” Some translations state, “Go into all the nations and teach,” and others, “Go into all the world and preach.” All of the various translations have the words “go” and “baptize” in common. It is generally accepted that the commission involves “going,” “teaching” and “baptizing.” The statement that is most significant is that Jesus promised, “I will be with you always.” Therefore, the believer will be empowered by the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus Christ, to fulfill this great commission. This Great Commission is found in all four gospels, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; and John 17:18; 20:21.

This scripture is the “heart” of Christian education and the teaching ministry. However, it can be applied to other ministries as well. When the ordination of a pastor or minister is performed this passage is often quoted. When missionaries are commissioned

and sent into the mission field, this passage is used. Additionally, it is also used to emphasize the charge to all Christians as the primary purpose of the Christian faith, to promote the cause of God and the gospel of Christ. This commission also extends into the ministry of evangelism and outreach. Today, there are a myriad of ways that this commission is implemented. A definition of evangelism developed by the American Baptist Churches USA states:

The joyous witness of the People of God to the redeeming love of God, urging all to repent and to be reconciled to God and each other through faith in Jesus Christ who lived, died, and was raised from the dead, so that being made new and empowered by the Holy Spirit, believers are incorporated as disciples into the church for worship, fellowship, nurture and engagement in God's mission of evangelization and liberation within society and creation, signifying the Kingdom which is present and yet to come.<sup>9</sup>

The primary task of disciple development is to educate and empower individuals in order to equip them to become followers of Christ. The primary goal is maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:13-14). As Christ is the center, disciples are intricately connected to the Church and community by their level of commitment. Areas of growth for discipleship generally include: growth in faith, giving, service, the Word, truth, worship, and witness. Initially, this growth should occur within the context of the church so that disciples will become equipped to go beyond the walls of church in order to “make disciples” in other locales. Discipleship involves training, nurturing, and love, with Christ always at the center. In actuality, one cannot be involved in evangelism without discipleship; and one cannot be engaged in discipleship without evangelism (John 8:31, 32; John 15:7). The local church must spend time developing disciples and providing opportunities for growth within the body.

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<sup>9</sup> Policy Statement from American Baptist Churches, USA, as quoted in Woods, *Congregational MegaTrends*, 39.

Today, many churches have developed small group ministries as a tool for promoting discipleship. Discipleship groups also include Sunday school, Bible study, mission, various ministry groups, worship, as well as places of employment. There are multiple avenues which may encompass the task of discipleship. The nature of small groups is conducive towards developing disciples because the process involves sharing and applying the Word of God. Some people are more willing to share in a small group setting rather than within a large group. Several churches have implemented discipleship groups and Bible study within other auxiliaries or ministries during the regularly scheduled meeting times, such as trustees' meetings, choir, women's ministry, men's ministry, usher's ministry, and the like.

This section will review those biblical passages that directly address the practice of "making disciples." Jesus called the first disciples and commissioned them by saying, "Follow me." Here, a disciple is a "follower" or "learner" of Christ. Jesus gave several models for the disciple-making process. One strategy that was obvious throughout his ministry was that Jesus was very relational. Jesus was often found conversing with people in various locations and conditions, while teaching and sharing a word of truth, such as the woman at the well (John 4:1-26), walking along the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-33); in a boat on the water (Luke 5:1-11); on the mountain (Matthew 5); during periods of sickness (Matthew 8:14-16), and bereavement (John 11), and many others. Disciple-making can involve formal communication, informal conversation, or some of both. Jesus was engaged in conversations with men, women, and children. Jesus' model also provides an example that the disciple-making process should be intergenerational.

In Chapter 2, the history of the Sunday school movement was presented, portraying the beginning stages of promoting the gospel message and the disciple-making process from England to the United States. Bible lessons were taught along with other skills for growth and development. The Sunday school movement of “going into all the world” began to lose momentum as secular schools were established and local churches were organized. However, local churches continue to maintain the teaching ministry as a priority. This is evident from the small churches to the mega-churches; there is generally Sunday school, Bible study, discipleship classes or a focus on teaching within the context of the preached word within the worship service. In *The Soul of Ministry*, Anderson offers the following critique of the disciple-making process: “Too often we attempt to build our discipling programs on conformity to rules, disciplines, and control-minded religious personalities. Jesus will have none of that! His discipleship is grounded on the obedience issuing from love, servanthood growing out of sonship, and freedom grounded in fulfillment of God’s purpose for his life.”<sup>10</sup>

In *Leading Congregational Change*, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr highlight a local church as an example of a congregation that has addressed improving spiritual and relational vitality among members within the congregation. It was reported that this church adopted the following vision statement:

We exist to make as many disciples for Christ as possible using the most effective means available. Making disciples encompasses winning the lost to Christ; baptizing new believers and assimilating them into the local church; teaching, training, nurturing, and equipping all believers for personal growth and for ministry; and sending out believers to be reproducers in the world.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 139.

Previously this church had measured attendance at discipleship training courses and events, but had not tried to assess whether these programs were fulfilling their intended purposes. Later, the church identified seven characteristics that they considered to be indicators of a mature disciple. These included behavior regarding: 1) corporate worship, 2) personal daily worship, 3) financial stewardship, 4) service in a specific ministry, 5) involvement in a small group, 6) relationships with unchurched persons, and 7) daily prayer life.<sup>12</sup> Although these factors are important and generally involved within the process of discipleship development, it would be most difficult to measure or assess Christian maturity among members within a given congregation based upon these seven indicators. This practice raises questions concerning the responsibility of the local church to serve as a “measuring rod” for determining an individual’s growth. First of all, whether or not it is possible to measure Christian maturity should be considered. This is the issue Anderson addresses in his critique of current discipleship programs and methods involving “conformity to rules.” However, all of the seven indicators are significant components of becoming a mature disciple and of gauging one’s spiritual growth and development. The indicators are also emphasized within various Christian education ministries.

In order to comprehend the challenges involved in discipling, reaching out and connecting with people in urban cities, Ray Bakke, in his book, *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today’s World*, reveals that people generally have four networks of “primary” relationships: 1) biological – family and extended family, 2) geographical – where one lives, 3) vocational – where one works, and 4) recreational – where one plays

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<sup>12</sup> Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 139.

or socializes.<sup>13</sup> When considering the nature of the local church for various people within a congregation, for some people the church is considered to be the extended family, a place where they are able to work, and also where they socialize. Thus, various types of interactions can occur within a local church during the course of a week. Unfortunately, in many urban areas people do not know their neighbors and neighborhoods are very transient, especially during times of economic instability. Bakke stresses the point that urban people want, and hunger for, fellowship which is high quality and lasting.<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps the primary factor can be attributed to the success of small group ministries in many churches because the format enables participants to develop personal relationships with others. This factor also further highlights the recent emphasis on the need for spiritual and relational vitality within the life of the congregation. Jesus modeled spiritual and relational vitality throughout his life and ministry. There are many examples in the New Testament which can be studied for the purpose of emulating his methods within the church, family, community and daily activities.

Several years ago the American Baptist Churches USA made the decision to change the name of its “Educational Ministries” to “Discipleship Ministries.” The following comparison was presented to assist members in comprehending the rationale for this transition. First, it was acknowledged that there is a significant overlap between Christian education and discipleship. However, Christian education is often seen more narrowly than discipleship and Christian education often focuses on programmatic efforts.

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<sup>13</sup> Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Discipleship often includes elements of the church's life such as worship and spiritual growth that are not included in Christian education.<sup>15</sup>

The traditional viewpoint of Christian education is that it is only focused on programs or curriculum taught within a specific class. However, the term was expanded in the 1990s to include the total life of the believer and the local church. Discipleship has always been embedded within Christian education to the point that the two entities cannot be separated. When the term "discipleship" was solely used by American Baptist Churches/National Ministries, as the term replaced "Christian education," there was a great deal of resistance within the denomination. Therefore, the name of the department was revised and now is "Discipleship and Christian Education."

The local church must continue to educate, as stated in the Great Commission, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Education lies at the heart of discipleship. Hilliard states,

A believer is simply a person who has trusted Christ for salvation; a disciple is a well informed (but always learning), well-trained (but always training), and disciplined believer who is totally committed to following Christ in everyday life. Aside from personal commitment, the main thing that distinguishes a disciple from a simple believer is education. The church's commission is to make disciples, and the best way to do that is through a commitment to organized, comprehensive Christian Education, whether it is Sunday School, doctrinal and theological studies, or practical instruction such as job training or seminars on such things as marriage or financial planning.<sup>16</sup>

In concluding this section, the poem by Teresa of Avila titled, "Christ Has No Body," captures the major essence of the disciple-making process.

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks

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<sup>15</sup> Training Time workshop by Jeff Jones, National Ministries

<sup>16</sup> Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 49-50.

Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Teresa of Avila, "Christ Has No Body," Journey with Jesus.net, [http://www.journeywithjesus.net/PoemsAndPrayers/Teresa\\_Of\\_Avila\\_Christ\\_Has\\_No\\_Body.shtml](http://www.journeywithjesus.net/PoemsAndPrayers/Teresa_Of_Avila_Christ_Has_No_Body.shtml) (accessed October 13, 2009).

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

#### **Christian Education as Liberation Theology**

Christian education is the process of educating, empowering, transforming and liberating the people of God. All of these components are active and inter-related within a perspective of liberation theology as experienced through Christian education. The theme of freedom or liberation can be discovered through readings in the Old Testament and the New Testament. In Genesis 2:16-17, God endows humankind with freedom of choice or “free will,” as stated by the following: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Therefore, a major thrust of Christian education is to educate and empower the people of God in order that humanity will be equipped to make responsible choices in life. It is a constant lesson to internalize the fact that God will never circumvent humanity’s freedom of conscience. Although God desires the best for humanity, human beings have the right to make a conscious decision to follow God’s Word and God’s ways of living. If one leaves God out of the equation of one’s life, it will be impossible to experience the fullness of life. Instead, one may experience an unexplainable void. However, Christian education

provides opportunities for people to learn how to exist within this realm of freedom given to humanity from God. This should not be interpreted to mean that people will always choose the right or the best path; however, Scripture provides guidance to assist in the decision-making process.

In the biblical narratives of Exodus, the liberation and freedom motifs are highly prevalent. Moses was chosen by God as the leader to deliver ancient Israel out of bondage from the land of Egypt and a life of oppression inflicted upon them by Pharaoh. God is revealed as a deliverer who stands against oppression, injustice, and the unnecessary suffering of God's people. Forrest E. Harris, in *Ministry for Social Crisis: Theology and Praxis in the Black Church Tradition*, examines the liberation tradition of African American churches. He determines that "there exist a theology and liberative praxis that has the possibility to shape social ministry for African American churches."<sup>1</sup> He suggests that this liberation tradition should be reflected within the various ministries of these churches. According to Harris, "The word *praxis* is defined as action in reflection. Responsible praxis (action in reflection) is necessary for raising new questions and developing a method of ministry for social transformation. Such action and reflection creates an opportunity for developing a network of ministries that enables the African American churches to realize their full potential as agents of social change."<sup>2</sup>

African American churches identify with the Exodus narratives by remembering the harsh struggles endured to obtain freedom and equality for the race prior to the Emancipation Proclamation and the continuous pursuit for justice, equality, and liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> Forrest E. Harris, Sr., *Ministry for Social Crisis: Theology and Praxis in the Black Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Harris states “The biblical story of freedom, particularly the liberation motif in the Hebrew Bible, was the most important resource for affirming a liberated black future.”<sup>3</sup> African American churches also acknowledge that it was the power of God which delivered enslaved people from centuries of oppression. African American churches point to the Civil Rights movement under the leadership of Dr. Martin King, Jr. as another major period within the history of the race that is reflective of the liberation/survival tradition. African Americans emphasize that the history of the struggles and victories should be told to the children from generation to generation. This parallels the Jewish faith tradition discussed in Chapter 3, in which the elders were instructed to pass on the history related to God delivering the Israelites out of bondage and oppression by the hand of Pharaoh. The attribute of God as a liberator is proclaimed in sermonic form, songs, Bible study, Sunday school lessons and also African American history and culture classes within the Church. In addition, liberation history is always the major focal point during Black History month celebrations throughout this country within churches, communities and also public schools.

Gayraud Wilmore, in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, declares that “the *telos* (end-goal) of both the survival and liberation traditions is freedom that leads to changing oppressive conditions that deny human wholeness.”<sup>4</sup> Theologically, Wilmore explains, “The black church’s liberation and survival tradition embraces the gospel as a mandate for humanization. Furthermore, the gospel focuses on full human development

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<sup>3</sup> Harris, *Ministry for Social Crisis*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and Hope* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), 94, as quoted in Harris, *Ministry for Social Crisis*, 22.

(inner and outer liberation) under the freedom of God. Liberation from oppression is commensurate with God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus Christ is exalted among the Christian population as the ultimate liberator who offers humanity the gift of salvation that encompasses love, deliverance, forgiveness from sin, and hope for the future. As a liberator, Jesus empowers and enables the believer to move from death (that is, a sinful state) to a new life guided by Christ that embraces eternal life. In the context of liberation theology, as Jesus liberates the believer, the believer in turn has the responsibility to introduce others to the ultimate liberator. The Scripture that promotes liberation theology can be found in Luke 4:18-19, as Jesus declared: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set as liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." This passage is also proclaimed in Isaiah 61:1, 2. This Scripture serves as the catalyst for the mission of the Church and the purpose for the existence of all of its ministries. This narrative highlights the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit to empower believers to fulfill the mandates of Christ. In the field of Christian education with a focus on liberation theology, topics for discussion might include an assessment of the varying needs within a designated community, including: homelessness, level of poverty, unemployment, children, crime, violence, school drop-out rates, environmental issues, and others. After identifying the target areas, strategies can be developed to engage in ministering to the community. Liberation theology is concerned for the whole person within the local church and the surrounding community.

The study of Scripture is a liberating endeavor as indicated in John 8:31-32:

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<sup>5</sup> Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian*, 94, as quoted in Harris, *Ministry for Social Crisis*, 23.

Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, if you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered Him, “we are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, you will be made free?” Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

The Christian community is in a continuous pursuit “in search of truth.” This passage addresses the major Christian beliefs embedded within the gifts of salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation, regeneration, and many others. These aspects of liberation are given freely as a result of God’s love through Christ Jesus. The special task of African American church leaders today is to continue to proclaim the message that God, through the embodiment of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, is a liberator.

The Bible provides instructions for living a life in pursuit of freedom, equality and justice for humankind. This freedom is both individual and communal, and connects the Church to the broader community for the purpose of fulfilling God’s ministry. Historically, the African American Church’s theology of liberation began with the determination to survive. The Church must continue in this model of praxis if it is to offer alternative strategies for liberation and self-determination. The biblical message of human salvation that emphasizes the right of freedom for all persons is the vision on which ministry in the African American Church is historically and theologically based. A continuing examination of biblical images of freedom is important in the contemporary African American Church’s quest for social empowerment and transformation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York Oxford University Press, 1977) 33, as quoted in Harris, *Ministry for Social Crisis*, 27.

## Christian Education as Practical Theology

Christian education as a discipline can be considered a significant component towards the application of practical theology. When examining the trends of Christian education, it is noticed that this ministry certainly has evolved over the years; beginning with the Sunday school model of the late 1700s to the twentieth-century concept known as practical theology. Years ago the Church did not associate teaching and learning Scripture in the church environment as “doing theology,” although the doctrines of the Church were learned and discussed, i.e., God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Church, and others. When placed in the context of practical theology this indicates that it is possible for children to be exposed to the formation of theological concepts at an early age, even beginning in preschool. However, most people in churches today are not aware of this evolution within the field of study.

Ray Anderson, in his book, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, presents several profound definitions and explanations centered on the scope of practical theology within ministry. These concepts have the potential to significantly transform ministry within the twenty-first century. The following definitions and terms are displayed in order to comprehend the depth and scope of this discipline.

The first is “practical theology.” Anderson provides the following definition:

Practical theology is a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church and the world and God’s purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge. Practical theology’s primary purpose is to ensure that the church’s public proclamations and praxis in the world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God’s continuing mission to the world and in so doing

authentically addresses the contemporary context into which the church seeks to minister.”<sup>7</sup>

This definition is synonymous with the overall mission of Christian education. In the ministry of Christian education, attempts are implemented to develop ministries that are biblically based, Christ-centered, and culturally relevant. As people are engaged in studying Scripture they often wrestle with the meaning of Scripture and attempt to apply biblical principles to modern-day experiences within society. Revelations and insights are obtained as people continue to grow and develop in knowledge, wisdom, spirit and truth.

Anderson also introduces the term “Christopraxis” as a postmodern term necessary for understanding practical theology. Christopraxis is defined as “the continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> Anderson reveals that he taught his students that “every act of ministry teaches something about God. Whether we are aware of it or not, each act of ministry will be interpreted by others as revealing something about the nature and purpose of God.”<sup>9</sup> The ongoing pursuit of Christian education when engaged in ministry, study, and reflection is to discover the following: what is learned about the nature and purpose of God; what is learned about the nature and purpose of God as revealed through Jesus Christ; and what is learned about the nature of God in relationship to humanity.

Anderson explains that the ongoing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Spirit of Christ constitutes the praxis of God’s mission to the world

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<sup>7</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

through the church and its ministry.<sup>10</sup> The word “praxis” is distinguished from the word “practice,” which is the application of theory. “Practice” tends to refer to tasks which carry out a plan or actions that relate theory to a task, i.e. a physician having a “practice.” “Praxis” involves tasks, but in the performing of the tasks, meaning is discovered, not merely applied.<sup>11</sup> As the word of God is studied and experienced, the discovery of meaning and interpretation becomes a lifelong pursuit. The definition of “praxis” was also discussed in the preceding section focused on liberation theology. Harris defines “praxis” as “action in reflection” which leads to raising questions and also has the potential for the discovery of new ministries.<sup>12</sup>

When developing ministries in the local church, quite often the focus is initiated based upon the needs of the people and the focus remains to fulfill human needs. Information is gathered from needs based surveys or questionnaires and the goals are developed based upon feedback received. However, Anderson suggests that priorities should shift to ensure that God becomes the point of departure rather than human needs. He writes,

Jesus’ ministry was always first and foremost a ministry to God on behalf of the world. It was not the ministry of Jesus to the world on behalf of God that made him a servant, but his ministry to God on behalf of the world. . . . The needs of the world did not set the agenda for the ministry of Jesus. The need from the side of the world did not take precedence over his commitment to serve God. His ministry was first of all directed to God and not to the world. Jesus drew human need into his own ministry of service to God. There is no ministry that belongs to the church or to members of the body of Christ that is not already grounded in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>12</sup> Harris, *Ministry for Social Crisis*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 41-42.

As God becomes the focal point, this should bring about a heightened sense of awareness that the realm of ministry is broader than one is capable of envisioning. When the focus is upon God this leaves room for additional insights, guidance and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. This perspective has the possibility to stimulate an increase in the level of commitment, dedication, determination and perseverance of leaders and other persons in order to fulfill the purposes given by God, through Christ, as empowered by the Holy Spirit for the expansion of ministry within the Church and the world.

### **Missional Christian Education – “Beyond the Walls”**

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the scriptural basis for Christian education is Matthew 28:19-20, “Go into all the world and make disciples, preaching, teaching and baptizing,” and this passage is also the foundational Scripture for mission development. Another scriptural reference proclaimed is Acts 1:8, “And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” According to the American Baptist Churches USA mission statement, the local congregation has always been the fundamental unit of mission.<sup>14</sup> Mission in the local community is considered the “Jerusalem” ministry. Mission in the region is the “Judean” ministry. Local church missions reach beyond ministry to its members and the surrounding community into the state or region of the country in which it is located. Mission within the U.S. is the “Judea and Samaria” ministry. This includes Discipleship/Educational Ministries and National Ministries. The call to mission is not completed until the whole world has heard the Good News. Jesus puts no limits on how far the Gospel should go. Mission in other countries is

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<sup>14</sup> American Baptist Churches USA website, “What is Missiology?” [www.abc-usa.org/WhoWeAre/Missions/OurMission/Missiology](http://www.abc-usa.org/WhoWeAre/Missions/OurMission/Missiology) (accessed November 25, 2009).

the fulfillment of ministry “to the ends of the earth,” which is represented by global missions, also known as International Ministries.

American Baptist churches have been involved in mission since 1814. The denomination has developed the following passion statement for mission: “to see the glory of God revealed in all the earth; to see Jesus Christ proclaimed as Savior and Lord to all people and nations; to see churches started and growing; to see the renewal for God’s creation; and to see God’s justice and peace reign in all the world.”<sup>15</sup> Every Christian has the responsibility to be a witness for Christ at home, at work, in places of leisure, or in other places. As believers are called to be disciples of Christ, believers are also called to be engaged in mission. Another Scriptural reference used as a guide for mission is Matthew 25:35-36, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles is one of the most ethnically diverse regions within the denomination (ABCUSA) and has an ongoing mission emphasis throughout the greater Los Angeles area. Therefore, the denomination has implemented several dynamic leadership training seminars and conferences for local church leaders and members. This section will highlight the work of the denomination to assist its leaders in understanding the current cultural changes taking place in America, with implications of these changes to ministry within the local churches and the denomination.

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<sup>15</sup> ABCUSA International Ministries, brochure titled, “American Baptist Mission,” September 2002.

## The ABCUSA Los Angeles Mission Conference

In March 2005, the American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles Mission Conference was held. The format of this conference was based upon the following presupposition:

Mission and the way churches will implement mission in the future is changing. Many people are no longer content to send money and let others do the work. A new generation is emerging that wants to get involved and personally be a part of God's continuing redemptive plan in the world. *Missions Reloaded* was designed to prepare churches and individuals to respond to this present day reality both globally and locally as we move into the post modern era.

The challenge was presented to local churches to have an increasing focus towards becoming "mission minded," while focusing on the needs within the surrounding community and worldwide, as opposed to solely concentrating on members within a particular church. It was emphasized that God loves the whole world, not only the Church. The emphasis was placed on local (home missions) and global (international missions). Many churches today have an inward focus and agenda which concentrates all of their energy and resources towards internal programs/ministries, maintaining or developing the church building/s, and providing for the needs of those within the congregation, who are active and contributors to the church's budget.

A missional church places the needs of others as a priority for ministry. A missional church includes an outward vision and agenda. The Great Commission impels believers "to go into all the world," not to remain behind the walls of a church building. A missional church reaches out to its neighbors and to the world in servant ministries which are transformational because they are the ongoing work of the Spirit in our midst. This is definitely a challenge in today's society of self gratification, where people are more concerned with self preservation as opposed to helping their neighbors. However,

when a church develops an outward focus, the church will be on the path towards becoming the church which Christ intended for his disciples.

The conference workshop leaders were Dr. Kenneth Fong, Senior Pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles, and Rev. Charles H. Jones, Acting Executive Director, International Ministries, ABCUSA. The workshop challenged the churches in attendance to move beyond their comfort zones and to open their eyes to the needs within the surrounding communities, cities, and worldwide, in order to become agents of transformation. It is imperative for churches to develop new ways of being the people of God as the culture continues to rapidly change and the church must be receptive to the movement of the Spirit of God. As the prophet writes in Isaiah 43:19, “[God is] doing a new thing . . . do you not perceive it?”

The greatest challenge for the local church is to find the balance between the inward and outward focal points. The church cannot totally reject the needs that are prevalent within its respective body; for there are many needs. The body has to be nurtured, strengthened, and developed on the inside before it can be an effective witness on the outside. This parallels one’s personal relationship with Christ; unless an individual has developed a personal relationship with Christ and continues to deepen this relationship, the individual will not be able to help others to mature and grow as believers in Christ. The problem is not necessarily having an inward concern for the members of a particular body, but rather a lack of acknowledgement that the Church is called to fulfill “greater works” of ministry. The following questions might be considered for reflection and the expansion of mission: 1) How can a church take the best of the traditional or past ministries and blend them into the vast possibilities the present has to offer? 2) What is

worth preserving and what should be relinquished? 3) How can a church reprioritize present agendas and motivate people to get on board to risk a new thing? and 4) What are the unmet needs within the community?

In order to determine the extent to which individual churches were involved in mission, every church within the American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles region was invited to complete a survey to share how the church is engaged in mission to advance God's Kingdom within the community and around the world. Figure 1 displays the collected responses.

Figure 1. How ABCUSA Churches in Los Angeles Are Involved in Mission

- serving noon meals with the Lord's Kitchen at the Salvation Army
- prayer walks through church neighborhood; outreach to local college
- ABCLA mission trips
- mission to South Africa
- supporting after school tutoring programs
- toy and blanket drives at a homeless intervention shelter
- working with unwed mothers at local high school
- weekly meals offered to the needy and homeless in the community
- prison ministry
- partnering with other mission agencies
- neighborhood outreach and evangelism teams
- computer labs to serve the community
- support of missionaries
- youth ministry outreach in local schools
- providing shelter for abused women and children
- providing shelter for homeless
- day care and preschool programs for the community

Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles has been engaged in mission beyond the walls of the church for many years. Its ministries include a child development center; a preschool program; shelters for homeless women and children; affordable housing for

large families, the handicapped and the elderly; a credit union with financial literacy classes; investment opportunities through an economic development corporation; estate planning seminars; positive parenting classes; grief recovery classes; opportunities for employment and skill development; community health seminars; and partnership with Los Angeles Food Bank.

### Continuing the Mission “Beyond the Walls”

A few years ago, American Baptists gathered in locations throughout the various denominational regions to discern God’s vision for the denomination. The vision that emerged “affirmed a radical call to personal discipleship, lived out through an ethnically diverse community of faith, created through the power of God’s redemptive love, embracing the world as neighbor through a multitude of servant ministries.”<sup>16</sup> This vision has a missional focus which is reflected in the responses received from the local churches. Although it is observed that many churches are involved in missions beyond the walls of their respective church buildings, there remains room for continued growth and expansion. During this conference it was mentioned that several American Baptist international missionaries would be returning to the U.S. as a result of voluntary recalls brought about by economic uncertainties. The local churches were urged to establish missionary partnerships in order to further support international missionaries.

As the Church continues to witness a changing context of ministry within the twenty-first century, there is a need for continued mission education within the local church. Many of the faithful men and women who are continuing to promote the mission

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<sup>16</sup> American Baptist Churches USA website, “Vision Statement,” [www.abc-usa.org/WhoWeAre/Vision](http://www.abc-usa.org/WhoWeAre/Vision) (accessed June 28, 2009).

of the Church have been serving for many years. The younger generation will need exposure to the biblical basis, historical foundations, and cultural relevancy through resources and education. The mission societies and mission circles have disappeared in many churches today and denominations such as American Baptist Churches and others are finding creative ways to continue to promote leadership development for missions. However, the younger generation is often missing from these events.

During this year of economic uncertainty, rising unemployment and mortgage foreclosures, the needs within churches and communities have escalated worldwide. As a result of these realities, the mission budget has decreased significantly in local churches and regional and national denominational bodies as well. Most churches will continue to be faithful to the mission given by God, through Christ, as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Another area that has to be addressed by the local churches is the present state of public education. Recently, there have been numerous conversations taking place concerning the need for churches to increase their involvement with establishing relationships with neighboring schools. Some churches have developed after-school programs that include tutoring, college and career day, mentoring, and offering support by donating school supplies or books for students. There are many avenues for implementing mission beyond the walls of the church, and this is a ministry that could involve diverse ages from the local church. Congregations should continuously seek new ways to significantly impact the community as the Church represents the body of Christ on behalf of God to the world.

CHAPTER 5  
CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

**Christian Education in the African American Church**

According to Juan Williams and Quinton Dixie in *This Far by Faith*, “Black Americans may choose one religious tradition over another – they may even invent new forms of worship – but they always remain a people of faith. At the start of a new century, black Americans still hold firm to that unyielding faith of their fathers and mothers.”<sup>1</sup> In the twenty-first century, Christian education continues to thrive as the “heartbeat” of the Christian Church within the African American community. It remains the only ministry that has the ability to significantly impact and nurture people across their life spans, from preschool through senior adulthood.

Although the ministry today is comprised of varying structures, from the traditional to contemporary modes of operation, the *telos* remains consistent. The ultimate goal is to “make disciples” through the process of educating persons towards the salvific knowledge of God as revealed through the life, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. This goal embodies the definition of Christian education that is emphasized throughout this ministry focus paper, which is to educate, empower,

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Williams and Quinton Dixie, *This Far by Faith*, (New York: William Morrow, 2003), 302.

transform and liberate the people of God. The goal as stated also serves as the impetus for the continuation of the educational ministry. The discipline remains to be the primary teaching, learning and training arm of the Church. This is evidenced by the fact that most African American churches, from small churches to mega-churches, maintain a Sunday school or a church school. The Bible remains to be the primary text utilized and most churches use a curriculum comprised of uniform lessons produced by several publishers as a supplemental resource. Furthermore, these classes and curriculum are provided for adults and children. Many churches also maintain mid-week prayer and Bible study, although these ministries are primarily organized for adults. It is well known that people who participate in the ministries of Christian education report continuous spiritual growth in their knowledge of God's word and their relationship with God.

Today there are many avenues presented within the African American Church to promote spiritual growth. The ministry of Christian education is multi-faceted and no longer restricted to Sunday school and Bible study. However, many members continue to embrace the traditional viewpoint. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, churches that are connected to their respective denominational bodies generally implement the ministries promoted by the denomination. This has led to the expansion of educational ministries to include preaching, worship, music, art, drama, dance, healthcare, social justice, camping, audio-visual, recreation, mission, fellowship, culture, and so on. Some of the more conservative churches would not consider ministries devoid of a Bible study class as a legitimate representation of Christian education. However, Jesus modeled the fact that a "teachable moment" may occur at any time in various locations. Several models of

Christian education ministries being implemented in the African American church community will be featured in the following section.

### An Africentric Approach to Christianity

In the African American culture, an Africentric approach to Christianity has been implemented in many congregations. In *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry*, J. Deotis Roberts introduces several dynamic africentric models for ministry. The term “africentrism” was developed by Professor Molefi Asante at Temple University, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> Roberts explains, “Africentrism seeks to interpret our history and reconstruct our culture. It does not rest with slavery or with our ancestry in West Africa; it takes us back to classical African history in Ethiopia and especially Egypt.”<sup>3</sup> This perspective includes an in-depth study of the Black presence in the Bible that has been presented by several African American scholars, including Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Martin, Renita Weems, Randell Bailey, Vincent L. Wimbush, and others.<sup>4</sup> A holistic view of Christian education in the African American Church includes this topic within Sunday school, Bible studies, and other ministries. Many of the African American Christian education publications have also included an Africentric perspective within the curriculum in view of the fact that biblical scholars have disclosed this significant scholarly research.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

When included within children and youth ministries, africentrism has the potential to elevate levels of self worth and self esteem by emphasizing the fact that all persons are valued because all are made in the image of God. Roberts highlights these concepts in the following statement:

Africentrism assures black youth that they come from a noble heritage. They need not be filled with self-hate. It is true that we were slaves and the shadow of slavery still lingers in the form of discrimination. However, one can still affirm a sense of self-worth and move forward against the odds. By combining the Christian faith claim that we are made in the image of God with a sense of belonging to a noble race, we may be able to lift up our heads and aspire for a better and brighter future.<sup>5</sup>

The ongoing task as members of the body of Christ is to assure all persons that they are valued and they are made in God's image. "God loves you and so do I" must not be a trite statement but an expression of real compassion, supported by an effort to uplift those who have lost their sense of worth.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the Christian Church and its ministries, africentrism is interpreted as being biblically based, Christ-centered, Africentric and culturally relevant.

Today, one can find many examples and models of africentricity within the Black Church environment i.e. music, dance, drama, poetry, prayers, symbols, rituals, images, preaching, studies to include the African presence in the Bible, attire, special celebrations, stories, rites of passage, lectures, and celebrations of Kwanzaa, and the like. Some emphasize africentrism more than others; however, Christian education continues to search for additional ways and methods for its inclusion. Another area to highlight for africentricity is the inclusion of mission education and mission projects to the continent of Africa, along with intercultural exchanges developed with missionaries and visitors

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<sup>5</sup> Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

from Africa. Most of these arrangements generally occur through partnerships established by the denomination or other mission agencies. Some churches sponsor excursions to the continent for educational purposes as well as for pleasure. Several members from Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles accompanied the pastor, Dr. William S. Epps, to the Baptist World Alliance general council meeting that was held in Accra, Ghana in July 2007. Several churches and mission outreach ministries have supported the establishment of churches, schools, orphanages, and communities across the continent.

Several African American churches, families and communities celebrate Kwanzaa, an Africentric holiday that occurs the last week of December, between Christmas and New Year's Day. Kwanzaa was initiated by Maulana Ron-Karenga, a political activist and a cultural anthropologist. Roberts describes the holiday:

Kwanzaa means “first” in Swahili, for the first fruits of the year. Each night a candle is lit representing one of the seven principles of *Nguzo Saba*, of the holiday season. Karenga selected these principles because they are common in African history. Swahili, the most common African language, is used to identify them: *Umoja* - unity, *Kujichagulia* - self-determination, *Ujima* - collective work and responsibility, *Nia* - purpose, *Kuumba* - creativity, *Imani* – faith, and *Ujamaa* – cooperative economics. The purpose of Kwanzaa is to build family, community, and culture.<sup>7</sup>

Roberts addresses the celebration of Kwanzaa in detail and explores conflicting viewpoints that have surfaced regarding Christians celebrating Kwanzaa. The controversy stems from the fact that Kwanzaa is celebrated by Christians and non-Christians, which also includes the Muslim community. However, some Christians have selected to celebrate Kwanzaa instead of Christmas. After investigating the practice of Kwanzaa, Roberts concludes that if Christmas is properly understood and observed, there is no danger that a mere cultural event can replace or supplant Christmas in the life experience

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<sup>7</sup> Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 74.

of a devout Christian. Kwanzaa can never replace the redemptive significance of Christmas. Nonetheless, African American Christians can embrace the African cultural heritage celebrated in Kwanzaa. African American's can benefit from nurturing youth on the values Kwanzaa promotes. Kwanzaa can be scheduled after a proper celebration of Christmas. Roberts declares that Kwanzaa does not take the place of the celebration of Christmas.<sup>8</sup>

In churches where Kwanzaa is celebrated, this does not diminish the celebration of Christmas because, as stated previously, Kwanzaa is perceived to be a biblically based, Christ-centered, Africentric and culturally relevant. The youth ministry at Second Baptist Church celebrates Kwanzaa during the annual Agape Fellowship, which is a Christmas dinner and gift exchange. As seven candles are lit, excerpts related to the seven principles of Kwanzaa are read aloud. Afterwards, the youth engage in a discussion surrounding the meaning and application of the seven principles of Kwanzaa.

Roberts presents further details towards emphasizing the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Personal and communal awareness are two dimensions of afri-centricity. Significantly, three of the seven principles of Kwanzaa – self determination (*kujichagulia*), purpose (*nia*), and faith (*imani*) – focus upon personal transformation.<sup>9</sup> When viewed from a Christian perspective, the Church is concerned about personal and communal growth and development which are embodied in the concepts of self determination, purpose, and faith. However, the Christian faith has God as the point of

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<sup>8</sup> Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

departure, as revealed through Jesus Christ, and Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit, which leads to personal transformation.

The remaining four principles of Kwanzaa lift up life in community. The principles remaining are unity, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, and creativity. *Umoja* (unity) indicates the need to work together in families, communities, nation, and race. *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility) suggests that African Americans team together to solve problems and to make their communities safe and productive places. *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics) refers to economic development, for instance, opening stores and other businesses within the community and aiding each other to improve the community's financial position. *Kuumba* (creativity) taps into African Americans' giftedness in the arts and urges them to use their talents and skills to make their communities better and more beautiful places in which to live. The African proverb, "I am because we are; because we are, I am," is a powerful expression for the group consciousness encouraged by these principles.<sup>10</sup> These principles also highlight the mission and purpose of the Christian Church. The Christian Church has ongoing ministries related to the principles of unity, collective work and responsibility, creativity, and the development of cooperative economics.

Roberts declares that "there is no reason why this communal notion of African life cannot enrich and empower the church for African American Christians. The church should be a caring, sharing community in which everybody is somebody. There is no reason why this sense of family should be locked up in the church. It should spill over

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<sup>10</sup> Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 84-85.

into the community as we witness to ‘all sorts and conditions of people.’”<sup>11</sup> This communal notion of life was also embedded within the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as believers were instructed to love their neighbors and commissioned to “go into all the world and make disciples.” The lifestyle of the early Christian Church was concerned with communal outreach as stated throughout the book of Acts; as believers witnessed to others the Church multiplied in numbers. Roberts continues, “The celebration of Kwanzaa illustrates how Africentrism offers means by which Christian ministries can address personal and community needs. Two conclusions may be drawn from examining Christmas and Kwanzaa: First, the values, ideals and celebration of Kwanzaa do not conflict with the Christian; and second, the celebration of Kwanzaa may be a useful ministry to African Americans.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Congregational Analysis**

When developing new ministries for the twenty-first century it is of critical importance to implement a congregational analysis. This analysis should entail a review of existing ministries to determine if the present ministries reflect a holistic focus. A holistic focus includes various components experienced in the life of the church, family and community, which include: spiritual, mission/global, physical/health, culture/history, education, technology and social/fellowship components. These areas can be used as a guide when developing a congregational analysis and also for establishing goals and objectives within the ministry of Christian education at Second Baptist Church.

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<sup>11</sup> Roberts, *Africentric Christianity*, 86.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

At Second Baptist Church, the following ministries are continuously or have recently been implemented. In regards to “spiritual” ministries, occurring regularly are dynamic preaching and weekly worship services, Sunday school, Bible study, choirs, prayer, grief and bereavement support, Vacation Bible School, and an annual retreat sponsored by the women’s ministry. Within “mission/global” ministries, the community relations commission serves lunch to AIDS patients in Los Angeles, Pastor and Mrs. Epps traveled to the Netherlands to attend the Baptist World Alliance Annual Conference and General Council meeting, the community relations commission has a recycling program to raise funds to send to Africa; and support was provided for a member to participate in mission trip to Swaziland. In regards to “physical/health” ministries, occurring regularly are weekly aerobics classes; the senior ministry sponsored a seminar on foot disease, diabetes and related issues; and the men’s ministry held an annual William S. Epps Golf Classic. Within “culture/history” ministries, regularly occurring are a Black history and cultural awareness class; and the senior ministry sponsored a theatre outing to attend the play *Crowns*. Within “education” ministries, financial/business seminars are held regularly; the men’s ministry hosted a guest speaker from the Los Angeles Urban League in conjunction with annual men’s fellowship for Men’s Day activities; the church holds a music and performing arts conservatory; and the church runs the Children’s Center, which is the early childhood educational program for the community. In regards to “technology” ministries, the church maintains a website and the Sunday worship service is broadcast via radio and Internet. And in regards to “social” ministries, there are opportunities for social or relational interactions within various

ministries. These are a few examples of the ongoing holistic ministries at Second Baptist Church. The succeeding paragraphs will highlight specific age-level ministries.

### Age-level Ministries

In search for the new, congregations sometimes overlook those components of present ministries that are being implemented successfully and operating with outstanding efficiency. In the area of Christian education new strategies have developed surrounding the traditional foundations of various age-level ministries. A holistic perspective leads to varied methodologies for promoting the gospel and making disciples. One strategy is to closely examine the existing ministries within a congregation to determine the areas of strength and weakness for future development.

### **Children's Ministry**

The Children's Ministry at Second Baptist Church continues to recognize and celebrate Children's Day on the second Sunday in June. Children's Day has been observed since 1850 in the United States, however, many churches and communities no longer honor their children on this designated date.<sup>13</sup> However, within the context of the local church this is an opportunity to let children know just how important they are to the life and livelihood of the church. It is a time set aside to embrace and celebrate the children and reinforce the reality that they are loved and wholeheartedly supported by their church family.

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<sup>13</sup> Sermon preached by Dr. William S. Epps, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles, CA, Children's Day, June 14, 2009.

This past year, Children's Day was a great day of celebration that began on Saturday with a Children's Concert that featured Second Baptist Church's Children's Choir. A variety of traditional and contemporary songs comprised the musical selections beautifully sang by the children. A narration and dramatization of the meaning and significance of Negro spirituals was also performed in conjunction with the choir, which emphasized the connection between religious faith and African American culture and history. This is also recognized as an Afrocentric approach to Christian education. The children were proud to wear their new choir robes for the concert. Additionally, Second Baptist Church's children's praise dancers performed. The dancers included girls and boys and a reception was held at the conclusion of the concert.

Second Baptist Church has implemented a conservatory of music and performing arts where children are taught to play several instruments. Some of the students displayed their talent during this concert which featured guitar and piano, which is an example of Christian education promoting singing, praise dancing, and musical instruments. As proclaimed in Psalm 100, praising God entails "coming before God's presence with singing, dancing, and string instruments."

During two worship services held on Sunday morning, the children served as worship leaders, ushers, and choir members. The children demonstrated outstanding worship and leadership qualities throughout the day. They exemplified a present model for Proverbs 22:6 which states, "Train children in the ways that they should go," and it also represents hope for the future, "when they are old they will not depart from it." Children's Day invariably portrayed components of an intergenerational ministry because the children were supported by parents, grandparents, church members and friends of all

ages. This ministry also reflects how the church continues to transfer the richness of the faith tradition to the next generation.

It is important to recognize the many opportunities presented within the church for intergenerational ministries to transpire. When developing new ministries with a focus on intergenerational activities, models have been prevalent within the church tradition; however, these models have not been traditionally designated as intergenerational ministries. It is interesting, for example, that reflections from the Children's Day celebration has led to a heightened awareness of the dynamics involved for cross-generational participation. In order to "train children in the ways they should go," adult role models are necessary, which include the pastor, grandparents and parents, leaders within various ministries of the church, teachers, neighbors, and other adults.

Another intergenerational ministry that has been implemented by the children's praise team and members of the children's choir at Second Baptist Church has been a mission outreach to visit members and residents who are in nursing homes, convalescent centers and retirement communities. The children engage in conversations with the residents of these facilities in the community or activity room, followed by an enriched time of worship, praise dancing, singing and sharing Scriptures during their visit.

Recently, an Agape Showcase was hosted by the children's ministry which enabled children and youth to display their talents and gifts in an afternoon program. This was an ecumenical event as children and youth from several different churches participated in the showcase. Again, it was an intergenerational gathering as members of Second Baptist and other churches enthusiastically supported this endeavor. The talent

displayed included an all-boys hand bell choir, a teen dramatization, concert pianist, solos, duets, choral performances, spoken word, poetry, and praise dancing.

The questions were presented in the introduction section of this ministry focus paper that probed how the church is exemplifying the commission given to us by Jesus – ‘to make disciples’ and how the church is transferring the Christian faith tradition to the next generation of Christian leaders. The ministry models displayed in the preceding paragraphs demonstrate that children and youth are being prepared to fulfill future leadership roles within the church, community and greater society. The foundation is being established and the models presented are a snapshot of the various ministries implemented throughout the course of a year. The children also participate in Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, and other special events. The children have excellent role models and mentors from within the family, church, school and community.

### **Youth Ministry**

The youth ministry of Second Baptist Church is implemented for teenagers between the ages thirteen and eighteen for the purpose of developing faith, spirituality, and building relationships. Every second Sunday, the youth serve as worship leaders for two worship services and attend a monthly meeting that is hosted at a member’s home. Most of the youth also attend the teen Sunday school classes. Members of this ministry live in various cities throughout the greater Los Angeles area and some commute a great distance to attend church services and other events. During the youth meetings the following topics have been discussed: Black history and multiculturalism, pulpit decorum, practical application for giving a testimony, prayer, successes and challenges in

school, perseverance and commitment, Sunday school lessons, colleges and careers, and many others. This year the youth arranged to have academic study periods at the public library. Several youth attended an in-depth “Through the Bible” class on Saturday mornings.

Additionally, the youth group at Second Baptist Church has participated in the various activities, whether occurring regularly or as one-time events. During the past few years these have included: conducting a children’s book fair; attending a scholarship luncheon sponsored by the Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Association, which is the local arm of the Progressive National Baptist State Convention; participating in mission projects to the Henderson Community Center Women’s Shelter; sending cards to senior members who are not able to attend church, along with care packages to college students; hosting the Graduate Luncheon; attending the National Baptist Convention Congress of Christian Education; and attending the National Council of Negro Women’s luncheon, where one of Second Baptist Church’s youth was honored as the Youth of the Year. Periodically, youth are requested to render service for special events, such as the Angel Tree Prison Ministry Fellowship’s Christmas luncheon, women’s ministry events, and the like. Special outings have included horseback riding, a visit to the Museum of African American History, where youth had an opportunity to view a display that featured Second Baptist Church, movie night, miniature golf, and a weekend retreat to Oceanside, CA. The youth of Second Baptist Church are being prepared for leadership roles in the present and the future.

At Second Baptist Church a graduate luncheon is annually scheduled for the second Sunday in June. Immediately following the afternoon worship service, the

luncheon is sponsored by the youth ministry to recognize and honor children and youth who have been promoted from elementary, middle, and junior high school. The luncheon also acknowledges senior high school graduates and college graduates, including those receiving undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees. The highest degree obtained was by Second Baptist Church's Music Director, who obtained a Doctor of Music Arts degree from the University of Southern California. Again, this occasion encompassed an intergenerational gathering of people within the church environment. This celebration is another focus area for Christian education ministry that embraces religious, private, and public education.

In addition, the Youth Emphasis Day is held annually on the fourth Sunday in June. Each year the youth have the responsibility to select the theme, develop the statement of occasion, and participate in planning the worship services. The youth ministry addresses the diverse needs of teens and focuses on spirituality, mission, education, culture, history, health issues, and social and relational components of Christian lifestyle. As a result of this ministry the teens are developing outstanding leadership gifts and are intricately involved in the "disciple-making" process.

### **Young Adult Ministry**

The young adult ministry at Second Baptist Church, which is comprised of young people between eighteen and thirty-five years of age, is a very diverse population and includes the following groups: married, single, parents, single parents, college students, professionals, career-bound, college graduates, employed, unemployed, male, female, commuters, transplants to California, and also native Californians. The young adults live

in the Los Angeles area, the San Fernando Valley, Long Beach, Cerritos, Duarte, Fontana, Orange and Riverside counties, as well as other locales. Several individuals who participate in this ministry have attended Second Baptist Church since early childhood and are third- and fourth-generation members of the church. Therefore, these individuals have traversed through children's and youth ministries. There are also those who have recently joined the Second Baptist Church fellowship.

A critical task facing the African American Church population involves embracing the young adult population and involving them as leaders and active participants in the life of the local churches. The young adult ministry at Second Baptist Church is undergoing a revitalization phase, as the church has experienced an increase in the number of young adults uniting with the church this year. Several suggestions were presented by the young adults during a planning session held on April 28, 2007, as the level of excitement and motivation to promote this ministry were very high. The young adults suggested that the ministry: meet regularly as a group; plan trips; support a Sunday school class; assist with the transition of members from youth ministry to young adult ministry by sponsoring a retreat or special gathering; include a dance ministry for the fourth Sunday worship service; arrange topical studies/conversations to discuss young adult issues and contemporary issues; implement a young adult Bible study; incorporate Black history within Bible study; host life application forums, i.e. state of the Black family, culture and community; develop podcasts, websites and forums to address young adult issues; plan seminars related to finances, investments, and real estate; stimulate active involvement within mission/outreach to serve within the Los Angeles community, i.e. feeding the homeless; and arrange carpooling to church in order to provide

transportation for senior members. It was suggested by Pastor Epps that young adults should serve as worship leaders for two services, every fourth Sunday. The pastor also suggested that the young adults consider sponsoring an event once per quarter to address issues relevant to young adults, i.e. relationships, marriage enrichment, career development, and the like.

The suggestions were summarized by organizing them within the following areas of ministry: Christian education/discipleship, education, mission/outreach, worship, technology, and fellowship. Within Christian education/discipleship are Sunday school, Bible study, topical studies, forums, seminars, retreats, and the like. Within education are business, finance, stewardship, and Black history and culture. Within mission/outreach is feeding the homeless. Within worship are praise dance and participation in worship services. Within technology are podcasting and websites. Within fellowship is building relationships within young adult ministry. It was most impressive to witness the outpouring of suggestions which aided in shaping this ministry and the leadership, organizational, and administrative gifts which were apparent during these discussions.

Upon reviewing the outcomes, one can perceive a blend of traditional and contemporary forms of ministry. Surprisingly, the young adults were interested in having a Sunday school/Bible study class. Some believers often think that this age group rejects the traditions of the historical Christian Church. But it appears that this group is not rejecting the traditional forms of Christianity but desires to enhance the traditional with contemporary methods and ideas. At Second Baptist Church, young adults serve in various ministries: teaching, choir, ushering, as trustees, as participants in the finance committee, audiovisual/multimedia, Vacation Bible School, and others.

## **Adult Ministry**

The adult ministry at Second Baptist Church is comprised of members who between thirty-six and fifty-five years old. This ministry evolved because there were several members within this age range who desired to create a ministry to target the concerns of this population. All of the other age level ministries were represented and active in the church, such as children, teens, young adults and seniors, therefore, this group sought to establish an active adult ministry to support one another. The members of this ministry have developed the following goals and objectives for the ministry: to focus on spiritual growth, faith formation, and enhancing spiritual relationships; to sponsor educational seminars/workshops to include retirement planning, finances, careers, relationships, parenting, marriage, and the like; to establish mentoring relationships with senior members; to provide opportunities for fellowship, socializing, and networking; to sponsor several events throughout the year for the entire church family; to adopt a family to support/assist as a mission outreach; to sponsor a ministry recruitment fair; and others. It was suggested that when other ministries are sponsoring an event that the adult ministry should support or assist when availability permits. Some of the members in this age group are involved in other ministries of the church and have targeted spiritual, educational, social and relational goals as priorities for further development.

The adults in this age range have the potential to be the pivotal point within the ministry of Christian education for the purpose of connecting across the generations. In this age range there are grandparents and parents, singles, married, widowed and divorced, new members, seasoned members, and a wealth of wisdom, knowledge and life experience. However, this age range is often overlooked due to other ministry concerns

or it is assumed that this group is aligned with other adult ministries. This sentiment was expressed by members of this group. Some of the members of this adult ministry were formerly very active in the young adult ministry. In the field of Christian education, ministries are not generally developed specifically for this population. However, this population has the potential to become the bridge to the younger generation and the older generation. During the planning stages for this age group ministry it was of high importance to develop ministries that would be inclusive of the entire church family. This age group is ideal for possibly spearheading a family ministry within the church or an intergenerational ministry.

### **Senior Ministry**

The senior ministry of Second Baptist Church is a most vibrant group of adults who are fifty-five and older. This population is active within various ministries as many seniors continue to exemplify excellent qualities of leadership in the church and the greater community. This ministry also exhibits a holistic perspective of Christian education in order to provide for the diverse needs of the members and is demonstrated by the following: a focus on worship and spirituality; educational seminars that have included business and finances, i.e. establishing a will, estate planning, reverse mortgages and investments; health screenings and other medical related issues; field trips for fellowship and recreation, i.e. to the Hollywood Bowl, Palm Springs, the Pasadena Playhouse and other exciting venues.

## Summary

As it has been highlighted above, Christian education ministries have been developed for diverse age levels within the congregation. In order for these ministries to operate, faithful and committed leaders are necessary to implement the various ministries. It is of critical importance that leaders are supported, recognized and appreciated for the many acts of service freely given to the church and the community. This generally takes place when ministries have their special events and worship services. These leaders are well prepared to receive individuals who participate in the various ministries. The ongoing goal of all ministries is to increase the number of participants throughout the year.

In his book, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Anthony B. Pinn writes,

While weekday activities such as Bible studies, choir rehearsals, and prayer meetings may not attract large numbers of participants, it is understood that Sunday worship is the basic form of celebration within the context of the Christian community. Thus it serves as the basic measure of involvement in the life of the Church and the basic sources of spiritual renewal and encouragement for members of the Black Church. Furthermore, it is the primary communal forum for expressing thanks and gratitude to God for salvation and it is believed that God is present and felt during this period of worship.”<sup>14</sup>

The Sunday worship service is the foundation for Christian education and all ministries evolve from this base as people are encouraged to connect with other ministries for continued growth and development. Decisions are made within the context of worship that have the power to transform one's life forever, as individuals respond to the preaching of God's word and the invitation to discipleship is extended at the end of a worship service. During the invitation to discipleship within the Baptist Church,

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 46.

individuals can make the decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and unite with the Church as a candidate for baptism, join with a letter from another church, or by Christian experience.

### **Generational Characteristics**

Eddie Gibbs, in *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*, reveals that “within many congregations, groups exist that represent three mindsets: traditional, modern and postmodern. Its no wonder that church leaders find it hard to secure consensus and set a clear direction.”<sup>15</sup> It is important to be aware of the diverse groups and mindsets that exist within a congregation, especially when developing new ministries. Generally, when Christian education ministries are organized, the focus is often upon the age level (or generation) of the participants as opposed to the mindset of the individuals (traditional, modern, or postmodern). In order to discern the varying characteristics that exist within the three mindsets presented by Gibbs, one should become familiar with the generational characteristics that are revealed as well.

The first generation includes those who were born between 1901 and 1924; these are known as Builders. This generation continues to witness the world changing before their eyes, “everything in life has changed around them, and their one remaining anchor is their church.”<sup>16</sup> However, they prefer not to see the Church changing with the times. This group remains satisfied with the traditional stance of the Church.

The Silent generation consists of those born between 1925 and 1942. This

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<sup>15</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

generation tends to be “more resistant to change than the builders.”<sup>17</sup> It is also mentioned that this generation is “intimidated by the achievements of the previous generation.” Furthermore, this generation is “most intimated by computers and the internet.”<sup>18</sup> This generation is also primarily satisfied with the traditional structure and organization of the Church. It appears that the Builder and the Silent generations would be the traditionalists within a congregation who would exhibit the greatest resistance to change in attempts to move the church into the twenty-first century. These groups would prefer to sing the longstanding hymns of the Church, maintain a formalized style of worship and attend a traditional Sunday school class or Bible study.

The Boomer generation is comprised of those born between 1943 and 1960. This generation was exposed to the “age of experimentation and some sought various ways of personal fulfillment through drugs, meditation techniques and explored Hinduism and Buddhism.”<sup>19</sup> However, some Boomers were able to “find peace and meaning through encountering Christ in the Jesus Movement.”<sup>20</sup> This generation is most often open to change and flexible to implementing new ideas and concepts within the Church. This group has the tendency to welcome change, including the new models of ministry that have been introduced in the twenty-first century in the areas of worship, Bible study, and other holistic forms of ministry. This generation attempts to remain knowledgeable of current trends within the Church and society.

Following the Boomers is Generation X, comprised of those born between 1961

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<sup>17</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 228.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

and 1981. According to Gibbs, this generation “presents the greatest challenge facing the Church because they are not looking solely to the Christian churches to meet their spiritual needs.”<sup>21</sup> He adds, “They are the first generation in North America to search outside the church. They will incorporate elements of Christianity, but they are equally likely to turn to New Age Beliefs, Native American religions, Eastern religion and paganism.”<sup>22</sup> Those who remain in the Church prefer contemporary forms of ministry intermixed with the traditional and are most receptive to change. This generation is most comfortable with change and enjoys experimenting with diverse forms of worship, Bible study and holistic forms of ministry. Individuals who have been members of a church since childhood have a greater tendency to appreciate the diverse forms of ministry. This generation has also been exposed to world religions and has experienced living and being educated in an increasingly global society.

The next generation, the Millennials (or Mosaics), represents those born between 1982 and 2000 (the year that Gibbs’ book was published). Gibbs writes, “This generation has not had time to develop distinctive characteristics, but, tend to be aligned with their parents, the boomers.”<sup>23</sup> According to Gibbs, “The diversity represented by Generation X and even more by the next generation, who are variously called the mosaics and the millennials, means that no single approach is going to be appropriate for all.”<sup>24</sup> In the area of Christian education this statement is also true for the other generations. Leaders must utilize various approaches when attempting to promote the gospel of Christ that will

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<sup>21</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 230.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 131.

address different learning modalities. Gibbs adds, “Church leaders must resist the strong temptation to simply reproduce a single model that seems to be making an impact and instead must recognize that there may be a wide variety of models that are equally effective alternatives for reaching different subgroups.”<sup>25</sup> Several models for age level ministries were presented in the preceding sections in order to highlight the variety of ministries being implemented within the context of the Christian Church. Gibbs also writes, “In addition to surveying the contemporary scene, there may also be valuable and long-neglected insights from the past that need to be rediscovered and reinterpreted.”<sup>26</sup>

One focus of this ministry focus paper has been to examine past and present trends within the discipline of Christian education. The study of the generational characteristics heightens ones awareness for understanding group dynamics that may be operating within a local church that has diverse age ranges within the congregation. For example, when considering the diverse generational characteristics, the young adult ministry at Second Baptist Church is comprised of members who are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. At the time of this writing, this group consists of those born between 1973 and 1990; therefore, according to the generational composition presented by Gibbs, this group encompasses GenXers and Millennials. However, most of the members of the young adult ministry tend to be Generation Xers because the Millennials have not yet found their comfort zone with the young adult ministry. This is primarily due to the fact that many of the Millennials are recent high school graduates who are also making the transition out of the youth ministry. Some Millennials are college students; others are searching for a career path; and many are uncertain of their direction in life.

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<sup>25</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 131.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

This is an interesting dynamic to consider for future ministry planning. This transition stage is a crucial time period for the Millennial population because this is also the phase when many young adults leave the church. This also emphasizes the necessity to be intentional about building the bridge to enable youth to transition to the next level.

This age range is targeted because this is the critical period when younger Christians leave the Church. When developing new models of ministry perhaps there is a need to consider creating an additional age-level ministry for those young adults between eighteen to twenty-five years of age. A new ministry was created at Second Baptist Church for adults between the ages of thirty-six to fifty-five, based upon the need for an age-level ministry in between young adults and the senior population. In the ministry of Christian education, if one model or method is not working, leaders must be flexible and creative to experiment with various models of ministry.

## CHAPTER 6

### NEW MODELS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

#### **An Intergenerational or Multi-Generational Ministry**

In the book, *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church*, edited by Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn Parker, various writers expound upon the critical need for the black church to promote spiritual wisdom formation as a means of passing on the richness of the faith tradition to succeeding generations. This is necessary in order to empower young men and young women as they continue on their faith journeys throughout life. Streaty Wimberly and Parker write, “Christian wisdom formation refers to an ongoing journey of imagining, gaining insights and deciding how to live as faithful and responsible Christians.”<sup>1</sup> They continue, “As a life journey, wisdom formation relies on recognizing that each moment opens before us anew and presents us with opportunities to see, feel, discover, and allow the life of Jesus Christ to be born anew within us.”<sup>2</sup> Christian wisdom formation acknowledges God as the point of departure and is dependent upon one’s faith in God. All of these components are reflected

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<sup>1</sup> Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn L. Parker, editors, *In Search of Wisdom: Faith Formation in the Black Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

within the ministry of Christian education and are implemented through the spiritual disciplines of study, prayer, meditation, maintaining a journal, attending retreats, worship services, conversations, music, and others.

Historically, Christian formation in the black church tradition has been transmitted orally through Sunday worship, instructions presented within the family structure, and storytelling, which occurred at various times during the week. Anthony G. Reddie, a contributor to *In Search of Wisdom*, writes, “This enabled people to form a spiritual and moral wisdom, including deep convictions and commitments needed to shape a life of meaning and purpose, as well as attitudes, behaviors, and skills needed to act with integrity in and on behalf of the community.”<sup>3</sup> He continues, “Over time, text based teaching and learning have become overemphasized. There continues to be the need to reclaim the oral means of promoting wisdom formation; and there is critical need for person-to-person cross-generational sharing to make it happen.”<sup>4</sup> The oral tradition of Christian education was gradually replaced by the written curricula in the twentieth century that emphasized “ocular versus oral pedagogies”.<sup>5</sup> Spiritual wisdom formation recognizes the value of the oral tradition and seeks to recapture this methodology as a tool for further development of Christian education ministries.

When constructing Christian education ministries for the twenty-first century at Second Baptist Church, it will be necessary to honor the rich legacy of the past 124 years in order to make the connection with the present and to further envision new models of

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony G. Reddie, “Forming Wisdom through Cross-generational Connectedness,” in Streaty Wimberly and Parker, *In Search of Wisdom*, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

ministry. It is necessary to acknowledge those components of the present that are implemented with efficacy in order to extrapolate the best practices and methods for future ministries. The foundation has been established centuries ago and is rooted and grounded in teaching and preaching the word of God. The word of God continues to go forth via many avenues within most churches today.

The organizational structures for Christian education are in place and include the development of varying age-level ministries. The curriculum utilized is relevant, current, biblically based and Christ-centered. Christian education teachers, staff, leaders and facilitators are dedicated and committed towards promoting the gospel of Christ. Valuable lessons have been learned from the past, implemented in the present church environment, and planning continues to take place for the future. The Christian Church continues to make disciples through various forms of ministry throughout the year and these facts have been portrayed in the previous chapters.

When considering the ministry needs of Second Baptist Church, it has been reported that the average adult is seventy years of age. This year, during the annual Senior Emphasis Day, senior members served as worship leaders or the liturgist for the eleven o'clock worship service. Additionally, special recognition and awards were presented to various seniors for their outstanding service within the church and community. As the awards were presented, a biographical sketch was read that highlighted the individual's Christian experience, membership with Second Baptist Church, employment history, and additional service to God through the church and community. There were several members who had maintained longstanding membership

with Second Baptist Church and there were some for which Second Baptist Church has been the only church of affiliation for over sixty years.

Many of the seniors are actively engaged in the ministries of the church and are committed to family, civic and communal arenas; for example, they are Sunday school teachers or members of a Sunday school class, ushers, choir members, ushers, choir, educators, administrators, social workers, counselors, business persons, mothers and fathers, grandparents, great grandparents, caregivers, and so on. Some have suffered the losses of spouses and/or children, as well as other types of losses during their life spans. The senior members embody a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and life experiences that have attributed to their ongoing spiritual growth. In order to construct new models of Christian education ministries for the twenty-first century at Second Baptist Church; it will be paramount to create an intergenerational ministry in order to pass on this rich history to the succeeding generations. Anne Streaty Wimberly and Edward P. Wimberly, in their chapter titled, "Wisdom Formation in Middle and Late Adulthood," write, "A gift of senior adults in a congregation is their bearing witness to how they have journeyed through life experiences, thereby providing awareness, insights, and spiritual rootedness needed by the young."<sup>6</sup> Words of wisdom proclaimed by Samuel D. Proctor in *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African American Faith*, further emphasize the significance of passing the faith tradition to succeeding generations, as he states,

We need to visit the past and look at the practices of previous generations that led to such unmanageable inequalities and also those that led to progress and achievement. Any new strategy for the future must also honor the past. The new

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<sup>6</sup> Anne Streaty Wimberly and Edward P. Wimberly, "Wisdom Formation in Middle and Late Adulthood," in Streaty Wimberly and Parker, *In Search of Wisdom*, 136.

human paradigm depends on first accepting hard facts, then reclaiming the positive, productive practices that have led to success.<sup>7</sup>

Today, within our transient society, few people will maintain membership with solely one church. Many will never maintain a longstanding employment history with one employer or business. Many seniors at Second Baptist Church who received recognition have been able to retire and maintain a lucrative quality of life. Today, many people are losing their retirement plans and some have never acquired adequate benefits that were provided in the past work environments. Most of the members relocated to California area many years ago, although some are also native Californians. Several members are in their nineties and some remain active in the ministries, such as choir, Bible study, women's ministry, altar guild, community relations commission, and the like. The life experiences of the senior population need to be honored, captured, preserved and reported to succeeding generations as well as documented for the future generations yet to be born. There are treasures to be experienced and documented through an intergenerational exchange, also known as a cross-generational exchange, as a model of ministry for the twenty-first century. According to Hilliard, "the future of the Christian faith depends in every generation on how well the leaders in each generation teach and prepare the leaders of the next generation."<sup>8</sup>

Although wisdom formation includes the traditional aspects of the Christian Church, it focuses on caring for the whole "village," which embraces the broader community. In addition to religious resources, wisdom formation also utilizes non-religious sources, i.e. African proverbs, African and African American history, clichés

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped for: a Memoir of African American Faith* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 236.

<sup>8</sup> Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 35.

from the community, and statements from secular or popular music. Therefore, wisdom formation emphasizes the importance of learning lessons of life from the wisdom of the past and embracing how it can inform the present. Streaty Wimberly and Parker assert, “In order for Christian wisdom to be formed, past and present Christian faith exemplars must guide it. Our families and the entire intergenerational community must participate in it. Christian wisdom formation proceeds through the undertaking of a whole village, in which village members commit to really be and relate with one another.”<sup>9</sup> Wisdom formation is concerned about the individual as well as the community – the birth family and the extended family.

Wisdom formation occurs throughout various life cycles and the wisdom obtained is based upon experiences and knowledge. The local church can become a place of wisdom formation in which the elders pass on their wisdom to the younger generations, and as a result mentoring relationships are established, and nurturing intergenerational interactions occur within the various ministries. Most often in churches today, ministries are divided by age levels, particularly within the church school, Bible studies, and other ministries geared toward children, youth/teens, young adults, mid-adults, seniors, and the like. However, there is the need for conversations, study, and cross generational fellowship for the purposes of sharing, learning, and gaining wisdom from one another. Throughout the wisdom formation process presented by Streaty Wimberly and Parker, it is emphasized that adults should also seek to receive and understand the wisdom which the younger generation can provide, particularly the hip-hop gospel culture. Therefore, wisdom formation provides opportunities for reciprocal learning, teaching, and growing across generations.

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<sup>9</sup> Streaty Wimberly and Parker, *In Search of Wisdom*, 13.

### Family Fellowship Hour

The hospitality committee at Second Baptist Church generally hosts a fellowship hour every third Sunday, immediately succeeding the eleven o'clock worship service. This is an ideal time period for promoting an intergenerational wisdom formation ministry. During the fellowship hour, possible events might consist of dialogue, power point presentations, music appreciation, testimonies, stories, dance, drama, video/audio recordings, inspirational readings to include favorite scriptures, poetry, excerpts about prayer, perseverance, and hope; words of wisdom, wisdom sharing, spoken word, games, technology, missions and travel presentations, and so on. This ministry could also entail birthday celebrations and other celebratory events in the lives of members and friends. The adult ministry at Second Baptist Church has expressed an interest in spearheading these events and has suggested that these gatherings should be promoted as the "Second Baptist Church Family Fellowship."

When promoting the hospitality hour as an intergenerational fellowship or family ministry, it will require being intentional to schedule and invite certain individuals or families who will serve as leaders to address the monthly theme. These gatherings will also feature dialogue across the generations in order to connect the past and present, while reflecting on current events in people's lives. Other possibilities might include sharing a favorite family tradition or expressions of success and/or challenge. A facilitator will serve as the guide for each event and this will be followed by small group discussions and sharing.

In addition to this time, the adult ministry desires to facilitate sponsoring quarterly Second Baptist Church family ministry nights; hosting a church barbecue; hosting a

family retreat; and sponsoring mission projects and other events. These activities will be promoted as an intergenerational fellowship with the purpose of increasing spiritual and relational vitality within the congregation and community.

Themes to address during the fellowship hour will be coordinated with the established church calendar of events. In January, reflections will be shared from members who were present when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached and held various meetings at Second Baptist Church, and the younger generation will share information they have learned about Dr. King. In February, a celebration will be held for African American History Month and recognition will be given to history-makers within the congregation. In March, traditions will be practiced for the season of Lent and Women's History Month will be recognized. In April, traditions will be practiced during the celebration of Easter and personal stories surrounding the gift of salvation will be shared. In May, Second Baptist Church's anniversary will be celebrated (in 2010 the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the church will be celebrated) and words of wisdom from mothers will honor Mother's Day. In June, words of wisdom from fathers will honor Father's Day, Children and Youth Emphasis Day and graduations will take place. In July, Men's Emphasis Day, Vacation Bible School, and summer vacation will take place. In August, Young Adult Emphasis Day will be celebrated. In September, "Back to School," Christian Education Emphasis, and Theological Education Emphasis will be the themes. In October, the church will celebrate and participate in the Pastor's Anniversary, Homecoming, and World Wide Communion. In November, Women's Day and Thanksgiving Day are celebrated. In December, traditions of Advent, Christmas, and Kwanzaa are honored.

The gatherings of the “Family Fellowship” hour should be documented via audio and visual recordings, as well as photography, for inclusion in the church’s archives and as a means of commemorating the past, celebrating the present, and embracing the future. It is important to document and preserve the rich history that is represented throughout the life of Second Baptist Church.

### Family, Friends, and Community Fellowship

An additional component to the Second Baptist Church Family Fellowship hour would be to invite neighbors from the surrounding community to join this wisdom formation process, as an extension that could be developed as a Family, Friends and Community Fellowship. The neighboring community surrounding Second Baptist Church is comprised of primarily Latino families. Many children from the community attend the Children’s Center and preschool programs operated by Second Baptist Church. Again, this type of interaction would require intentional modes of organizing, planning and reaching out to the neighboring community. In the past, there have been several special events held at Second Baptist Church that involved the broader community, i.e. the Angel Tree ministry, health and education seminars, worship services, and others. The possibilities for the inclusion of multicultural and multiethnic engagements are endless due to the diverse communities and churches within the city of Los Angeles. This ministry focus paper has suggested just a few examples of how Christian spiritual wisdom formation might be implemented within the context of an intergenerational and multicultural ministry.

### **A Total Christian Education Program**

The trend within Christian education today is to develop a total Christian education program, also known as a “holistic” ministry that focuses on the whole person. This type of ministry includes the following entities: mind, body, and spirit; personal life, home, church, local, national, international and universal communities; individual, family, and diverse relationships; biblical, historical, political and social concerns of the church and community; and other relevant issues encountered through experiences of life. The Christian Church has developed numerous ministries and methods for the purpose of promoting discipleship and spiritual growth. The succeeding paragraphs will highlight various churches, conferences and organizations that promote a total Christian education approach for ministry.

#### **Women in Ministry International 3 Conference**

Several models of contemporary ministry were presented during the Women in Ministry International 3 conference (WIMIN3) which was held October 20-23, 2007 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and was organized by Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook. This was the third annual conference hosted by Dr. Cook for the purpose of educating and empowering women in ministry. The theme was “Sisters Soaring to Success” and the program included the following workshops to prepare women for twenty-first century ministry: “Health and Thinking for Your Success,” “What Seminary Did Not Teach You,” “Systems for Success,” “Vision Casting for Success,” “Can You See It?,” “Leadership Is Not for the Timid,” and others. In addition to the scheduled workshops, Dr. Cook

provided an opportunity for attendees to be exposed to new models of worship within a local church.

During this conference, the conferees worshipped at the New Birth Church in Miami, Florida and were welcomed by Bishop Victor Curry, the senior pastor. This is a young congregation with the majority of the seven thousand members being young adult age (18- to 35-year-olds). There are three weekly Sunday worship services held at 7:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., and 7:00 p.m. The women in ministry attended the 7:00 a.m. worship service and were surprised to observe young adults arriving at church for the early morning service.

The church displayed excellent use of audio-visual technology with two large video monitors located in front of the sanctuary for announcements, Scripture and several video presentations. The video presentations featured a message related to hurricane preparedness, followed by a video clip that featured one of New Birth Church's college graduates who is presently employed as a registered nurse. During the presentation, she encouraged members to obtain a college education, while stressing the importance of finishing school and attending college in order to succeed in life. Additionally, announcements and appeals were made to the congregation to join Bishop Curry and the NAACP on a bus trip to Tallahassee to address the state governor and protest the recent beating of a local teenager by the police force. It was announced that New Birth Church would host a special recognition day for law enforcement officers in order to build bridges and increase communication and dialogue with the police force.

The church had a dynamic praise and worship team, accompanied by the music staff that consisted of a synthesizer, drums, trombone, trumpet and guitar. The 7:00 a.m.

service was almost filled to capacity as members danced freely in the pews and the aisles. This was a very contemporary service without a choir, hymns, spirituals or anthems in the repertoire of musical selections. The topic of the sermon was “Walking in the FOG” (the “Favor of God”) and at the conclusion of the message, lights were dimmed and a fog machine dispersed fog throughout the sanctuary. The congregation demonstrated the act of “walking in the fog” as they marched into the aisles and around the sanctuary chanting “We’re walking in the fog, the divine favor of God.”

Afterwards, conferees were given the opportunity to tour New Birth Church’s offsite facilities which included a radio station and a recording studio named New Birth Enterprises. This facility also maintains a banquet hall for rental during special events, i.e. weddings, family reunions, community events, and the like. It was mentioned that Bishop Curry planted New Birth Church sixteen years ago. The church began with a few people in his living room and rapidly expanded to a membership of over seven thousand congregants.

Overall the worship service was biblically based, Christ-centered, culturally relevant and possessed a prophetic witness for promoting social justice. There were also elements of community involvement, emphasis on higher education, inclusion of modern technology, as well as being spiritually interactive and engaging. Bishop Curry stated that he has been mentored by Bishop Eddie Long, Pastor Joe Cephus Johnson, Sr., Mack King Carter, and the late Pastor E. V. Hill. This worship service displayed a new experience and a new model of ministry for the majority of women who attended the conference.

As the dynamics and components of this worship service are examined it leads one to consider questions related to New Birth Church’s capacity to attract over seven

thousand young adults, especially (for some of them) to a 7:00 a.m. worship service. The structure contains the various components for a contemporary style of worship, such as a relaxed atmosphere, contemporary forms of praise and worship exemplified by musical selections and instruments, an appeal to the auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic senses, freedom of expression, and use of technology.

Lora-Ellen McKinney, in *Christian Education in the African American Church: A Guide for Teaching Truth*, discusses the various sensory modalities utilized within the learning process. She asserts, “In every venue in which Christian education is provided, Christian educators will need to address several basic learning styles: auditory (related to hearing), visual (related to sight), kinesthetic or sensory (related to touch), and relational (a form of learning necessary for the creation of the Christian community and an important form of learning for most African Americans).”<sup>10</sup>

### Dawning of a New Day Conference III

A critical task facing the African American Church population involves embracing the young adult population and involving this generation as leaders and active participants in the life of the Church. In presenting a profile of the next generation of black churchgoers, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. sponsored a “Dawning of a New Day Conference III,” with the theme, “Generations Working Together for the Dawning of a New Day.” The keynote discussion was led by Dr. William J. Shaw, President of the convention and Dr. Howard-John Wesley. It was reported in the conference manual written by the same individuals that “there are several misconceptions

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<sup>10</sup> Lora-Ellen McKinney, *Christian Education in the African American Church: A Guide for Teaching Truth* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 57-58.

concerning ministering to the next generation of Black churchgoers, i.e. 1) The next generation has a tendency to be immoral, atheistic, irreligious and violent, 2) ministry to this generation requires drastic compromises in doctrine, and 3) ministry to this generation requires an abandonment of the sacred and an adoption of the secular.”<sup>11</sup>

It was also reported in the conference manual that there are three dynamics operating among the next generation of black churchgoers (ages 18-40) which include: 1) Post Literate, 2) Post Desegregation, and 3) Post Soul. These three focal points will be highlighted in the succeeding paragraphs:

Post Literate – in the history of humanity there have only been two major shifts in communication media and method: oral to written (literate) and written (literate) to electronic. The primary media of communication for the next generation of Black churchgoers is not written but electronic. This next generation has been shaped by: World Wide Web and 98% surf the internet and check emails daily, only 13% have a library card. Computer Technology – 77% own a computer and utilize high tech video games, CDs, MP3, PDA’s, IM, TXT, Blackberry, Wireless communication, cable/satellite television, On Demand, TIVO, multiple flows of information, e.g. CNN.<sup>12</sup>

Post Desegregation – This is the first generation to experience and reap the full benefits of the opportunities and challenges made available in a desegregated America. This generation has more exposure to educational opportunities, more financial resources and opportunities to manage, along with greater work, family and recreational time commitments. This next generation has also experienced a loss of the influence of community, the breakdown of traditional familial support systems, poorer school systems, moral and ethical relativity, and life challenges beyond racial issues. The next generation is in need of relevant, specialized, topical, and systematic Christian education.<sup>13</sup>

Post Soul – This is the first generation of African Americans that have been influenced and shaped by values and voices external to the Black Church. The Black Church no longer has a monopoly on shaping Black values, but is in

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<sup>11</sup> William J. Shaw and Howard John Wesley, *Generations Working Together for the Dawning of New Day*, manual for “Dawning of a New Day Conference III,” 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

competition with Hip-Hop, BET, celebrity lifestyles, and other religious expressions e.g. Islam, Buddhism, New Wave Spirituality, etc.<sup>14</sup>

During the “Dawning of A New Day Conference III,” the following practical strategies for changes in methodology within the black Church were presented to reach and retain the next generation: develop a website, create small group discipleship ministries and support group ministries, relax the formal dress code, emphasize stewardship, transition to relevant and topical Christian education curricula in Bible Study and Sunday school, become more time sensitive, create alternative options for worship and ministry involvement, and others. It was also emphasized that the key words for reaching and keeping adults between eighteen and forty years of age are “relevance,” “excellence,” “convenience,” “time,” and “teaching.”<sup>15</sup>

This is an excellent leadership development model which demonstrates possible strategies for educating and empowering the next generation of leaders for twenty-first century ministry at the denominational level and within the local church. It is critically important to understand the characteristics and behavioral trends of the young adult population. If churches desire to reach this population it is apparent that change is necessary. The changes that need to transpire are primarily directly related to the methodology that is utilized, which will entail a blend of the traditional and the contemporary ministries of the local church.

One of the major problems that the Church has encountered within the changing context of a ministry to a postmodern and virtual world is that individuals no longer “go into all the world.” Instead, ministry is designed for people to come into the church.

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<sup>14</sup> Shaw and Wesley, *Generations Working Together*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Therefore, congregations must envision strategies to reach people through various channels of communication, such as the use of technology. This can occur if congregations begin to reflect upon the question: “If people will not come to us, how shall we reach them?” This thought should guide the mission to reach as many people as possible for the cause of Christ and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In a fast-paced, technological society, it is imperative to expand one’s vision for the purpose of exposing as many people as possible to the message of the gospel of Christ. A similar challenge has also been experienced by institutions of higher education. This is represented by the fact that many colleges and universities have recently developed distance learning programs for students to complete degree requirements. Classes are presented online and some include chats or community discussion groups. Students may also view live lectures via web casts by instructors. This method was initiated due to declining student enrollment on college campuses.

This medium should also be considered for expanding Christian education ministries to a broader population. In the context of Christian education, if the weekly Sunday school lesson or Bible study lesson was transmitted via the church’s website, or through email, Facebook, My Space, YouTube, CD, DVD, MP3, audio and visual tape recordings, this could be a viable strategy for expanding the church’s Christian education outreach and mission. However, the option to distribute hard copies of lessons via newsletter, flyers and U. S. mail should also be maintained, especially for those who are not technologically savvy or for those who do not have the necessary equipment to review other formats. In an article written by Church Warnock entitled “Use of Technology in Ministry,” Warnock discusses the vast possibilities that are available for

churches to extend their reach and ministry around the globe with social networks, i.e. Facebook, My Space and others.<sup>16</sup>

#### American Baptist Churches USA 2009 Biennial Convention

During the American Baptist Churches USA 2009 Biennial convention, Leonard Sweet presented a lecture entitled, “What’s a Gutenberg Groupie in a Google World Going to Do?” Sweet’s lecture highlighted the paradigm shift towards the use of technology within ministry as he demonstrated the utilization of Twitter for Bible study and worship. He explained that Twitter is a relational, non-linear type of social networking. Jesus was non-linear as well when teaching parables to the disciples; for example, he stated, “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed” (Matthew 13:31). As an image was presented by Jesus, the image was succeeded by narration. According to Sweet, new models of teaching should make a shift from words to images because churches are not effectively communicating with the dominant culture. He further explained that the Bible was not originally written in verses, but during translation, the King James Version divided the Bible into chapters and verses. The Bible originally emphasized stories. Sweet made reference to stories and songs remembered from childhood that he learned in Sunday school or Bible study. He stressed the following point: “If you really want to transform someone, give them images because a Google world is embedded with images.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Warnock, “Technology Will Allow Churches to Extend Ministry,” Ethics Daily website, [www.ethicsdaily.com](http://www.ethicsdaily.com) (accessed October 23, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Sweet, “What’s a Gutenberg Groupie in a Google World Going to Do?” Lecture presented at the American Baptist Churches USA 2009 Biennial Conference, July 26, 2009.

One process that is working effectively is the EPIC model, which is an acronym for “experiential,” “participatory,” “image-based,” and “connecting.” This type of model has been successful for reaching the younger generation. Throughout Sweet’s presentation, his son projected various images on several screens located throughout the conference room. Sweet referred to his son as the VJ (video jockey) and stated that churches should release the ministries of children, youth and teens in the context of worship by involving them in the technological components of worship. Sweet emphasized that it is important to realize that children, youth and teens in today’s society are the “first generation in history that does not need authority figures to access information. However, they require authority figures to help them assess and process information in order to discern what is good and what is bad.”<sup>18</sup> During the lecture, several people in the audience forwarded “tweets” to Dr. Sweet and they were immediately projected on the screen. Twitter generally asks, “What are you doing?” However, Sweet prefers to ask the following questions when he “tweets” or asks conference attendees to “tweet”: “What are you paying attention to?” “What am I inspiring you to do?” and “What are you thinking?”<sup>19</sup> Today, there are several churches that are experimenting with the use of Twitter during the Sunday worship service. People are encouraged to “tweet” and the pastor sometimes addresses questions during the service or at some point after the service.

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<sup>18</sup> Sweet, “What’s a Gutenberg Groupie in a Google World Going to Do?”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

### Small Group Ministries

Although the term “small groups” has been promoted as a new development within the field of Christian education, small groups have been operating for a considerable length of time in most churches. The ministry of Christian education has the Sunday school as its historical beginning and the evolution of small groups originated within the Sunday school setting as well. In Chapter 2, the history of the Sunday school movement was documented and it was revealed that the ministry began as a large group and gradually classes were organized according to age levels. Small group ministries also include choirs, ushers, men and women’s ministries, altar guild, and community relations commission, among others. However, in the context of the megachurches, small group ministries are a new development designed to maintain a spiritual and relational bond among the massive congregations. Megachurches have had to be intentional for guiding the members into small groups and as a result new models of ministry have been created that are based upon the interest or hobbies of the members. For example, at the Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, CA, small group ministries might include rock climbing, golfing, and other sports, in addition to Christian education classes. However, Greg Ogden, in *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*, writes,

An equipping ministry makes room for multiple types of small groups. The basic small group comes with many names and forms: nurture, koinonia, or kinship groups, and home fellowships among others. Generally they focus on four areas: Bible study, sharing, prayer, and service. Other types of small groups are evangelism (a core of Christians inviting unbelieving friends); discovery (self-motivated seekers are invited to examine the message of Christ); recovery (overcoming some form of addiction); and support (gathering around a common need that threatens one’s quality of life.)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2003), 177.

There are numerous possibilities for further developing small group ministries within the local church. The succeeding paragraphs will present some of the models that are presently being implemented, as well as new models for consideration and implementation.

Many churches observe the liturgical calendar throughout the year. Small groups are often arranged to study the lessons of the seasons of Advent and Lent. These groups might meet in a member's home based upon residential zip codes of the members within a congregation or as a Bible study at the local church. At Second Baptist Church lessons for Advent and Lent are studied during Wednesday evening Bible studies. In addition to these lessons, various topical studies selected by members of the class are studied throughout the year. An extension of the Wednesday Bible study could entail posting the topic and highlights from the class on the church's website.

Another small group ministry for development is a Contemporary Issues Sunday school class or Bible study. As a resource for this class, there are some excellent topics included on the website, [www.ethicsdaily.com](http://www.ethicsdaily.com), which focus on current events to stimulate theological reflection. The format for this course might include: 1) members bringing in articles about hot topics or current events for presentation/theological reflection and discussion in an informal setting; 2) specific articles being posted in a monthly newsletter or on the church's website, along with guided questions for discussion; 3) the class meeting at a scheduled time during the month to discuss posted articles; and 4) establishing a blog or a social network for comments and reflections.

A new model that is being considered for development within small group ministries at Second Baptist Church is mission education. In Chapter 4, it was suggested

that in order to prepare and equip individuals to send into the mission field and participate in local or international ministries, mission education is necessary. Since Sunday is the day that most people attend church, additional small group ministries can be developed in conjunction with the traditional Sunday school classes. If individuals within the small group desire to meet at another time during the week, the group can determine the additional timeframe based upon the convenience and consensus of the members within the group. It is anticipated that a passion for mission will develop from the mission education class and that new models of ministry will be implemented. It will be necessary to include the biblical, theological, historical, and cultural entities under girding mission.

In the book, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*, Tom Sine presents several models of churches that have created small group ministries with a mission focus.<sup>21</sup> Describing one of these churches, he writes,

There is a missional church plant in Torrance, CA, where the pastor worked with a team to create innovative ways to move mission to the center of their life together. The church began to offer a small group program focused on equipping the church's 125 members for mission in their local neighborhoods. There is also a strong emphasis on carving out daily time for spiritual disciplines and weekly time for witness and service. The members of this mission group are involved in Habitat for Humanity, battered women's shelter and remodeling for poor families. Globally they are involved in funding a microenterprise development project in Mozambique, one of the poorest nations in Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Another model presented by Sine is located in Minneapolis within the inner-city community. The church has a small group program and the Sanctuary Community Development Corporation (CDC). It is a separate not-for-profit organization. CDC

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<sup>21</sup> Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 274.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

sponsors a hip-hop academy, a mentoring program for young women, and a tutoring program called Momentum Workforce Development that helps those at the margins develop job skills to support their families.<sup>23</sup>

Additional small group missional possibilities for implementation at Second Baptist Church might include the following: establishing connections with the University of Southern California for a campus ministry outreach; adopting and supporting a local school, which might also include after-school tutoring; providing summer fun activities for children in the neighborhood during Vacation Bible School week, to be held in the church's parking lot; sponsoring a community fellowship barbecue in the church's parking lot; hosting a community yard sale and donating profits to mission or families in need; offering English as a Second Language and Spanish courses, and continuing to explore avenues to increase the mission focus. As the scope for mission increases it is anticipated that eventually all ministries, auxiliaries, and members not connected with a ministry within the church will become motivated to become involved in mission.

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<sup>23</sup> Sine, *The New Conspirators*, 274.

## CONCLUSION

The intent of this ministry focus paper has been to examine past and present trends of Christian education within the context of a postmodern Church and society. Research has indicated a steady decline in the enrollment and attendance figures for people involved in Christian education ministries in many denominations. A review of trends within the Baptist denomination, with a specific focus on the Christian education ministries of Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles and the trends within the African American Baptist Church, was explored. The following broad-based definition of Christian education was developed to guide the investigative search: Christian education is the process of educating, empowering, transforming and liberating the people of God. Guided by this definition two issues were addressed. The first issue considered was how the Church is educating and equipping the people of God to fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ in the present as well as preparing for the future. In other words, it addressed how the Church is exemplifying the Great Commission given to us by Jesus: “Go into all the world and make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20). The second issue discussed was how the Church is transferring the Christian faith tradition to the next generation of Christian leaders.

As reflections were focused upon the past and present state of the African American Church, there were vast arrays of strengths that have been passed on from generation to generation. Oftentimes, churches are focused on the areas of weakness and limitation to the extent that they fail to acknowledge the rich heritage of the Christian faith tradition which has withstood the test of time, by the grace of God. It is necessary to acknowledge and celebrate the treasures of the past and present within the life of the Church. However the Church must also maintain a heightened awareness of the present state of affairs, especially within a changing context of ministry.

It was discovered that most churches in the twenty-first century are continuing to educate and equip the people of God to fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ in the present as well as preparing for the future. Through the various ministries of Christian education lives are being transformed, and the Christian faith tradition is being transmitted from generation to generation. There are excellent models of Christian education being implemented. New models of ministry are continuously being developed by denominational bodies and local churches to address a changing context of ministry within a postmodern world.

Christian education continues to thrive as the “heartbeat” of the Christian Church within the African American community because it remains the only ministry that has the ability to significantly impact and nurture people across their life spans, from preschool through senior adulthood. Although the ministry today is comprised of varying structures, from the traditional to contemporary modes of operation, the *telos* remains consistent. The ultimate goal is to “make disciples” through the process of educating persons

towards the salvific knowledge of God as revealed through the life, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

As was highlighted in this ministry focus paper, churches connected to their respective denominational bodies generally implement the ministries promoted by the denomination. This has led to the expansion of the perception of educational ministries to encompass a holistic perspective which includes preaching, worship, Sunday school, Bible study, prayer, discipleship, evangelism, mission, music, art, drama, dance, healthcare, social justice, camping, audio-visual/technology, recreation, fellowship, African and African American culture and history, and the like. The Church has literally created “something for everyone” in order to continue the pursuit towards spiritual growth and development. However, it was reported that there has been a steady decline in the number of people who take advantage of the Christian education ministries within the Church. This decline is most significantly observed among the young adult population, those between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Therefore, several models were presented as strategies to increase the level of outreach and participation through the ministries of Christian education.

During the course of this research several challenges and barriers were identified. One of the major challenges that the Church has encountered within the changing context of a ministry to a postmodern and virtual world is that Christians no longer “go into all the world.” Instead, the ministry is designed for people to come into the local church and this has produced an inward perspective and a decrease in the missional outreach of the Church. Therefore, it is necessary to envision strategies by which people can reach beyond the walls of the local church. In order to address this challenge the Church must

find the balance between the inward and outward focal points. The Church cannot totally reject the needs that are prevalent within its respective body; for there are many needs. The Body has to be nurtured, strengthened, and developed on the inside before it can be an effective witness on the outside. The problem is not necessarily having an inward concern for the members of a particular body, but, not acknowledging that the Church is called to fulfill “greater works” of ministry. Churches should develop a mindset that asks, “If people will not come to us, then how shall we reach them?” This thought should guide the mission to reach as many people as possible for the cause of Christ.

In a fast-paced technological society, it is imperative to maintain an expanding vision to expose as many people as possible to the message of the gospel of Christ. However, in this age of technological advancement and bombardment, there is a need for further growth and development in the technological arena for the local church in the twenty-first century. There have been numerous discussions surrounding the use of technology for the expansion of the disciple-making process. Various models were presented in this ministry focus paper pertaining to the use of technology in ministry which included social networks, i.e. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, weblogs, webcasts, and the like. This technology has proven to be most effective for reaching the younger generation.

Another problem encountered during the present paradigm shift is that historically, models of Christian education were designed according to the organizational structures of public school education. In the past, when there was the thrust placed upon educating the masses, the total community was involved in the educational process. Churches were also involved in promoting public school education and Christian education. However, today

it seems as though public school education is no longer a priority and Christian education, in many cases, has lost its significance in the local church. However, in the twenty-first century the pendulum is swinging once again towards the need to restore greater emphasis and support towards improving public school education and expanding Christian educational pursuits.

When constructing Christian education ministries for the twenty-first century at Second Baptist Church, it is necessary to honor the rich legacy of the past 124 years in order to make the connection with the present and to further envision new models of ministry for the future. It is necessary to acknowledge those components of the present that are implemented with efficacy, in order to extrapolate the best practices and methods for future ministries. The foundation has been established centuries ago and is rooted and grounded in teaching and preaching the word of God. The word of God continues to go forth via many avenues within most churches today. When addressing the ministry needs of Second Baptist Church, the following strategies were presented for implementation: establishment of an intergenerational ministry, which will also be known as the Second Baptist Church family and friends fellowship hour; creation of various small group ministries that will include the development of a contemporary issues Sunday school class; an increased focus on mission education and outreach; and expanding the use of technology for worship, Christian education, discipleship, mission, and other activities.

As the Church continues to implement the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ, the Church must continue to develop methods to educate, empower, transform and liberate the people of God in the midst of a diverse post modern culture. In the text, *We Have This Ministry*, Garner C. Taylor proclaims these words of wisdom: “The very fact

that the gospel was set down in a definitive form that has been able to move and to demonstrate relevance across cultural boundaries and barriers says something about its divine nature.”<sup>1</sup> Congregations of faith must continue to acknowledge the treasures and gifts of the past and remain abreast of the new models of ministry that continue to evolve from generation to generation.

Jim Wallis offers several predictions for the twenty-first century in the book, *God's Politics*. These include:

1) Faith will be defined more by action than by doctrine; 2) Bible study will continue to grow in popularity among a wide variety of people; 3) Prayer will be even more important to people than it is now; 4) Family values will be embraced by people across the political spectrum; 5) Women in leadership in every area of life will become a given; 6) Overcoming poverty will become the great moral issue; 7) The unfinished agenda of racism will be impossible to ignore in the face of increasing diversity; 8) Old ecumenical structures will gradually dissolve in favor of new tables that bring together evangelicals, Pentecostals, Catholics, mainline Protestants, and historic Black churches along with Latino and Asian congregations; 9) The challenge of pluralism will replace the challenge of secularism as many diverse religious and spiritual traditions have to learn to live with one another; 10) Human rights will replace national sovereignty as the key international issue; 11) The need for prophetic religion will grow; 12) Peace making and conflict resolution will be regarded as being among our highly valued skills; 13) Hope will be the most essential ingredient for social change.<sup>2</sup>

Although they are only predictions, they are worth considering as believers continue to implement Christian education ministries in a postmodern culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor, *We Have This Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Wallis, *God's Politics* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005), 368-371.

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