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# Rise of the Reconcilers: Developing a Multiethnic and Reconciling Church Through the Equipping of Cross Cultural and Justice-oriented Disciple Makers

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

RISE OF THE RECONCILERS: DEVELOPING A MULTIETHNIC AND  
RECONCILING CHURCH THROUGH THE EQUIPPING OF CROSS-CULTURAL  
AND JUSTICE-ORIENTED DISCIPLE MAKERS

Written by

EFREM D. SMITH

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary  
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

  
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Date Received: May 7, 2019

RISE OF THE RECONCILERS: DEVELOPING A MULTIETHNIC AND  
RECONCILING CHURCH THROUGH THE EQUIPPING OF CROSS-CULTURAL  
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A DOCTORAL PROJECT  
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  
EFREM D. SMITH  
MAY 2019

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## ABSTRACT

### **Rise of the Reconcilers: Developing a Multiethnic and Reconciling Church through the Equipping of Cross-Cultural and Justice-Oriented Disciple Makers**

**Efrem Smith**

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2019

The city of Sacramento is one of the most multicultural and multiethnic cities in the United States, and yet within the last year has been facing deep racial tensions. These tensions have risen in the aftermath of the shooting death of unarmed African American Stephon Clark, at the hands of two Sacramento police officers. What is taking place in Sacramento is just part of the broader divisiveness, polarization, and dehumanization plaguing the entire United States.

Demonizing rhetoric targeted towards Black and brown people connected to the social issues of immigration, racial profiling, and religion dominates social media. Women within the arts, the marketplace, and politics are coming forward to tell their stories of sexual harassment and abuse.

With the nation being deeply polarized and socially suffocating from injustice, it is important to ask what evangelistic, disciple-making, and mission credibility the Church has, even a diverse church. The development of the multiethnic Church alone is not enough to bring transformation to a diverse, divided, and polarizing mission field. Therefore, this project seeks to answer the question, "Will the development of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers in a multiethnic congregation increase the credibility and relevancy of a church located in an urban and multicultural context to advance reconciliation?"

The multiethnic and reconciling church must equip and release cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers who forge unity, transformation, and social justice in their local communities and who innovate new paths of evangelism and missions. This doctoral project connects reconciliation theology, Black liberation theology, and urban apologetics in order to present a more robust ecclesiology that leads to a reconciling church. It also utilizes a sermon series, the development of a four-week class on reconciliation theology and the development of staff values for moving a diverse congregation to a multiethnic and reconciling church.

Words: 297

Content Reader: Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil

To my wife Donecia, and our daughters Jaeda and Mireya—thanks for loving me, supporting me, and pushing me to the finish line of this project.

To the Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil—thank you for the years of influence and serving as reconciliation, justice, and liberation theologian and practitioner. Your wisdom and insights were so valuable throughout this process.

To Pastor Gerald J. Joiner, Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., and Dr. Robert Owens—thanks so much for serving as my mentors and spiritual council over the years. The love, knowledge, affirmation, and equipping that you've poured into me will never be forgotten. Thanks for spiritually adopting me as a son and nephew.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Church in the United States finds itself once again in a very challenging moment. Among White evangelicals, 80 percent voted for a presidential candidate<sup>1</sup> who has used his office and social media to state that there are “good people” among White Nationalists and Neo Nazis, who threatened to deport immigrant children born in this nation, who encouraged police officers to rough up those they arrest, who called for the removal of African American athletes who use their platform to nonviolently bring attention to police brutality, and who marginalizes the voices of women who have been sexually abused.<sup>2</sup> While the president spews these words of division, unarmed African Americans are dying at the hands of police, fear-based portrayals of undocumented immigrants are widespread, and African-American churches, Islamic mosques, and Jewish synagogues are unsafe from racists with murderous intentions. Rallies of White nationalists in the deep South raise their voices crying, “blood and soil,” while celebrating confederate symbols which point back to the days of Jim Crow and even slavery.<sup>3</sup> In response to this significant moment, the multiethnic Church has been presented as a solution to the challenges of divisions based on racial, gender, and class, as well as the challenge of injustice. However, the multiethnic Church has not yet been able to impact this moment with sustainable and transformative social change.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Pulliam-Bailey, “White Evangelicals Voted Overwhelmingly for Trump Exit Polls Show,” November 9, 2016, accessed April 7, 2019, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

<sup>2</sup> Erin Corbett, “Trump Defends His Comments on Deadly Charlottesville Rally,” accessed April 7, 2019, [www.fortune.com](http://www.fortune.com), April 26, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Arsalan Iftikahar, “Trump Sees Immigrants as Invaders. White-nationalist Terrorists Do Too,” March 17, 2019, accessed April 7, 2019, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

## **A New Vision for the Multiethnic Church**

The multiethnic Church has the potential to be a transformative answer to a diverse yet divided mission field in America. Multiethnic church planting and revitalization projects are having more and more influence at church planting conferences, denominational pastors' gatherings and annual meetings, and within church growth book resources. This is especially true within evangelical spaces, whether church or parachurch; commitments to multiethnicity and diversity seem to be growing. After a season of commitments to urban ministry by evangelical churches and parachurches, there seems to now be a commitment to multiethnic ministry. It is not uncommon for parachurch ministries like Young Life or InterVarsity to have multiethnic ministry foci at the city, regional, and national levels, providing vision, biblical theology, and strategy to grow a more diverse staff and experience greater reach among diverse populations. Evangelical denominations like the Evangelical Free Church of America have developed national ministry departments focused on reconciliation while the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination has an executive minister serving over a Department of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice. Evangelical church planting conferences such as Exponential have seminar tracks on multiethnic church planting and feature pastors of multiethnic churches as general session speakers.

However, even with these advancements, evangelical Christianity is still very much perceived and presented in the major media as a White, conservative, Republican, as well as a Southern and Midwestern movement. It is seen as a movement that sees social justice as Marxist, socialist, and unbiblical. There seems to be a refusal to see and practice the biblical connection between justice, reconciliation, righteousness, and the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. But this problem within evangelicalism is not merely assumption and perception. Influential evangelical voices such as evangelist Franklin Graham, Liberty University President Jerry Falwell, Jr., Southern Baptist Preacher Robert Jeffress, African American Bishop Harry Jackson, and Christian television personality Paula White have used their platforms to strongly support President Trump, with a theology that aligns the Kingdom of God with nationalism, and have refused to speak boldly against racist, sexist, and demonizing rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> Though many other influential evangelical leaders may disagree with the positions of this group, their silence in speaking against this rhetoric as well as the bully pulpit of the above mentioned, in love and truth, has nearly drained evangelicalism of the transformative credibility to provide the solutions to the social ills infecting a diverse, yet deeply divided mission field. This however is assuming that evangelicalism ever had this credibility in this first place, which is debatable.

### **The Problem of Evangelicalism and Race**

Evangelicalism is not seen broadly as an innovator when it comes to diversity, multiethnicity, justice, and beloved community. How can this be, with what seems to be a commitment to multiethnic church planting and an embrace of racial reconciliation? The answer lies in a conflicting history within evangelicalism of seemingly making a commitment to reconciliation and justice while at the same time promoting and profiting from a White American conservative, nationalistic, and supremacy framework of Christianity. This framework lifts up a mythology of White Christian innocence, while

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<sup>4</sup> Kate Shellnutt and Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, "Who's Who of Trump's Tremendous Faith Advisors," June 22, 2016, accessed April 7, 2019, [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com).

presenting a revisionist motif which reduces the historic impact of colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the subordination of women. Evangelicalism also has a history of doing ministry in a way that places individual or personal evangelism and discipleship over advancing the Kingdom of God toward both individual and systemic transformation. This is coupled with a social engagement limited to the issues of a pro-life position limited to life in the womb, marriage between one man and one woman, a preservation of the current State of Israel, and a majority of politically conservative judges on the supreme court. The preservation of this within evangelicalism becomes the major roadblock for a greater missional credibility in the areas of justice and reconciliation. In their book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, Christian sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith present some of the problems evangelicalism faces in this area in recent years and in a more distant past:

Because evangelicals view their primary task as evangelism and discipleship, they tend to avoid issues that hinder these activities. Thus, they are generally not counter-cultural. With some significant exceptions, they avoid “rocking the boat,” and live within the confines of the larger culture. At times they have been able to call for and realize social change, but most typically their influence has been limited to alterations at the margins. So, despite having the subcultural tools to call for radical changes in race relations, they most consistently call for changes in persons that leave the dominant social structures, institutions, and culture intact. . . . Evangelicals usually fail to challenge the system not just out of concern for evangelism, but also because they support the American system and enjoy its fruits.<sup>5</sup>

Emerson and Smith reveal an evangelical juxtaposition when it comes to evangelicalism’s journey with justice and reconciliation. Consider evangelist and founder

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 21-22.

of evangelicalism, George Whitefield. This powerful revivalist during the Great Awakening preached the good news of Jesus Christ to Black slaves and supported the institution of slavery at the same time.<sup>6</sup> Evangelicalism in America begins in contradiction when it comes to race, justice, and reconciliation. This explains how evangelicalism can simultaneously show a commitment to urban ministry and multiethnic church development while at the same time support the presidency of Donald J. Trump.

### **The Double Consciousness of Whiteness**

The journey of this evangelical juxtaposition makes sense of a spiritual schizophrenia within evangelicalism. There are two personalities within evangelicalism, or what Joseph Evans describes as a “double consciousness within Whiteness.”<sup>7</sup> This is a White privileged version of the double consciousness that W. E. B. DuBois speaks of within African Americans.<sup>8</sup> This is why the current approach to multiethnic church development and racial reconciliation is not working in terms of addressing systemic racism and racialized divisions in America.

In the 1970s, African American evangelists such as Tom Skinner and John Perkins were received as prophetic voices of racial reconciliation within evangelicalism. At the same time, after Tom Skinner preached a message on racism and world evangelism at InterVarsity’s Urbana Missions Conference in 1970, a significant segment of evangelical churches and organizations refused to have him preach or support his

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Evans, *Reconciliation and Reparation: Preaching Economic Justice* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

ministry. His divorce a few years after the 1970 message was used by some as the reason for many White evangelicals distancing themselves from him, but others point to the Urbana message as the real reason.

In the 1980s, evangelical churches and parachurches began to bring on urban directors and outreach pastors to reach racially diverse neighborhoods and cities. It is within this commitment that my life was touched as a teenager by ministries such as Park Avenue United Methodist Church and Youth Leadership Foundation, Young Life, and Hospitality House. At the same time, the evangelical donors to these ministries threatened to stop financially supporting when staff of color, programs, or sermons came across as liberal in their eyes.

In the 1990s, Promise Keepers came on the scene as a mega-evangelistic rally for men, which also called men to racial reconciliation through African American pastors like Tony Evans and Raleigh Washington. At the same time, Raleigh Washington publicly denounced the Million Man March and its focus on inspiring and strengthening African American males. In the 2000s, books on the case for multiracial and multiethnic church development hit the shelves of Christian bookstores and were featured at pastors' conferences. Major evangelical conferences are diversifying their speaker rosters like never before. At the same time, after Rev. Michelle Higgins presented a prophetic critique on the state of evangelicalism along with a proclamation that Black Lives Matter at Urbana 2015, some donors threatened to pull their financial support if InterVarsity did not distance the organization from some of her comments.

Because of these contradictions, evangelicalism has very little credibility when it comes to being an innovation center of reconciliation and justice. Instead it is seen as

being apathetic towards reconciliation and justice or the opposers of it. There is a significant segment of evangelicalism that is held captive to whiteness, White supremacy, and White nationalism. This reality shows that changing the perception and the reality of a church movement historically deeply rooted in whiteness takes more than just a commitment to diversity or multiethnicity. There is a need for multiethnic churches whose ultimate goal is not simply to look like heaven, but to advance heaven in a broken and sinful world that is plagued by racial division.

The Gospel must be presented in its authentic state, including evangelism, discipleship, reconciliation, and justice. With the nation being deeply polarized around issues of immigration, police brutality, mass incarceration, and the sexual harassment and abuse of women, it is important to consider what evangelistic, disciple-making, and mission credibility the Church has, even a diverse church. The development of the multiethnic Church alone is not enough to bring transformation to a diverse, divided, and polarizing mission field. Therefore, this doctoral project seeks to answer the question, “Will the development of cross-cultural disciple makers in a multiethnic congregation increase the credibility and relevancy of a church in both an urban and multicultural context to advance reconciliation?” The exploration of this question is necessary because a multiethnic church is not necessarily a reconciling and transforming church. Diversity alone does not lead to churches that advance empowerment, justice, and multiethnic disciple-making.

The multiethnic and reconciling church must equip, empower, and release cross-cultural and reconciling disciple-makers. Cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers will forge unity, transformation, and social justice in their local communities and

beyond. They will innovate new paths of evangelism, disciple making, and missions. This doctoral project is about the multiethnic church movement going beyond simply growing visibly diverse congregations, to becoming transformational Kingdom communities that equip and release cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers. This process better positions the multiethnic church as a missional force, able to be the transformative solution to the problem of race and racism in the United States.

The context of this doctoral project is Bayside Church Midtown, a campus of Bayside Church in Sacramento, California. Bayside Church is a part of the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination. It is the second largest church in the denomination with close to twenty thousand people in weekend attendance across seven campuses. The broad goal of the project is to strengthen current and develop new sustainable discipleship ministries which equip current members in their cross-cultural competencies and skills that they may more fruitfully participate in the Great Commission. The hope is to go beyond a large attractional multiethnic megachurch campus, to a discipling church of empowered reconcilers.

Bayside Church Midtown is unique within this multi-campus church model because it is currently the only campus that is both in the heart of the city of Sacramento and very multiethnic in its attendance demographic. Though a campus of Bayside Church, on its own it is one of the fastest growing multiethnic and urban churches in the United States. This presents an opportunity. Because Sacramento is one of the most multicultural cities in the United States, there is an opportunity for Bayside Church Midtown to develop a ministry initiative of reconciliation, justice, and cross-cultural disciple-making that could equip and empower other diverse congregations to move to

becoming multiethnic and reconciling churches. There is an opportunity first within the Bayside family of churches and within the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination.

First, this project presents an opportunity to move Bayside Church Midtown from simply a multiethnic church to a more reconciling, liberating, and socially transforming church. Second, there is an opportunity to impact the culture and future of Bayside Church as a whole. To this degree, there is the possibility of impacting change within evangelicalism in a larger way because of the influence Bayside Church has within the Evangelical Covenant Church and within evangelicalism more broadly. The evangelical multiethnic movement will not be changed simply by relying on a majority of White leaders held captive to White Americanism, nationalism, political conservatism, and supremacy, but by an army of multiethnic indigenous and urban leaders equipped as cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers. Through the development of an annual sermon series, an annual four-week class, and the development of cross-cultural, community-based service opportunities, this doctoral project prioritizes a ministry end of not simply diversity, but of a spiritual formation that includes reconciliation and justice.

Currently, Bayside Church Midtown is the second largest campus within the Bayside family of churches with a weekend attendance of three thousand, and this campus is only seven years old. By becoming a multiethnic and reconciling church, committed to cross-cultural disciple making and community transformation in a diverse and deeply divided mission field, Bayside Midtown can also become a teaching and training center that participates in changing the face and impact of the Church in the United States. Also, by thriving and flourishing in this way, the center of gravity in the Bayside family of churches could radically change. Instead of a suburban, predominantly

White and politically conservative campus driving the culture and agenda of the Bayside family of churches, what if an urban, multiethnic, and reconciling campus was? For this to happen, Bayside Midtown must discover a deeper clarity of its mission, vision, and theology.

This doctoral project connects reconciliation theology, Black liberation theology, and urban apologetics in order to present a more robust ecclesiology that leads to the reconciling Church. Reconciliation theology is important because it can play a significant role in a diverse church having a more missional and transformational impact in a diverse and deeply divided mission field. This was part of the Apostle Paul's strategy in ministering to the church at Corinth. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, Paul challenges this multiethnic congregation to be compelled by God's love, to no longer see others from a worldly point of view, and to receive the message and ministry of reconciliation. Paul realized that being a diverse community alone would not lead to this church living out its mission as Christ followers in the multicultural city of Corinth. In the same way today, multiethnic churches need to utilize reconciliation theology in their discipleship initiatives. Though the Evangelical Covenant Church has brought in reconciliation theologians such as Brenda Salter McNeil and Curtiss DeYoung, their teachings have not shown up in the curriculum that is used to plant multiethnic churches in the denomination. The development of a four-week sermon series and class on reconciliation and cultural values will be central for moving a diverse congregation to becoming a multiethnic and reconciling church.

Urban apologetics is important because cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers, who are located in a multicultural city such as Sacramento, must be able

to bring the Gospel to bear upon the social issues within it. A learned apologetics for defending the Christian faith is not enough; there must be an embodied urban apologetics which unleashes compassion, mercy, and justice where there is brokenness and injustice.

Finally, the foundation of Black theology is important because the experiences of the Black Church and its example of realizing liberation, modeling reconciliation, and advancing justice can inform the development of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers. Evangelicalism can be liberated from its captivity to Whiteness by allowing the theology, practices, and ministries of the marginalized, oppressed, and liberated to transform its approaches to evangelism, discipleship, and mission.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

In the fall of 2010, the congregation now known as Bayside Church Midtown began as The House Church in the Midtown community of Sacramento, California. The church was planted by Bob Balian who, prior to this call, was the executive pastor of Bayside Church of South Sacramento (hereafter, BOSS). It is important to understand the planting and development of BOSS in order to gain a better understanding of both the planting and current ministry context of Bayside Church Midtown.

#### **Bayside Church of South San Francisco (BOSS)**

BOSS was planted in 2004 by Sherwood Carthen in partnership with Bayside Church located in the Sacramento suburb of Granite Bay, California. Bayside Church is a predominantly White and evangelical megachurch led by Ray Johnston. BOSS was planted intentionally as an urban and multiethnic church. Bayside Church was planted by Johnston twenty-three years ago under the auspices of the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination on Easter Sunday 1995. Its initial preview service was held a few months earlier at the Granite Bay Golf and Tennis Club.

The Granite Bay/Roseville Area of California is located in Placer County, which is one of the most politically conservative counties in the state of California. It is known for its Republican Party support. Though most of the rest of the state leans toward the Democrat Party in its voting, Placer County has been a strong support base for the Republican Party. This showed itself to be true in the last presidential campaign that led to the election of Donald Trump. An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on January 20, 2017 accurately captures this reality:

The deep Republican red of Placer County, even combined with its GOP-leaning neighbors in the state's far north, the Sierra and the Central Valley, wasn't nearly enough to overcome the Democratic domination of the population centers along the coast. But Trump's triumph gave his California backers the last laugh. More than 51 percent of the county's voters backed Trump, compared with 39 percent for Clinton. That's not a surprise, since the GOP holds a 45 percent to 29 percent registration advantage over Democrats in the county in the conservative foothills of the Sierra Nevada.<sup>1</sup>

The population of Placer County is 386,166, and 84.8 percent of that population is White. The median income of Placer County is \$80,488.<sup>2</sup> As a large suburban congregation of over seven thousand in weekend attendance located in Placer County, Bayside Church is not only predominantly White, but also predominantly upper middle-class. Bayside Church was planted in a community and developed as a church very similar to evangelical, predominantly White, suburban churches such as Saddleback Church in Southern California and Willow Creek Church in suburban Chicago.

The partnership with Carthen, an African American and indigenous leader in Sacramento, to plant BOSS, was the first time Bayside Church ventured into urban and

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<sup>1</sup> John Wildermuth, "In Red Placer County, Republicans Optimistic, Confident in Trump," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 20, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Census Department, "Quick Facts: Placer County, CA," accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/placercountycalifornia>.

multiethnic church planting. It should be noted that by planting in the city of Sacramento, Bayside Church was planting in a mission field much different than that of Placer County. Carthen began with a core team in 2004 and officially launched with a grand opening worship service in April of 2005.

Carthen was initially surprised by the opportunity to plant BOSS. Though after preaching at Bayside Church a couple of years earlier, he believed that a church like Bayside, though suburban, evangelical, and predominantly White, could have an impact in multiethnic and urban South Sacramento. In his book, Carthen recalls sharing this belief with Ray Johnston. He writes,

I mentioned how great it would be to have a church like Bayside in South Sacramento. I said, "If you were to start a church there, I'd make it my home church." Ray gave me a funny look and then we went on to talk important things like how the Sacramento Kings were doing. It was only a short time later that Ray asked if we could get together. When we met, he shared with me his vision for starting a family of churches throughout the Sacramento region and beyond. He explained that "One of the places we've targeted for starting a church is South Sacramento." I was excited to hear that. I told him I'd be a member from day one. That's when Ray dropped the bombshell: "We don't want you to be a member," he said. "We want you to be the pastor."<sup>3</sup>

Over the first seven years, BOSS would grow to an average weekend attendance of 2,500 and became the multiethnic church of Carthen's dreams. He recalls,

So, when we started BOSS, we launched it to be an intentionally multiethnic church. Our staff is multiethnic. All of our ministry teams are required to be multiethnic. Our worship is multiethnic. We sing songs in several different styles and even in different languages. BOSS looks and sounds a little bit like heaven to me! Maybe, you're wondering if this kind of multiethnic strategy works. Decide for yourself. Our urban church has been running for four years now. There are approximately 2,500 people who attend on any given weekend. But what's more exciting are the kinds of people God is bringing. Our church is roughly 35% African American, 35% Caucasian, 20% Latino, and 10% Asian. Even more

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<sup>3</sup> Sherwood Carthen, *Amen All by Myself: Discovering God in Life's Wilderness* (Self-published, 2009), 113-114.

exciting, we've baptized hundreds of new believers. This truly is a dream come true.<sup>4</sup>

For Carthen, the definition of a multiethnic church is one where people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds comprise one larger congregation. However, there is no mention of cultural or economic class diversity nor how these differences would impact a multiethnic congregation. Carthen became a very influential faith leader in the city of Sacramento, serving as the chaplain of the Sacramento Kings and working closely with then-mayor Kevin Johnson on issues such as community development as well as racial and economic disparities. Mayor Kevin Johnson called him the “pastor of Sacramento” on many occasions.

Though Carthen passed away in the fall of 2013 at age fifty-four of a heart attack, BOSS remains an influential church today under the pastoral leadership of Daryl Scarborough. However, the church has moved from being a very multiethnic church to a predominantly African American congregation. This may be due to the fact that Scarborough comes from Salem Baptist Church, a predominantly African American megachurch located in Chicago. As such, Scarborough has had a ministry background exclusively in the African American Church and has brought this contextualized ministry practice into how he leads BOSS.

It is also important to note that in the search process for the next senior pastor at the time of Carthen's passing, the church membership rejected an Asian American female candidate, though she was highly recommended by the nomination committee. The refusal to provide this candidate with a super majority vote of the membership is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

significant. When the opportunity arose to go further in its identity as a multiethnic and reconciling church by voting in an Asian American woman, instead the church decided to select Pastor Scarborough. This anecdote reflects the reality that ethnic diversity alone does not lead a church to break the glass ceiling that far too many women face in the pastorate.

### **The Formation of Bayside Midtown Church**

Bayside Church Midtown began as The House Church in the Midtown community of Sacramento, California in 2010. Bob Balian planted the church after leaving his executive pastor position at BOSS, where he had worked side by side with Pastor Carthen. Balian, who is Armenian, was part of the planting of BOSS from the very beginning and eventually took on the position of executive pastor. Although BOSS was one of the fastest-growing urban and multiethnic churches on the West Coast during its first few years, soon tensions arose, amongst both the staff and elder board of the church. BOSS would realize that success in growing a large multiethnic church does not necessarily mean the church will also be a healthy, reconciling, and unifying church. It is possible to be both a diverse and divided church. BOSS was having a tremendous impact externally but struggling internally, especially among the staff.

In the beginning, Carthen and Balian seemed to be a match made in heaven. They were called by some, “Shaq and Kobe” referring to the professional basketball players Shaquille O’Neal and Kobe Bryant. As teammates with the Los Angeles Lakers, these gifted athletes won three consecutive NBA championships between 2000 and 2002.

However, as the relationship between Shaq and Kobe eventually turned sour, so also did the relationship between Carthen and Balian.

While winning championships in the NBA, it would eventually be revealed that Shaq and Kobe did not have a very good relationship. Their unhealthy relationship became known as “The Shaq-Kobe feud.” In 2004, the same year BOSS was planted, Shaquille O’Neal was traded to the Miami Heat. The relationship between Carthen and Balian would eventually become the Carthen-Balian feud within a church context. By 2009, the relationship between the two pastors was strained, and it was evident that it would not be possible for them to continue serving together.

In my role as superintendent of the Pacific Southwest Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination, which brought me to California in July 2010, I interacted with both Carthen and Balian.<sup>5</sup> Balian had recently left his position as executive pastor at BOSS when I came onboard. In my role, I provided oversight to 164 churches in California, Arizona, Hawaii, and Nevada, and Bayside Church and BOSS were two among these. I had also known both Carthen and Balian prior to 2010 because I had preached at BOSS and Carthen had preached for my congregation in Minneapolis.

Due in part to rising tensions within the staff, in 2009, an outside Christian organization was hired to come in to perform an organizational audit of BOSS. This was done in order to more clearly assess the health of the church and identify specific challenges. Areas of unhealth were presented in the results of the audit, and a lot of the unhealth pointed to both Carthen and Balian. Their strained relationship was having a

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<sup>5</sup> In 2010 I left my role as the founder and senior pastor of The Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota to serve as the superintendent.

significant impact on the staff. There were also results of the audit that pointed more specifically to Carthen. On one hand, he was a powerful preacher and very loving shepherd. He still today remains to be one of the most effective communicators I have ever heard. It was also very hard to be in his presence and not feel loved. However, his lack of strong organizational and strategic skills impacted how he led outside of the weekend experiences of worship and pastorally with individuals. This caused tensions with the staff and specifically in his relationship with Balian. The audit made Carthen feel betrayed, especially by Balian.

Balian appeared organizationally stronger than Carthen, which made sense since he has a background in business. He is the former owner of a construction company that he inherited from his father. However, at the time, Balian was not as polished a communicator and was not viewed as being as strong as Carthen in terms of his shepherding gifts. Again, one would think this relationship would have been a match made in heaven: one pastor with strong preaching and shepherding gifts and the other with strong organizational and strategic planning gifts able to mobilize staff and move forward key initiatives, one African American and the other Armenian. It could have been a beautiful picture of reconciliation, the two of them serving together as senior and executive pastor over a growing multiethnic and metropolitan church. However, this was not the case. Their personal lack of unity would also divide the staff. Some sided with Carthen while others sided with Balian. Once I began my tenure as superintendent, Balian had already left the staff, and I played a significant role in facilitating a process for their relational reconciliation.

When Balian left staff, it was decided at BOSS and affirmed by Ray Johnston at Bayside Church that Balian would transition out and plant a church in Midtown, closer to downtown Sacramento. This would purposely put some distance between this new church plant and BOSS. This plan was halted when the unresolved issues between Carthen and Balian led Carthen to pull back on his support of the new church plant. Johnston offered to hire Balian on staff at Bayside Church with the understanding that Balian would wait two years to plant a new church.

As the superintendent, by the time I stepped into the process, Balian had made the decision to move forward anyway based on the advice of other local urban pastors, without the support of Carthen and Johnston, and planted in the fall of 2010. This not only increased the tensions between Carthen and Balian, but it also created a new tense relationship between Balian and Johnston. As a result, I now had to facilitate reconciliation between Carthen and Balian as well as between Balian and Johnston.

Clearly, based on the story of these two pastors, ethnic diversity and numerical growth alone does not lend itself to emotional health, dynamic spirituality, and relational reconciliation. Where a lack of emotional spirituality exists, it compromises the multiethnic congregation's ability to thrive and fulfill its mission. This reality creates the chasm that exists between a multiethnic and a reconciling church.

### **Defining a Reconciling Church**

It is important here to define a reconciling church. In her book, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil defines the term reconciliation as “an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken

relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”<sup>6</sup> With this definition in mind, a reconciling church is one which embraces the ongoing spiritual process that involves forgiveness, repentance, and justice which restores broken relationships and systems and weaves it into its discipleship strategies. The reconciling church is justice oriented and equips Christians to be disciple-makers in an ethnically diverse and deeply divided mission field. For this ecclesiastical practice of reconciliation to take place externally, it must first show up internally among an ethnically diverse staff and volunteer leadership within the church. This is why noted author and pastor Pete Scazzerro connects reconciling ministry externally with emotionally healthy spirituality internally.<sup>7</sup> Leaders of a reconciling church commit themselves to an ongoing process of soul care.

The reconciling church also focuses externally on its surrounding mission field. The late Reverend Samuel Hines, expert multiethnic church leader and reconciliation theologian, described reconciliation as both a spiritual discipline and the primary agenda of the church.<sup>8</sup> Understanding the reconciling church in this way shows a dynamic relevancy for greater participation and fruitfulness in the Great Commission in urban America and beyond. Being that the Great Commission is about making disciples of all nations, it is clear that in America this is a cross-cultural, social justice, and reconciling venture. There is no significant fulfilling of the Great Commission in the United States

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<sup>6</sup> Brenda Salter-McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Scazzerro, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel George Hines and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Beyond Rhetoric: Reconciliation as a Way of Life* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 32-33.

with acknowledging and addressing racial injustice, racism, and the challenge of whiteness and White supremacy within the evangelical Church. This doctoral project positions Bayside Church Midtown to meet these challenges head on to the glory of God.

### **An Analysis of Culturally Irreconcilable Differences**

As I look back on what went wrong between Carthen and Balian, I think of the importance of reconciliation within the multiethnic church. The fact that a church is multiethnic does not mean that there is a culture and spiritual practice of reconciliation. Diversity in and of itself does not mean there exists within a congregation cross-cultural and intercultural competencies, skills, and understandings. It does not mean that pastoral staff are committed to living out an ongoing process of reconciliation for the sake of church health. Also, as a product of both African American and multiethnic, evangelical congregations, I have an understanding of where things can go wrong when one comes out of a homogeneous and smaller church experience.

For example, prior to the planting of BOSS, Carthen had mainly been in predominantly African American and smaller church settings. In these settings especially, the African American pastor is the solo leader with loyalty and deference to the pastor being of utmost importance. Carthen's prior pastorate was of a predominantly Black Church and he understood the influence that role carried. He explains this ethos:

I was the king of a kingdom. I don't mean to sound arrogant, but the reality is that when you're the pastor of a black church, you're a king. In our country, there's supposed to be separation of church and state—but in the black community, the church is the state. If community leaders and politicians want to meet with the people, they meet in your church. If the neighborhood wants to rally or complain about the city, they meet in your church. On Sunday mornings, people come to church to get their marching orders for how to live. A black pastor can endorse a candidate or a proposition without ever using the word endorse. But people

understand what you're doing, and they will follow. . . . I was the pastor of a black church—the king of a kingdom, the head of state.<sup>9</sup>

Though Carthen brought Balian on early in the planting of BOSS as the executive pastor, this was not meant to be a co-pastor situation in terms of role and responsibilities. Based on his church background, Carthen would have expected to receive the loyalty and deference of an African American-contextualized ecclesiology and polity. There are a few African American churches where there are co-senior pastors, but they are few, and most are a husband-and-wife combination or a father-and-son team as part of a succession plan. My African American father in the ministry (a term used in the African American Church to denote a spiritual mentor), Pastor Gerald J. Joiner, Senior Pastor of Zion Missionary Baptist Church of Louisville, Kentucky, once told me, “The only thing with two heads is a monster.” This phrase I believe impacted the mindset Carthen had on pastoral leadership in the church.

Carthen would have expected a loyalty that bled into support, possibly even when wrong, and at least support in the masking, not exposing, of weaknesses and shortfalls. Any disagreements in this cultural context should only take place behind closed doors, and they should be done with great respect and sensitivity. Anything else, even if intentions were meant to be respectful and provide solutions to a problem, could be seen as insubordination and/or betrayal.

On the other hand, Balian came into his role at BOSS with a different cultural mindset. Balian, though not African American, grew up with many African American friends and had dated African American women. His roommate as a college student at

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<sup>9</sup> Carthen, *Amen All by Myself*, 21-22.

UCLA was African American basketball standout and eventual professional player, Jerome “Pooh” Richardson. As a baseball player in high school, his best friend was African American Greg Vaughn, who went on to be a professional baseball player with the Atlanta Braves and Milwaukee Brewers. Yet even with this background, there were potential challenges.

Primarily, it is significant that Balian’s relationships with African Americans throughout his life were mostly peer relationships. It was not until his fallout with Carthen that he sought out mentorship and accountability from seasoned African American pastors, such as Parnell Lovelace, founder of Center of Praise Ministries, and Ephraim Williams, Senior Pastor of St. Paul’s Missionary Baptist Church, both located in Sacramento.<sup>10</sup> These mentoring and spiritual father-based relationships became very valuable to Balian after his fallout with Carthen, and he has sustained these relationships to this day. In fact, his relationships with Lovelace and Williams led to Balian deciding to move forward with planting a church in Midtown without the support of Carthen and Johnston. But without these mentoring relationships during his time on staff with Carthen, Balian had mainly his peer relationship background to go with. This could have led to him believing he could bring his peer/friendship background with African American males into his relationship with Carthen. Without these significant mentoring relationships, Balian would not have gained insight regarding the loyalty and deference dynamics in relationship to the founding and senior pastor’s role.

By leaning into his peer/friendship experience with African Americans, Balian may have expected more of a co-leading situation at BOSS with Carthen. It is likely that

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<sup>10</sup> Bob Balian, interview with the author, Bayside Church, Sacramento, CA, October 10, 2018.

he believed he was providing great respect and deference to Carthen, but he was operating out of what he knew from his peer/friendship experiences with African Americans. Also, because Balian is not African American and has navigated a racialized society with White skin, there could also be unrecognized privilege issues at play as well. Balian's experiences cross-culturally, especially with African Americans, has made him sensitive to issues of privilege, but Whites in the congregation of BOSS who had never had to submit to African American authority may have shown a deference to Balian, and this may have played a role in the tensions with Carthen. African American friendships alone do not equate to the full removal of White privilege. This issue of privilege points to how issues of race, not discussed and without a process to navigate them, also could have played a significant role in the breakdown of both the personal and professional relationship. In her book, *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, Debby Irving addresses this issue as she writes about the challenges of navigating whiteness in multiethnic settings:

Until I became aware of how my internalized white ways of thinking and acting interfered with my best intentions to bridge the racial divide, I was like a bull in a china shop. What passed for normal in my white world had the potential to alienate people of color, creating unintentional slights, reinforcing the white stereotype, and perpetuating the kind of mistrust and misunderstanding that fuels racism.<sup>11</sup>

This is what I stepped into in 2010 as superintendent. I did not realize it at the time, but this was the beginning of the next step in my own journey in the areas of reconciliation, multiethnic church development, and disciple-making in a diverse and

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<sup>11</sup> Debby Irving, *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014), 210.

deeply divided society. The next seven years of experience would lay the foundation for the focus of this doctoral project.

### **Moving to a Multi-Campus Expansion and Planting Strategy**

By 2010 Bayside Church had planted BOSS and five other congregations: Bayside Citrus Heights, Bayside West Roseville, Bayside Woodland, Bayside Galt, and Bayside Lincoln (all located in the Greater Sacramento Area). These churches were planted in partnership with the Pacific Southwest Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) denomination and its national department of Church Growth and Evangelism (now called Starting and Strengthening Churches). Although these churches carried the Bayside name, they were independent member churches of the ECC with their own governing boards. There was simply a relational connection as a network of Bayside churches. This relational connection ended up not being as strong as Johnston had hoped. By 2012, some of the Bayside church plants were struggling, but the relational connection that existed did not lend itself to the Bayside Church being able to step in and address the issues. This also played a role in the Bayside Church not being able to intervene early on and deal with the breakdown of the relationship between Balian and Carthen as well as the broader staff issues at BOSS. This all led to Johnston's desire to change the church planting strategy and work to renegotiate the relationship with the other churches carrying the Bayside name.

Johnston invited the other Bayside Churches to become campuses of Bayside. The original Bayside Church, which was larger and more resourced, would provide central services to the other Bayside Churches and become a campus, creating one multi-site

congregation. In this new strategy, the other Bayside Churches would dissolve their governing boards, and a new board leadership team would be formed representing all of what would become campuses. There would be one larger annual budget and central services, covering areas such as finance, human resources, missions, and communications and marketing, initially driven by the original Bayside Church, which already had these ministry departments and staff in place.

This new model did not resonate well with the senior pastors of the existing Bayside Churches, which created a new strain and tension between some of them and Johnston. As a result, the larger and more resourced Bayside churches—BOSS, Citrus Heights, and West Roseville—decided to stay on their own. Bayside West Roseville changed its name to Life Community Church, in part because of added tensions after Bayside Church planted one of their first campuses (within the new church planting and expansion model) about three miles from their church. Today, Bayside Galt and Bayside Lincoln no longer exist. Bayside Citrus Heights, Bayside Woodland, and BOSS are still functioning as independent member churches of the ECC.

### **The Reconciling of Relationships**

In 2012, an event significant to this doctoral project took place. Reconciliation was finally realized between Balian and Carthen. This private reconciliation between Balian and Carthen became public when Balian preached at BOSS and Carthen preached at The House Church, now under the name of Bayside Church Midtown. In both settings, Balian and Carthen shared with the congregations their forgiveness of one another and their commitment to rebuild their relationship. This was moving along fairly well until

Carthen's untimely passing in September of that same year. It was also in 2012 that reconciliation had taken place between Balian and Johnston. Balian's original desire was to plant a church within the fellowship of the Bayside churches and the ECC. Broken and unreconciled relationships led him to plant The House Church as an independent congregation. Once reconciliation had taken place between Balian and Carthen as well as with Johnston, the opportunity was there for Balian to pursue his original desire. Therefore, Balian approached Johnston with the proposal of The House Church becoming a campus of Bayside, and soon after the transition to Bayside Church Midtown took place. This was another step in the relational reconciliation process between Balian and Johnston.

Today, the Bayside family of churches is made up of eight campuses: Granite Bay, Midtown, Adventure, Blue Oaks, Davis, Folsom, Folsom Prison (men's and women's facilities), and Santa Rosa. Together as one multi-site congregation, it represents a weekend attendance of close to twenty thousand. The leadership and multi-site model of Bayside is somewhat unique as well. Some could interpret Johnston's desire for a new church planting and multiplication strategy as a power grab, but it has been quite the opposite. Only the Folsom and Folsom prison campuses are video venues, and the Folsom campus is only a video venue two out of the four weekends each month. All the other campuses have live preaching every weekend. Each campus has either a senior campus pastor or co-senior campus pastors. Granite Bay, the original Bayside Church with a weekend attendance over seven thousand, has a team of four senior pastors in Ray Johnston, Curt Harlow, Andrew McCourt, and Lincoln Brewster. Ray Johnson and

Lincoln Brewster are in the process of moving to the role of global senior pastors, functioning in more of a coaching, mentoring, and equipping role.

Not only is there a Bayside Board Leadership Team with representation from multiple campuses, but there is also a senior-level Global Vision Team with responsibility for vision, strategic planning, faith statements, and core values. I serve on this team, and I am also ex-officio to the Board Leadership Team. There is also a Campus Pastors' Team made up of the senior pastors of every campus that focuses on sermon series and weekly sermon development, ministry expansion, leadership development, and global events connecting all campuses. Johnston's desire is to set up a culture and structure that can live beyond his presence and also prioritizes a team approach while he is still serving. This desire of Johnston for a team approach and a flat organizational structure within an evangelical megachurch has significant implications for the multiethnic church, which is explored in the next section.

### **Political and Racial Divisions within Bayside Church**

The challenge of being a campus of Bayside Church connects again to the fact that Bayside Midtown is currently the only multiethnic and urban campus. The other campuses are not only predominantly White and suburban, but also have ministry leaders that lack the cross-cultural and intercultural competencies and skills that many of our staff at Bayside Midtown have. We are also located in Sacramento County, which is more ethnically diverse as well as more liberal in its political ideology. This reality at times brings tensions and discomfort between our campus staff and the staff from other campuses.

One example of this took place at our weekly All Staff Meeting in November 2016 right after the presidential election of Donald Trump. His campaign and election as president of the United States played a role in the resurgence of racial tensions and divisions in the nation. Our Bayside Midtown staff went to the all-staff meeting the day after the election with heavy hearts. The election of Donald Trump was described as a, “White-lash” by Van Jones, a CNN political commentator.<sup>12</sup> Many of the Bayside Midtown staff felt they were the victims of that White-lash. On the other hand, many of the staff from the predominantly White and suburban campuses came to that same meeting excited and happy. Among White evangelicals, 82 percent voted for President Trump, and the other Bayside Church campuses were represented by staff that were part of that group. That reality was felt by the Bayside Midtown staff in the meeting. The tension was obvious in the room.

Johnston was aware of the tension and noticed the body language and facial expressions of the Bayside Midtown staff. He changed the agenda of the staff meeting and invited members of the Bayside Midtown staff upfront to share their feelings with the staff representing the other campuses so that they might feel the grieving of some of their fellow brothers and sisters in order to understand that Bayside was no longer simply a predominantly White, evangelical, suburban, and Republican megachurch. Although this attempt at pastoral sensitivity was appreciated, it further highlighted the fact that staff of color are expected to be the ones responsible for teaching their peers even in their time of

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<sup>12</sup> CNN.com, “This Was a White-lash: Van Jones’s Take on the Election Results,” November 9, 2016, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/09/politics/van-jones-results>.

sadness and grief. This is what author and ECC denominational executive Edward Gilbreath describes as “reconciliation blues.”<sup>13</sup>

This is not the only moment of racial tension we have faced as a multi-campus church. In 2016, to protest police brutality against African Americans, former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and other players knelt on the sidelines during the playing of the national anthem. President Trump not only described the protests as disrespectful to the American flag and the military, he also called the protesting players, “sons of bitches.” Christa Armstead is the worship pastor at Bayside Midtown and her husband Gus is on the Bayside Leadership Team (Global Executive Board). Gus is African American, and Christa is biracial, her mother being African American. Their son Arik plays for the San Francisco 49ers, and he knelt during the national anthem for multiple games. Many of us on staff at Bayside Midtown were grieved by the president’s statements.

This once again led to tensions that arose at one of our Wednesday All Staff Meetings the week of Veteran’s Day. At the meeting as we were giving campus reports, one of the staff members from another campus commented, “We celebrated Veteran’s Day on our campus this past Sunday and no one took a knee.” This comment was made without any sensitivity to one of our pastors being called a “bitch” by the president of the United States or a willingness to understand why her son, a member of Bayside Midtown, would kneel in the first place. Colin Kaepernick, the first player to take a knee and start this movement against police brutality, actually was given the idea of protesting this way

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical’s Inside View of White Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 19.

by a military veteran.<sup>14</sup> This is the great irony in how the narrative of this peaceful protest has been hijacked politically and embraced by a significant segment of White evangelicals. Needless to say, this was another example of the challenge of Bayside Midtown being the lone multiethnic and urban campus. These experiences have also given me a clearer sense of my calling within the Bayside family of churches.

When I met with Ray Johnston, Bob Balian, and other senior campus pastors about coming on full time at Bayside Midtown, Johnston asked if I would also serve as a teaching pastor for all Bayside campuses. He has encouraged me to share my passion for reconciliation, compassion, and justice on the other Bayside campuses. Though I am indeed encouraged by this, I know that this alone will not be enough to change the culture of the other campuses and raise their level of cross-cultural and reconciliation understanding. Putting the whole weight for injecting the biblical principles of reconciliation and justice on the shoulders of the lone person of color has been a failed strategy of evangelicals that has burned out many highly capable yet lonely men and women. Majority leaders within Bayside Church should be just as burdened with this responsibility. My hope is that this doctoral project will also become a global initiative, impacting all the campuses of Bayside Church.

### **The Bayside Church Core Value of Unleashing Compassion**

One of the core values of Bayside Church is to unleash compassion. This value shows up in the ministry areas of local and global missions, the experience of worship,

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<sup>14</sup> Military.com, “Kapernick Meets with Veteran Nate Boyer, Then Kneels during Anthem,” September 2, 2016, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.military.com/undertheradar/2016/09/kaepernick-meets-veteran-nate-boyer-kneels-anthem>.

and in capital campaigns. We have had challenges in the area of race and racism in the midst of our collectively unleashing compassion as a multi-campus church through our Mexicali Missions outreach ministry. On our last Mexicali Missions trip, two African American high school students from the Bayside Midtown campus heard a group of White students from the Bayside Granite Bay campus call them niggers. The White students did not think the African American students heard them. This issue was addressed right away, but it shows that even in a strong commitment to unleash compassion, there can be areas of prejudice and racism that have to be addressed. This is another example of why the goal of this project is to go beyond a ministry initiative of Bayside Midtown to one that impacts all Bayside campuses.

Another example of how the church seeks to unleash compassion is Serve Weekend. One weekend a year, we shut down weekend worship experiences on all campuses and spend that time putting on over forty service projects throughout the Sacramento metropolitan area. Neighborhood cleanups, painting school classrooms, repairing bikes and giving away bikes to youth and the homeless, providing free haircuts and manicures, a free mobile health clinic set up in the church parking lot, and giving out food are just some of the ways we unleash compassion in the city through Serve Weekend. We shut down church services in order to be the church that serves as a large army of God's people.

Whenever there is a capital campaign on one or multiple campuses for building and ministry expansion, the first 15 percent of the money raised goes to support what are called Compassion First projects. Through these projects we have supported ministries such as Compassion International, World Impact, Convoy of Hope, Youth for Christ,

Fellowship of Christian Athletes, St. John's Home for Women and Children, and the Urban Youth Workers Institute. We desire to bring real hope to challenging places and hurting people through our time, talent, and treasure. One of the desired outcomes of this doctoral project is a ministry initiative that equips members and regular attenders to go beyond simply participating in compassion opportunities to a life of cross-cultural, justice-focused, and reconciling disciple-making.

### **Increasing Experience of Worship Services**

The building where Bayside Midtown Church currently worships has limited space challenges. The space where we worship can only seat approximately five hundred people. In early 2017 we were averaging 2,300 in attendance with four worship services (this also includes an overflow room and children's ministry meeting in a separate space). By the fall of 2017, we added two more worship services. At the time of this writing, we are averaging close to three thousand in attendance with a 7pm Thursday evening service and Sunday services at 8:30am, 10am, 11:30am, 12:55pm, and 7pm. We continue to grow as a multiethnic, multicultural, and metropolitan church. But with this growth, we must also strengthen current and develop new ministry initiatives to equip people as disciple-makers where they live, work, go to school, and within the surrounding community of the church. Another one of the original core values when planted as The House Church was to create the perfect balance between reaching and growing people.<sup>15</sup> An initiative to launch small groups was presented as a means of living this out, but other initiatives will also be needed to achieve this core value.

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<sup>15</sup> Bob Balian, "The House Church Mission and Vision," document developed for Core Team Meeting, September, 2010.

## **A Desire for a Deeper Focus on Community Engagement and Development**

The vision and core values of Bayside Midtown are not simply centered on multiethnic church growth. We do desire to grow to the degree that we want to be a thriving church that reaches people throughout the Sacramento metropolitan area, and we also hope to change the face of the Church in America, where the majority of congregations remain homogeneous. Ultimately, though, we want to go beyond being a multiethnic worship center to also deeply impacting our surrounding community. Currently one of the ways we do that is through a focus on education. Ashlei Hurst is a member of our congregation who also used to be on the Bayside Midtown staff as the outreach pastor. A couple of years ago, she transitioned off staff to work for Mercy Housing Development. Mercy Housing is a low-income housing project made up of mostly African American and Hispanic single-mother-led families. All of the families living in the Mercy Housing Project are on federal assistance. Over two thousand people live in this housing development. The elementary age children who live there are required to go to Leataata Floyd Elementary School located right across the street.

Many of the children attending the school are below grade level in reading and math. As I have talked with people working in both education and the criminal justice system, I have heard on many occasions that one of the ways those in the prison industry forecast who will be incarcerated years from now is by looking at that the percentage of children in under-resourced communities who are below grade level in math and reading. Ashlei's primary role is to work with under-performing children at the school and their families and hopefully disrupt this housing project-to-prison pipeline.

Her transition off our staff was actually a strategic move in order to get our church involved at both the school and housing project. We partner with her to run Breakaway Academy, a summer school for under-performing students in elementary grades up to middle school. We raise over \$200,000 for this initiative, hiring teachers and providing school supplies. We also partner with Chuck Doss, the head of the athletic ministry within St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church Family Center, to run an afterschool mentoring program for students at Floyd Elementary School called, Huddle Up. It is a monthly after-school program designed to encourage and equip kids in the areas of character development, goal setting, and treating themselves and others well. We provide food and guest speakers who are successful in various career fields, and we facilitate small groups where young people can share about the challenges they are facing in life. The small groups are led by adult volunteers from our church.

Even with these initiatives, Ashlei has communicated that she is in need of more mentors and tutors for kids and people who are willing to build relationships with the family members of the kids. We need more Huddle Up small group leaders as well. There is a need for a cross-cultural, reconciling, and disciple-making ministry initiative that equips and releases more of our people into the surrounding community to meet these types of needs. We also desire to grow our impact in the community beyond just these opportunities. We would like to offer after-school programs that focus on the arts and sports. One day we would like to have our own Boys' Academy at Bayside Church Midtown. The original core values also pointed to having an impact in our community by addressing homelessness in meaningful and transformative ways. This is why it is imperative that Bayside Church Midtown go beyond being a multiethnic church to a

reconciling church. Serving our surrounding community in this way would move our members from simply participating in a diverse congregation to actually embodying urban and reconciling apologetics.

### **Raising Up an Army of Cross-cultural, Reconciling, and Social Justice Disciple-Makers**

Bayside Church Midtown has begun the work of engaging this and other issues impacting Sacramento mainly through the involvement of the pastoral staff. We have been working with professional athletes to engage communities in transformative ways. We have hosted and attended town hall meetings on issues such as race and youth violence at our church. Though all of this is positive, our church members many times seem like nothing more than audience members or observers. We could easily be a church of people who simply celebrate their pastors' involvement in the community rather than engaging themselves. This doctoral project focuses on equipping and releasing cross-cultural and reconciling disciple-makers into the city as agents of transformation. In the urban context, pastors can get so busy growing their own influence in the city that the church's impact, for the most part, is limited to them. We can have a greater impact by equipping the mass of attenders we are fortunate to have. At the end of the day, we do not want to celebrate our large attendance, but our impact in the city.

Not only is there an opportunity to equip our members and regular attenders for greater impact in the community, there is a need to measure the impact we are having within our diverse local context. Currently the main metric we track is our attendance. Since the beginning, we have been tracking attendance in our worship services. Recently, we have been tracking participation in small groups, attendance at our weekly men's and

women's ministry gatherings, and participation in our youth and young adult ministries. We also track attendance for our summer program initiatives, including the Breakaway Academy and Breakaway Day Camp.

Because we raise funds beyond our congregation, we also track the impact of Breakaway Academy and in terms of what percentage of participants have improved their reading and math skills. We connect with parents to track their experience. Part of Breakaway are optional family events. We put on a community BBQ and carnival as well as an Adventure Night at the Sacramento Zoo. We had over eight hundred people participate at the zoo event. We could definitely continue to improve how we measure our fruitfulness beyond tracking attendance and beyond our current evaluation of summer initiatives. We also have an opportunity to develop ways to measure the impact we are having on our members and regular attenders. If the goal is to equip and release disciple-makers, we need to measure how our people are growing as disciples themselves and our effectiveness in disciple-making. This doctoral project can play a part in improving how we measure fruitfulness in terms of community engagement and impact.

Measuring our impact in this way allows us to see if we are building new and lasting relationships with families in the Mercy Housing Development. Are we reaching the currently unchurched in other parts of our community? Are people who have come to Christ in our church growing as disciples and getting engaged in community impact initiatives? Are we building trust and credibility cross-culturally with our neighbors? Putting measurement tools in place along with reconciling, disciple-making initiatives can move us from a growing diverse church to a healthy, multiplying, and transforming one.

This doctoral project comes at a time when we are exploring how to become a more “sticky church.” We seem to be a very attractational church right now. We are definitely experiencing fruit when it comes to the original core value of developing an exhilarating worship service and creating an irresistible environment. Our worship experiences include the contemporary urban gospel sounds of Kirk Franklin and Fred Hammond as well contemporary Christian songs of Hillsong and Lincoln Brewster from our praise and worship team. We have a worship band made up of professional musicians and a praise and worship team co-led by national recording artist Melinda Watts. We have a multiethnic team of high-energy and biblically-rooted preachers and teachers. Sometimes we feature spoken word artists and local high school drumline teams. We have a strong children’s ministry with an ethnically diverse staff team. We have a fulltime communications and media director on staff. All this lends itself to a line of people outside and around the corner many Sundays waiting to enter the building and experience one of our six worship services.

Our challenge is to strengthen our current and add new discipleship, connection, social justice, and community developing initiatives beyond the attractational worship services. As already mentioned, we have small groups and midweek gatherings of men, women, and youth. We are working to grow these ministries further, but we are also launching new initiatives this summer and fall. Big Wednesday is a four-week series of classes offered during the summer. The fall we will also bring our Men’s and Women’s Ministry gatherings together to put on a two-week series on marriage and dating as well as living single. Part of this doctoral project is the development of one of the Big Wednesday classes offered this summer entitled, “Reconciliation and Disciple-making.”

The hope is that this class will be part of a long-term focus on equipping and releasing cross-cultural and reconciling disciple-makers. The desired result of this would be to move beyond being simply a large multiethnic church to a healthy and reconciling one as well as having a more fruitful and measurable impact in our city.

### **Moving from an Ethnically Diverse Church to a Reconciling One**

There is no question that Bayside Midtown is a diverse church, but Curtiss DeYoung, noted author and reconciliation leader, states that just because a church is multiethnic does not mean it is a reconciling church.<sup>16</sup> As a nation we are living in an ever-increasing diverse, yet deeply divided reality. People come into our church from that reality, from many backgrounds and carrying many issues as the products of living in a racialized society. There are Democrats, Republicans, and Independents in our congregation, though the Democrats may be the majority. There are some who see issues of race everywhere they go and others who are wondering why we talk about it so much. People are drawn into our church for many different reasons.

There was a time when I believed that everyone who was at our church was there because of our ethnic diversity. I would talk to members and regular attenders who would say that they came to our church and love it because of our ethnic diversity. Some said they loved that they could look around our church on Sunday morning and it felt like what heaven must be like. But then I began to talk with others at our church and the ethnic diversity was not what drew them at all. One man said to me that he loved that we preach deeply biblical sermons. A woman said she was drawn by how loving our people

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<sup>16</sup> Allan Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 78.

are. Another stated that he loved that we were so involved in the community. To my surprise someone said that he did not even notice how diverse we are. He used the colorblind-based statement that when he looked at me, he did not even see color.

We have experienced the tensions that arise in the midst of all this. The first sermon I preached as co-pastor was the Sunday during the racial violence that broke out in Charlottesville, South Carolina in August of 2017. Alt-right and White nationalist members were in Charlottesville to march and rally around symbols of the confederacy and White supremacy. There were counter protesters there as well, and violence broke out leading to many injuries and the loss of life. On that Sunday, Balian and I stood together and made a statement about how White nationalism and supremacy in no way align with the Kingdom of God, the mission of Christ, or the biblical Church. We talked about our commitment to be a church of compassion, mercy, justice, and reconciliation. Later in the service I preached a sermon and said some things about racism in our nation. I believed I was speaking broadly and biblically.

The next day I received an email from an Asian woman who was highly offended by my sermon. She stated that her husband was White and that he felt that I was calling him a racist throughout the whole sermon. She said she cried in the car all the way home and wondered if I had a problem with all White people. On the other hand, there were some African Americans in the congregation that day who felt I was not strong enough on the issue of racism in the sermon. I also had a person come up to me a week later and say that he did not realize that race was still a major issue in our country. This experience helped me to see the point that being a multiethnic church does not make you a healthy and reconciling church. This doctoral project is part of the hope that we will strive to be a

healthy and reconciling church as well as equip and release reconciling disciple-makers into a deeply divided and racialized mission field.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review highlighting the intersections of multiethnic church development, reconciliation praxis, Black liberation theology, and urban apologetics. This establishes the foundation for this project to equip cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present an end result of the multiethnic and reconciling church that is not simply the planting of large ethnically and racially diverse churches or the revitalizing of predominantly White evangelical congregations. The ultimate end result should be to equip, empower, and release cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers into a mission field that is increasingly multicultural, yet deeply broken in the areas of class, gender, and race.

There is also an opportunity for a more credible ecclesiology and more fruitful participation in the Great Commission for the evangelical Church. This will also affect the life and leadership transformation of church planters, campus senior pastors, and current evangelical church pastors who wish to venture into the development of multiethnic and reconciling churches. The multiethnic and reconciling church has the opportunity to train up cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers who practically

live out the Scriptural command, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God” (Micah 6:8). Nine books are reviewed within three categories: reconciliation praxis, Black liberation theology, and urban apologetics.

The first category is reconciliation praxis. The books chosen for this section are: *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* by John W. De Gruchy, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* by Allen Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, and *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* by Brenda Salter McNeil. De Gruchy’s book presents reconciliation as a theological doctrine, containing multiple expressions which inform reconciliation praxis within the local church. He connects reconciliation praxis with restorative justice and the transformation of society.<sup>1</sup> Boesak and DeYoung show how reconciliation is deeply biblical through the ministry of Paul in the New Testament. They make the case that because Paul and his fellow early Christians were a marginalized and oppressed people, reconciliation praxis takes on both spiritual and political meaning. The ministry of Paul and the churches he planted are connected to the reconciling work of Christ on the cross, which also is both a political and spiritual event.<sup>2</sup> Salter McNeil frames reconciliation praxis as an ongoing spiritual process that is both relational and systemically restorative, encompassing forgiveness and justice. She goes beyond

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<sup>1</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 16-34.

<sup>2</sup> Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation*, 11-23.

reconciliation as biblically rooted in the ministry of Paul and Christ, to the restoration of God's multicultural mandate given in the beginning, in the command to fill the earth.<sup>3</sup>

The second category of the literature review explores both how Black liberation theology connects to reconciliation theology and how it can inform ministry praxis within the local church. The evangelical Church especially can realize greater faithfulness and fruitfulness in the development of multiethnic and reconciling churches by learning from both Black theology and the social engagement of the Black church. This gift of Black liberation theology to the multiethnic and reconciling church is explored in the books, *A Black Theology of Liberation* by James H. Cone and *A Black Political Theology* by J. Deotis Roberts. A third book, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* by Cheryl J. Sanders, provides a practical insight into how Black liberation theology and reconciliation praxis is realized in the life of the Black church.

Cone's reflections on God in Black theology connects God as the liberator of the oppressed as seen in the Old Testament book of Exodus with the incarnational God found in Jesus Christ. This provides a union of both God the Father and God the Son as well as God the liberator and God the reconciler.<sup>4</sup> Roberts presents a Black theology that calls the oppressed to both the pursuit of liberation and reconciliation based not on cheap grace, but on a faith in the God who suffers with the marginalized and sets them free. This also points to the incarnational God found in Jesus Christ as he encounters the oppressed, marginalized, and suffering. This combination of liberation and reconciliation

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<sup>3</sup> Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 20-38.

<sup>4</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 59-95.

empowers the oppressed to set the terms to the oppressors on which reconciliation to God and one another is possible.<sup>5</sup> Sanders explores the journey of Third Street Church of God in Washington DC as church of refuge and reconciliation. This ministry of being a refuge from a world of sin and a house of reconciliation to divided humanity puts into practice the theological union of liberation and reconciliation presented by Cone and Roberts. It also informs how a multiethnic and reconciling church can put the learnings from Black theology and the journey of the Black Church into its outreach and discipleship initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

The final category of this literature review considers urban apologetics. This study informs both the current ministry context and the ministry project presented in the concluding chapters of this doctoral project. The books chosen for the section are: *Urban Apologetics: Why the Gospel is Good News for the City* by Christopher W. Brooks, *The Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* by Eric Mason, and *From Classism to Community: A Challenge for the Church* by Jini Kilgore Cockroft. Urban apologetics informs the ministry praxis of the multiethnic and reconciling church by presenting a practical theology of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9-10) through the embodiment of the good news, which is the gospel of Christ (Luke 4:18-21). In this way the church becomes the continuing extension of the incarnation of God as ambassadors of reconciliation, until Christ returns (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

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<sup>5</sup> Deotis J. Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 219-222.

<sup>6</sup> Cheryl J. Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38-48.

Brooks presents the members of the urban church as urban apologists, whose lives show how much the city and its challenges matter to God. Urban apologists embody the gospel in ways that show how Christ and the gospel have much to say about social issues. He contends that the mission of the urban church is to present a Christianity that is concerned with the human flourishing of those historically and presently marginalized and oppressed.<sup>7</sup> Because urban centers are ripe for the development of multiethnic and reconciling churches, this understanding of urban apologists can inform the development of justice-oriented disciple makers.

Mason presents the members of the urban church as exiles and as incarnational missionaries for justice. In his defining of incarnational missionaries for justice, he shows how peace-making, justice, and image-bearing are crucial elements of the missional and urban church. When urban Christians find identity in being incarnational missionaries for justice, they become woke Christians and collectively a woke church.<sup>8</sup> Becoming “woke” is a useful metaphor in the moving from a Christian who is a member of a diverse church to one who steps into the journey of justice-oriented disciple making.

Kilgore Cockroft contends that followers of Christ in community together should lead to a fellowship of equals, where racial and social class lines are dismantled. Her vision for the urban church goes beyond simply being together in a diverse community to how people treat one another, learn from each other, and grow spiritually in such an environment. For her, an urban and diverse congregation ought to bring about a deeper

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher W. Brooks, *Urban Apologetics: Why the Gospel Is Good News for the City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), 29-81.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 41-55.

spiritual transformation and realization of extended family among the haves and the have nots and the formally incarcerated and never incarcerated, as an example.<sup>9</sup>

***Reconciliation: Restoring Justice by John W. De Gruchy***

The understanding of what constitutes a reconciling church is partially influenced by De Gruchy's doctrine of reconciliation. In his book, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, he presents reconciliation as both a doctrine and a process. It is a doctrine in that it is the story of God's salvation, and it is a process because it goes beyond just a belief system to action motivated by hope and love.<sup>10</sup> His describing of reconciliation encompasses God's saving work in Jesus Christ, the reconciling of estranged persons, and as the mission of the Church.<sup>11</sup> But the Church embodying reconciliation as the mission of God is not limited to spiritual growth cross-culturally or mending broken relationships. For DeGruchy, reconciliation is about a fundamental shift in both personal and power relations between former enemies, and it is about the restoring of justice. He provides a holistic understanding of reconciliation through four levels or ways to speak about reconciliation: theological, interpersonal, social, and political. These levels are not meant to compartmentalize reconciliation, but to provide a more robust understanding of biblical reconciliation and both its spiritual and social impact.

The reconciling church is a church on a journey, encompassing a holistic approach to reconciliation. First, this holistic approach to reconciliation is evangelistic in

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<sup>9</sup> Jini Kilgore Cockroft, *From Classism to Community: A Challenge for the Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2016) 11-71.

<sup>10</sup> De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

terms of the salvific work of Christ to reconcile sinful humanity to God. Second, reconciliation is about discipleship in terms of believers maturing in their relationship with God through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is about the follower of Christ becoming an ambassador of reconciliation. Third, reconciliation is outreach and missions in terms of God's mandate of justice to God's people. Reconciliation is also about social healing and transformation through restorative justice. The reconciling church is focused on the way of reconciliation; Jesus Christ and the work of reconciliation; and the following of Christ as change agents in a broken world.

For a deeper understanding of the work of the reconciling church, DeGruchy uses the movement against apartheid in South Africa. He presents this movement as church-based through leaders such as Bishop Desmond Tutu and as utilizing Black theology. Black theology for DeGruchy builds the relationship of reconciliation and liberation within the doctrine of reconciliation. Within the reconciling church, working towards unity within diversity is not a full realization of the doctrine of reconciliation and leads to a cheap reconciliation. The reconciling church is God's missional vehicle for social justice and transformation.

***Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism***  
**by Allen Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung**

Reconciliation theologians Allen Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung call for a radical understanding and practice of reconciliation in their book, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*. They root their radical reconciliation theology biblically in the ministry of Christ and the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. Utilizing Paul's ministry, they explore the context of his status as a first-century Jew.

This meant he was living as a colonized, oppressed member of an ethnic and religious minority group. Reconciliation in this context takes on both spiritual and political meaning. Boesak and DeYoung show this by providing a definition of reconciliation as a word translated from several related Greek words: the verbs *katallasso* and *apokatallasso* and the noun *katallage*. They also describe reconciliation as broader than simply being relational between two persons: “These words were utilized by Greek writers to discuss interpersonal relationships. In particular, they were used in peace treaties between nations and groups.”<sup>12</sup>

This shows that there are both spiritual and political dimensions to the word *reconciliation*. Boesak and DeYoung explain that reconciliation from these Greek words “can be understood as exchanging places with the other, overcoming alienation through identification, solidarity, restoring relationships, positive change, new frameworks, and a rich togetherness that is both political and spiritual.”<sup>13</sup> From this understanding, Paul’s ministry is both a spiritual and political movement. Boesak and DeYoung write,

Paul linked reconciliation with social justice. In order to claim that reconciliation is the work of social justice Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8, a reference to Israel’s liberation from Egypt- the core understanding of Judaism. This may be an intentional echo of Jesus’ quote from Isaiah to launch his ministry from Nazareth. . . . Reconciliation is radical in that it reaches to the very roots of injustice. Paul understood that injustice creates the need for reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

Boesak and DeYoung present Paul as a radical reconciling missionary and church planter and Jesus as a radical reconciling savior and liberator. The very birth of Christ was both spiritual and political in that he was called Messiah and by being called King of

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<sup>12</sup> Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

the Jews, he was a threat to King Herod, who was appointed by the Roman Empire to serve in that role (Matthew 2:1-14).<sup>15</sup> The ministries of Jesus and of Paul were political in nature, including threats from government and religious structures, incarcerations, public beating by ancient police-like forces, and eventually the death penalty. But their ministries were also spiritually dynamic. In Christ, salvation and reconciliation becomes possible and an understanding of God's justice is brought forth for a woman caught in adultery, a woman with an incurable disease, and for a girl left for dead, to name a few examples. The work of the reconciling church includes the pursuit of justice in Jesus' name. To be ambassadors of reconciliation is to be pursuers of justice in the communities that surround the local churches where we hold membership.

***Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice***  
**by Brenda Salter McNeil**

In order for multiethnic and reconciling churches to be communities that equip and release cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers, there is a need for the inclusion of strategies for implementing ministries of reconciliation and justice. Brenda Salter McNeil provides a framework for this in her book, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice*. As a noted reconciliation theologian, pastor, and conference speaker, Salter McNeil provides a definition for the spiritual process of reconciliation and a strategy that she presents as a roadmap for becoming a reconciling church. She believes that for reconciliation to occur there must be

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<sup>15</sup> All biblical references will be taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

a combination of repentance, justice, and forgiveness.<sup>16</sup> She centers reconciliation in the work of Christ and roots it as a biblical concept. She frames reconciliation from both a spiritual and sociologically transformative perspective. This is shown in the following definition:

I therefore offer this new definition of the term reconciliation: Reconciliation is an ongoing process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish. This definition acknowledges the historical wounds that must be healed and transcends an individualistic view to include the need for systemic injustice to be addressed as well. However, it is also rooted in a biblical understanding of God, which is why we must take a close look at the theological principles that undergird it.<sup>17</sup>

Salter McNeil's book is a major contribution to the development of reconciliation theology. She provides the necessary framework for moving reconciliation beyond simply a social experiment or relational tool to a weapon of spiritual warfare, the primary mission of the Church and one of the fundamental elements of spiritual development. She even places the beginnings of reconciliation theology much earlier than the development of multiethnic churches or the writings of the Apostle Paul on reconciliation in the New Testament. Though reconciliation is the restorative and repairing work of God in Christ and God's people through the Church, Salter McNeil roots reconciliation theology in the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament book of Genesis and provides a broader understanding of what broken humanity is being restored back to. She presents this understanding of multiethnic diversity being the mission of God, in the beginning of creation, in the following manner: "So, let's press in to our theology of reconciliation. It

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<sup>16</sup> Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

starts in Genesis 1:28 with what is known as ‘the cultural mandate,’ or the command to fill the earth. Here we see that variation was one of God’s creational motives from the outset. The creation account reveals God’s desire for the earth to be filled with a great diversity of races and people.”<sup>18</sup>

Though I would argue that race is a non-biblical and man-made social construct, I agree with her overarching point: both oneness and diversity were God’s ideas from the beginning. God commanded the first human beings to move toward the reality of a flourishing, multiplying, unified, diversity in relationship with God and one another. Sin warps this idea and creates separation between God and humanity; it also impacts God’s vision of a diverse humanity. The diversity of humanity infected by sin leads to division and oppression. Christ as the ultimate reconciler comes to restore human beings and the rest of creation back to God’s original vision. This provides a more robust reconciliation theology for the multiethnic church. The multiethnic church is a flourishing church of justice and transformation when adopting a reconciliation theology and strategy for developing a culture of reconciliation.

Salter McNeil then moves in her book to presenting a reconciliation praxis, which she calls a roadmap. She believes that racialized events, even those tragic, can be utilized by the Church as catalytic events to move the Church into the process of reconciliation. She provides two potential options that can take place within a catalytic event: people will either seek preservation or desire transformation. Preservation is a defense option for staying with the racial or ideological beliefs that one already held. In this option, a person digs his or her heels deeper in the ground. For example, a White person choosing to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 23.

preserve his or her whiteness as it is currently regardless of how it is impacting people of color. Another example would be a male choosing to preserve his maleness as it is currently, even if this preservation is at the expense of sustaining an oppressive or unsafe environment for women.

Transformation is the option Salter McNeil provides for those who desire to step into the process of reconciliation. Her roadmap includes an invitation to journey into repentance, justice, and forgiveness. This roadmap is very useful because many people are coming into the multiethnic Church deeply impacted by a culture infected by rugged preservation, especially in the areas of race and political ideology. Because of this, it is possible for a person to experience spiritual transformation through the receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior and yet stay in preservation mode socially or culturally. This brings into question what type of spiritual transformation actually took place. Spiritual transformation as reconciliation ought to bring about an ongoing holistic transformation. For the Apostle Paul, for instance, his meeting Christ on the road to Damascus brought about an internal spiritual transformation and it also brings about a social transformation in how he saw and related to both Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ. He is so spiritually and socially transformed that he praises God even in persecution, and he influences the planting of multicultural and reconciling churches that pursue justice. The reconciling church is an embassy of this holistic reconciliation and transformation. Salter McNeil's roadmap provides a way to frame and measure this.

### ***A Black Theology of Liberation by James Cone***

Reconciliation encompasses liberation or freedom because reconciliation is found in Christ. The Apostle Paul writes, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). Christ is the revelation of God and God’s love towards humanity, enslaved by sin. We are set free and reconciled to God through Christ and given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). This is a liberating act: to be set free from sin and also empowered to live as reconcilers. Reconciliation and liberation are then inseparable in Christ. Christ announces his public ministry of reconciliation by speaking of a mission of freedom when reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, which says, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4: 18-19).

Therefore, in Christ we are set free, reconciled, and empowered as both reconcilers and liberators. Black theology has contributed greatly to the understanding of the biblical connection between liberation and reconciliation. In addition, Black theology as well as Black Church praxis informs the reconciliation theology and praxis presented in this doctoral project. Furthermore, in order for the evangelical Church to truly discover and realize faithfulness and fruitfulness in the development of multiethnic and reconciling churches, it must also learn from Black theology and the journey of the Black Church.

To this end, James Cone’s book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, provides insights helpful for Bayside Church Midtown in the equipping and releasing of cross-

cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers. Cone traces Black liberation theology back to “pre-Civil War black churches which recognized that Christian freedom grounded in Jesus Christ was inseparable from civil freedom.”<sup>19</sup> When the Black Church moves away from this holistic praxis of freedom and focuses wholly on individual moral purity, it moves away from its foundational identity as a church and from Black liberation theology. The reconciling church must learn from this by adopting a holistic understanding of reconciliation and liberation. This means that when the reconciling church focuses mostly on individual reconciliation and corporate colorblind unity, it moves away from its identity as a reconciling church and from a reconciliation theology.

Second, the reconciling church can also learn from how Black theology sees the revelation and activity of God. Cone makes this case when he presents Black liberation theology’s analysis of the doctrine of God:

Christian understanding of God arises from the biblical view of revelation, a revelation of God that takes place in the liberation of oppressed Israel and is completed in the incarnation, in Jesus Christ. This means that whatever is said about the nature of God and God’s being in the world must be based on the biblical account of God’s revelatory activity. . . . The doctrine of God in black theology must be the God who is participating in the liberation of the oppressed of the land. . . . Because God has been revealed in the history of oppressed Israel and decisively in the Oppressed One, Jesus Christ, it is impossible to say anything about God without seeing him as being involved in the contemporary liberation of all oppressed people. The God in black theology is the God of and for the oppressed, the God who comes into view in their liberation. Any other approach is a denial of biblical revelation.<sup>20</sup>

For the reconciling church, this approach to the doctrine of God and the incarnation of God in Christ gives clarity to what it means to be reconciled and take on

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<sup>19</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

the message and ministry of reconciliation. Out of the overflow of being set free from sin and reconciled to God, we join with God in the work of liberating those still oppressed. This is spiritual and social justice work. For the Jews and Gentiles of the first century, being set free from sin was not separated from the sinful systems and institutions that supported or initiated corporate sin. The work of God addresses both spiritual and systemic slavery. Black liberation theology does not compartmentalize the two and neither should the reconciling church.

At Bayside Midtown Church, there are occasionally people who attend that are connected with the Sacramento chapter of Black Lives Matter. They are looking for more than a diverse congregation, if they are looking for that at all. It is my learned experience that they care less about a diverse congregation and more about what the Church is doing on behalf of marginalized and dehumanized Black people. If our church is going to be relevant to these members of our surrounding community, our ministries of reconciliation must learn from a Black liberation understanding of following Christ. We have a tremendous opportunity for ministry to and with members of Black Lives Matter by incorporating Black liberation theology in our ministry praxis. As reconcilers we ought to meet the hurting and angry within our surrounding community where they are because that is what God does; God meets the oppressed and marginalized where they are. This is seen clearly in the incarnation of God in Christ. The fruit of our reconciling ministries is not just based on how we are doing internally in the work of developing community among diverse people groups, but also in how we are developing transformative relationships with those feeling disenfranchised and angry in our surrounding neighborhoods.

### ***A Black Political Theology by J. Deotis Roberts***

In his book, *A Black Political Theology*, J. Deotis Roberts contends that the liberation of the oppressed is the God-given mission of the Black Church.<sup>21</sup> He also assumes the incorporation of reconciliation in Black theology by seeing no separation between the liberating of the oppressed and the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He makes this point when he states the following about reconciliation and Black theology:

The incorporation of reconciliation into a black theology needs no justification. Reconciliation is an integral part of the gospel. Reconciliation is the very essence of the good news. God in Christ is reconciling in the world and Christians are called to be agents of this reconciling gospel. The whole gospel includes reconciliation. The revelation of God includes what ought to be and what must be as well as what is. . . . Reconciliation in our social climate includes a cross for all Christians.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the incorporation of a Black political theology into the praxis of the reconciling church needs no justification. Roberts states earlier in the book that a Black political theology is concerned with the whole person. His approach to Black theology is both existential and political.<sup>23</sup> Ambassadors of reconciliation are to be concerned with the soul of people; this includes how they exist and identify themselves in a broken and sinful world. They are also to be concerned about the oppressive systems, structures, and policies which infringe upon their existence. It is not enough to have a feeding program for the homeless; as reconcilers we also must have concern about the issues of housing and employment in our community. This is how being justice-oriented can be

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<sup>21</sup> Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 220.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

incorporated into the reconcilers' understanding of disciple making. As the ultimate reconciler, Christ modeled this by teaching the truth of who he was and challenging the political and religious systems that were oppressing those listening to him. By healing on the Sabbath, building relationships with tax collectors, and claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus' ministry was both political and reconciling.

***Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* by Cheryl Sanders**

The journey of the Black Church and Black preachers in the United States has included both a Black liberation and reconciliation praxis. Being reconciled to God through Christ, the liberation of Black people in an oppressed society, and ministries attempting at racial reconciliation have all been part of this journey for a people who began as slaves in this nation. Pastor and theologian Cheryl Sanders explores part of this journey of the Black Church and Black preachers in her book, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture*. Her presenting of the development of interracial movements within the African American Holiness-Pentecostal journey partially informs the reconciling church praxis presented in this doctoral project. Sanders provides a brief background sketch of the five original denominations coming out of the Holiness-Pentecostal movement of the United States and the impact of racism upon them. Three out of the five denominations were interracial on some level, but deeply impacted by racism from Whites within the denomination or the pressure of White racism from the outside.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sanders, *Saints in Exile*, 19-20.

This brief sketch by Sanders shows a historic openness and commitment to racial reconciliation by Blacks with Whites while still being subjugated to racism by Whites. What a powerful commitment to reconciliation on the part of the Black participants. Black people historically are at the forefront of the reconciling church while simultaneously working to realize their own liberation. In the early 1900s Blacks and Whites in the Holiness-Pentecostal movement worked together to plant churches, but probably at a greater cost to the Black brothers and sisters. The Azusa Street Revival is an example of a multiracial and reconciling event led by African American apostle, William J. Seymour. However, Sanders states that Seymour was not alone in making the Azusa Street Revival and the Azusa Street Mission a success: “Although the Azusa Street Mission attracted a multiracial multitude of black, white, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian seekers of both sexes and all social classes, the fact remains that its fundamental identity as a group of poor black women and men significantly facilitated the revival’s broad appeal.”<sup>25</sup>

This is important to the development of the reconciling church because it is a reminder of the way in which reconciliation takes place through the incarnation of God in Christ. Reconciliation is made possible in Christ spiritually, but there is a unique way in which this spiritual event has social significance. Christ does not come as a wealthy, privileged Roman with his ministry of liberation and reconciliation. God reveals himself in Christ as a marginalized, oppressed minority born in an impoverished condition. Yet from this state of being, reconciliation is possible.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 34

Connect this now to marginalized and oppressed Black people within the Holiness-Pentecostal movement participating in ministries of reconciliation. This incarnational and ecclesiastical connection can dynamically inform the ministry praxis of the reconciling church. Who Christ is and how he came in human form is significant for how the Church becomes a reconciling movement. The journey of the Black Church and the Black struggle for liberation and openness to reconciliation can better inform the mission of the reconciling church than that of White evangelicalism. For example, Bayside Church Midtown has been able to become a large multiethnic church in connection to a larger White evangelical movement. However, its hopes of becoming a reconciling church will be contingent upon its willingness to sit at the feet of and learn from Black liberation theology and Black Church praxis.

A helpful and practical ecclesiology for the reconciling church is shared by Sanders in the story of Third Street Church of God in Washington, DC, where she currently serves as senior pastor. She writes about her predecessors, Elder Charles T. Benjamin and the Reverend Samuel Hines and their commitment to developing what she describes as a “holiness congregation focused on ministries of refuge and reconciliation.”<sup>26</sup> The reconciling church can learn much from the journey of the Black Church and its openness to racial reconciliation while striving for liberation.

***Urban Apologetics: Why the Gospel Is Good News for the City***  
**by Christopher W. Brooks**

The urban centers of the United States are most ripe for the development of multiethnic and reconciling churches with their significant class, ethnic, and racial

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 35-48.

diversity. Cities are the shining example of an ever-increasing multiethnic and multicultural mission field. Cities also show the ways in which the diverse mission field is deeply divided and filled with broken people and under-resourced communities. This reality is why the mission of the church located in the city is so important. Urban apologetics address this opportunity and challenge for the multiethnic and reconciling church. Since Bayside Church Midtown is located in the heart of Sacramento, California, one of the most multicultural cities in the nation, urban apologetics will partially inform this doctoral project and the ministry praxis it explores.

In his book, *Urban Apologetics: Why the Gospel is Good News for the City*, Christopher Brooks contends that the urban Church should be comprised of urban apologists, equipped to bring the good news of Christ to its city. He presents a contextualized understanding for apologetics: the art and science of commending and defending the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Brooks defines urban Christians as “men and women who live, minister, and are called to reach the residents of our inner cities throughout America.”<sup>28</sup> It is our hope as pastors at Bayside Church Midtown that all of our members would see this definition of the urban Christian as a contextualized understanding of being a cross-cultural, reconciling, and justice-oriented disciple maker.

As part of his biblical foundation for urban apologetics, Brooks utilizes Jeremiah 29:7: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” This text speaks strongly to the urban reconciler in terms of finding identity as the exiled. The first-century churches

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<sup>27</sup> Brooks, *Urban Apologetics*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

were made up of exiled and marginalized people. Prior to the development of those churches, Christ came as an exiled and marginalized human being. This should inform the posture that the urban church takes as it seeks to minister in its city. Urban Christians should find their identity in being a humble, reconciled people who are not of this world, but exiles here representing the Kingdom of God. This is counter cultural from the evangelical suburban posture of coming down into the city as good Christian Americans to serve poor urban folks. The reconciling and urban church must be informed by the way in which Christ went to Samaria. He sat down at the well and looked up at a marginalized woman and began the conversation by asking her for a drink of water.

Brooks also states, “The task of urban apologists should be to show that Christ and the gospel have much to say about issues such as economics, health care, hunger, energy, homelessness, and immigration.”<sup>29</sup> This point, also made by other authors mentioned in this chapter, shows the connection between the incarnation of God in Christ and a practical ecclesiology for the multiethnic and reconciling church.

***Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in American to Confront Racism and Injustice by Eric Mason***

The ministry of reconciliation has been given to every follower of Christ. Collectively, Christians in community with this understanding make up the reconciling church. Urban reconcilers ought to be passionate about bringing the good of the gospel to the hurting and broken around them. Urban reconcilers are vehicles of God’s love, justice, truth, and grace. This is what makes the urban Christian spiritually alive or what is labeled in urban slang, “woke.” Eric Mason provides a wake-up call to the urban

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

church in his book, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*. Mason describes urban Christians as exiles in this world and as incarnational missionaries in the world for justice.<sup>30</sup> He believes that the gospel “is big enough to root out indifference, apathy, and poverty of the soul,” and that “it’s a gospel that cries out for a Woke Church.”<sup>31</sup>

Mason calls for a woke Church that looks at the injustices within its surrounding community and responds with lament, a prophetic voice, a vision for change, and transformative action. This urban apologetics praxis informs the reconciling church by providing a pathway for urban reconcilers to engage the city. There are many urban churches that are filled with commuter Christians. They drive into the urban community for an experience of worship and then leave without making any transformative connection within the community. Instead, we ought to be like the Apostle Paul as he engaged the city of Athens (Acts 17:16-34). His urban engagement informs the praxis of the urban, multiethnic, and reconciling church. Though Paul was “greatly distressed” to see the sin in the city, he built relationships with people in the marketplace, including philosophers, artists, and politicians. He learned the culture to the point that he was able to present the gospel of Jesus Christ by quoting the poets of the city.

The Apostle Paul demonstrates that being a woke Christian in the urban context is not just about knowing the Scripture, praying well, and knowing the latest urban contemporary praise and worship songs. Cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers know about the challenges of their city. These challenges may cause distress and

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<sup>30</sup> Mason, *Woke Church*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

lament in their souls, but they do not stop there. Cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers find their identity in the incarnational work of God in Christ Jesus until such time as he returns. This works itself out by engaging the community, building relationships with artists, business leaders, educators, and politicians. The reconciling and urban church must find its prophetic voice, develop a plan of action, and present a gospel that includes liberation and justice.

***From Classism to Community: A Challenge for the Church* by Jini Kilgore Cockroft**

In Luke 4, not only does Christ speak of freedom in quoting from the prophet Isaiah and launching his public ministry, he also speaks of “proclaiming good news to the poor.” The multiethnic and reconciling church must bring this proclamation into its ministry praxis. In her book, *From Classism to Community: A Challenge for the Church*, Jini Kilgore Cockroft calls the Church to prioritize ministries of empowerment on behalf of the poor. She states her hope for the Church in this endeavor in the following: “The Lord’s church can boldly claim that although society may devalue and alienate the poor, the church can offer to the poor the great opportunity to achieve a genuine sense of self-worth, equality, and inclusion through the experience of Christian transformation and fellowship in a loving community.”<sup>32</sup>

Kilgore Cockroft presents an urban apologetics that goes beyond unleashing compassion towards the poor to creating flourishing, Christ-centered community with the poor. Her challenge informs the reconciling church by presenting a framework for ministry that empowers the poor by inviting them into the multiethnic Church as

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<sup>32</sup> Cockroft, *From Classism to Community*, 12.

extended family. Three years ago, I attended a friendly debate on American Christianity and American poverty held at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC. The debate was between Arthur Brooks, President of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, and Jim Wallis, President of Sojourners, a progressive evangelical social justice ministry. During the debate, Brooks stated that “one of the sustainers of poverty is the lack of genuine relationship between the wealthy and the poor.” That statement, along with the challenge of Kilgore Cockroft, informs how a new ministry strategy for engaging the poor is part of this doctoral project. Kilgore Cockroft states that this kind of ministry development begins with love for people over love for ministry projects. She also states, “No fancy program or well-detailed plan or mission statement for the ministry can replace the love that the ministers have for the people. Love must be shown in deeds and must be genuinely felt in the heart. Our ministry must flow from a place of love for God and God’s people. We must love the people whom God loves.”<sup>33</sup>

Kilgore Cockroft presents her urban apologetics praxis as an incarnational and contextual approach to missional ministry. This partially informs the ministry praxis of this doctoral project paper by providing a way to see reconciling ministry as a present-day extension of the incarnation of God in the reconciling Christ. Kilgore Cockroft’s challenge to the urban Church to prioritize ministry that empowers the poor also echoes the words of Christ at the conclusion of Matthew 25:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 83.

separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:31-40).

This text, along with Kilgore Cockroft's challenge, informs the reconciling church that its ministry praxis should reflect the incarnation of God in the work of Christ. God is revealed as One in such solidarity to the poor and marginalized, that to serve and build community with them is to serve and build community with Christ. This type of incarnational and missional ministry is not optional for the multiethnic and reconciling church. The inheritance of the Kingdom of God hinges on it.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the scholars within each of the books presented in this chapter inform both a theology and ministry praxis for the multiethnic and reconciling church. Based upon the information gained through this literature review, it is clear that a reconciling ministry has a greater opportunity for flourishing and thriving when fueled by Black liberation theology, Black Church praxis, and a missional vision contextualized in urban apologetics. Moreover, the incarnation of God in the reconciling work of Christ, the mandate of the Great Commission, and a commitment to justice must also be informed by the theology and ministry practices of the oppressed and marginalized. This

will be a necessary corrective to the dominant and privileged theology and praxis of American evangelicalism.

## CHAPTER 3

### A THEOLOGY FOR THE RECONCILING CHURCH

This chapter presents a theology for the reconciling church, a reconciliation praxis informed by the incarnation of God in Christ, and the missional ecclesiology of the Apostle Paul presented to the church of Corinth. The incarnation of God through the declarations and demonstrations of Christ show him as the ultimate reconciler and the head of the reconciling Church. As the greatest revelation of God's love, Christ reconciles sinful humanity to God and divided humanity to one another. This chapter explores how God's empowering and transformative love informs the reconciling church. In addition, it also explores how an understanding of Christ, as one who came to earth as the marginalized Messiah and liberator of the oppressed, empowers members of the reconciling church. This understanding of Christ informs the development of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple-makers. The incarnational empowerment of God in Christ also assists in the framing of a missional ecclesiology, connecting the message and ministry of reconciliation to the disciple-making praxis of participating in the Great Commission. Finally, this chapter provides a reconciliation theology that shows the missional intersection of cross-cultural disciple making, reconciliation praxis, and justice.

## **The Incarnation and Reconciliation Ministry Praxis**

God is love, and this truth is a theme that runs throughout the entirety of Scripture. The greatest expression of God's love for humanity, separated from God through sin, is found within the incarnation of God in Christ. God as love is revealed in the reconciling work of Christ. In *The Message*, a version of Scripture translated by Eugene Peterson, John 1:14 states, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory of God with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish."

God shows the extent of his love for broken and divided humanity through a direct social proximity to humanity. God goes beyond a supernatural voice to Adam and Eve, a burning bush to Moses, or sending angels as representatives. God becomes human in Christ Jesus. The all-Holy, all-powerful, and only true God came into the world as flesh in Christ. This is what makes the incarnation not only the foundation of reconciliation, but radical. It introduces a whole new understanding of God. God is not simply a distant God who can only be known in supernatural, cosmic expressions. God can also be known in the natural form of a human being with the purpose of salvation, liberation, and justice. Cone explains the incarnation of God in the following manner:

The grounding of liberation in God's act in Jesus Christ is the logical consequence of any Christian theology that takes Scripture seriously as an important source for the doing of theology. . . . It also expresses God's will to be in relation to creatures in the social context of their striving for the fulfillment of humanity. That is, God is free to be for us. This is the meaning of the Exodus and the Incarnation. . . . God is the God of Jesus Christ who calls the helpless and weak into a newly created existence.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 128.

Christ becomes one of us so that all of us who make up the human family would have access to liberation and reconciliation. God becomes human and enters into the social divides of male and female, privileged and marginalized, colonizer and exiled, as well as those deemed righteous and those excluded. Christ is born in an under-resourced setting among farm animals. Under the government-sanctioned threat of Hebrew male babies being annihilated, Christ and his earthly parents flee into Egypt as immigrants. Christ is beaten unmercifully by a military police-like force of the Roman Empire. Christ is incarcerated and receives the death penalty, though the governing authorities admit finding no fault in him. These experiences of God revealed in Christ show that God does not simply have compassion and mercy for the immigrant, the incarcerated, the poor, and the marginalized. God in Christ became the immigrant, the incarcerated, the poor, and the marginalized. Theologian and mystic Howard Thurman addresses the relevance of the context and ethnicity in which God shows up as human:

It is necessary to examine the religion of Jesus against the background of his own age and people, and to inquire into the content of his teaching with reference to the disinherited and the underprivileged. We begin with the simple historical fact that Jesus was a Jew. The miracle of the Jewish people is almost as breathtaking as the miracle of Jesus. . . . The economic predicament with which he was identified in birth placed him initially with the great mass of men on earth. The masses of the people are poor. If we dare take the position that in Jesus there was at work some radical destiny, it would be safe to say that in his poverty he was more truly Son of man than he would have been if the incident of family or birth had made him a rich son of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Thurman sheds light on how spiritually and socially radical the incarnation of God is.

The radicality is found in God becoming marginalized and poor. This incarnational God informs the ministry praxis of the reconciling church because it reveals the way in which

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<sup>2</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 15, 17-18.

God reconciles himself to sinful humanity. God becomes human and takes on the weight of the systemic sin and division impacting all of humanity. This also provides the opportunity for humanity to experience reconciliation in a way that deals with the various social divisions systemically and relationally between human beings. Once again, this points to the radicality of the incarnation of God. God addresses the social divisions within humanity by entering into those divisions as a human being. Reconciliation theologian John Perkins states the following about the social impact of the incarnation of God: “God was able to identify with us because He came down from heaven to be a man. He relocated. You don’t get to the heart of people faster than when you go live with them and eat with them and fellowship with them—that gets you to peoples’ hearts faster than anything else.”<sup>3</sup>

This deep connection of the incarnation of God with the marginalized and oppressed informs the identity of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers within the reconciling church. Members of the reconciling church go beyond unleashing compassion to the marginalized and oppressed to finding community and extended family with them. Justice ministry in this light is communal both with the one in need of justice and with God. God calls the reconciling church into the same solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed that God himself participates in through the incarnation.

The incarnation of God revealed in Christ is both a reconciliation between God and humanity and between divided humanity itself. This work of Christ provides salvific reconciliation and it models social reconciliation. The ministry praxis of the reconciling

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<sup>3</sup> John Perkins, *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development*, Rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 101.

church should embody both of these vertical and horizontal dimensions of reconciliation. In this way, the incarnation of God offers a missional ecclesiology for the Church. God shows how much he loves humanity, in spite of our sins, through the incarnation. God dwells among sinners and makes reconciliation possible by bringing an empowering love up close. God's love prioritizes social proximity. God in the human form of Christ gets up close to the diseased, the left for dead, the blind, the paralyzed, and the outcast. That is what the incarnation is; it is God being proximate. This is God being visibly intimate with humanity. The implication for the Church is that the Church must be proximate to the oppressed and suffering. God is not satisfied with being separated by sin from those he created in his own image. And God is not satisfied with any portion of his beloved being socially separated from healthcare, food, and full personhood.

The ministry of the Apostle Paul represents one example of how the incarnation of God in Christ and its multi-dimensional reconciling work can be embraced and embodied in the development of the Church. In his second letter to the church in the city of Corinth, he provides for them a missional ecclesiology, connecting the love of God, the incarnation of God in Christ, a communal praxis, and the message and ministry of reconciliation as the mission of the church. He presents this missional ecclesiology:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14-19).

These words of the Apostle Paul offer an opportunity for the Church to rediscover the implications of the incarnation by missionally living it out in its present context. Christ is the revelation of God's love for and mission among the sinful, divided, oppressed, marginalized, and captive. The mission of God revealed in Christ goes beyond simply being individually saved from sin through the reconciling work of Christ. We are spiritually saved by God's love revealed in Christ, but we are also spiritually empowered and socially transformed by it as well. Christ forgives sins and he also causes the lame to walk and gives sight to the blind. God's incarnational love found in Christ gives human beings access to eternal life and equips them in becoming ambassadors of reconciliation. Reconciliation comes out of the overflow of God's love, brought close to sinful and divided humanity, through Christ.

### **Embracing and Embodying the Incarnation**

For the reconciling church, the incarnation is contextualized by both the diversity and oppression of the people initially receiving the empowering love of God. The people of the church in Corinth to whom the Apostle Paul writes are an oppressed and marginalized people under the rule of the Roman Empire. Though the love of God is for all people, the incarnation of God in Christ and the ecclesiastical mission of the Apostle Paul is presented significantly to the oppressed and marginalized. Sanders states the following about the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ: "Jesus centered his proclamation of the good news in the life situation of the marginalized people of his day. It is clear that Jesus gave priority to the ethical principles of justice and love in his interactions with others. . . . The people on the margins of society celebrated his ministry

among them, while those identified with the centers of religious power joined forces to crucify him.”<sup>4</sup>

From the context of God’s love revealed to and received by the oppressed, it is made possible to all. It is from this reality that God loving the whole world cannot be refuted. God’s love revealed to the oppressed and marginalized strengthens the case that it is a love available to all. The incarnation of God brings reconciliation and salvation to sinful people and reconciliation and social transformation to divided people. This is brought about through God’s empowering love shown within the ministry activities of the church. Regarding how the Church can embody the incarnation of God in this way, Sanders writes,

Whenever we feed the hungry, take in the homeless, visit the hospitals and nursing homes and prisons, we show God’s promise to be true. We make good on the good news in the eyes of the dispossessed when we minister to them in the name of the Lord, because our ministry is God loving people through us- God feeds the poor in our kitchens, God comforts the lonely in our embrace, God heals the sick when we lay our hands on them, God consoles the prisoner with our words. This is the mandate of the kingdom, that the people of God cooperate with God by doing God’s will.<sup>5</sup>

The reconciling church embodies the love of God through ministries of solidarity with the marginalized, poor, and oppressed. The reconciling church must align its mission and purpose with the prophetic and justice-oriented ministry and mission of Christ. The prophetic and justice-oriented ministry of Christ meets a marginalized Samaritan woman at a well, it disrupts a woman caught in adultery from receiving the death penalty, it allows a touch from the hands of a woman with an incurable disease, and it speaks

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<sup>4</sup> Cheryl J. Sanders, *Ministry at the Margins: The Prophetic Mission of Women, Youth, and the Poor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

liberation to a terrorized man crying out from a cemetery. The reconciling church must find it prophetic and justice-oriented place among the poor and oppressed in its surrounding community. The Apostle John writes of the way in which God's love ought to compel us to find connection and community with the needy when he says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (I John 3:16-18).

These words of the Apostle John on the embodiment of God's love among God's people connects well with the Apostle Paul including God's love in his reconciliation challenge to the church in the city of Corinth. In stating that Christ's love compels us, the Apostle Paul is pointing to God's love drawing in, controlling, and empowering human beings who embrace and embody the prophetic, reconciling, and justice-oriented ministry of Christ. Reconciled people are a people surrendered to and guided by God's empowering love revealed in Christ. Sinful human beings have shown since the onset of sin, what they are able to do in their own power, separated from God's empowering and reconciling love. Human beings are able to hate, discriminate, live in prejudice, utilize violence as the primary means to solve conflict, sustain oppressive systems and institutions, and demonize others in their own power. But for human beings to sustain unity and justice, extend and receive forgiveness, and empower others, they need to receive and embody God's empowering and reconciling love revealed through the incarnation.

John Perkins is a champion of this type of reconciliation theology and ministry praxis that embodies the incarnation of God. He is co-founder of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) and has ministered to the poor and oppressed in under-resourced communities in California and Mississippi for over fifty years. Regarding how the Church should embody the incarnation of God, Perkins states,

Jesus was equal with God, yet He gave that up and took on the form of a servant. He took on the likeness of man. He came and lived among us. He was called Immanuel—God with us. The incarnation is the ultimate relocation. Not only is the incarnation relocation; relocation is also incarnation. That is, not only did God relocate among us by taking the form of a man, but when a fellowship of believers relocates into a community, Christ invades that community. Christ, as His Body, as His church, comes to dwell there.”<sup>6</sup>

Perkins demonstrates that the incarnation of God in Christ was not just a one-time act over two thousand years ago, but through the Church it is the ongoing work of God until such time that Christ returns. This ongoing work of God being revealed among the lost, marginalized, and poor is the challenge the Apostle Paul put before the Church in the city of Corinth. This is also the challenge that John Perkins and CCDA is putting before the Church in the United States today.

CCDA is made up of members representing local churches and Christian nonprofits focused on embracing and embodying a modern-day representation of the incarnation of God. These ministries are located in under-resourced rural and urban communities across the country. They are aligned around the principles of relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

The reconciling church is one that has purposely relocated where the marginalized, oppressed, and poor are. Just because a church is physically located in an under-resourced community does not mean that its vision, mission, and ministry priorities represent a transformative focus on that community. The reconciling church is one that steps into the chasms of class and racial division within the community in which it is located. The reconciling church can be a bridge between Black Lives Matter and the police department or between families and community institutions that are failing them. However, there are times when the reconciling church must stand on one side of the chasm where the poor, oppressed, and marginalized are. Christ stood with the woman caught in adultery and faced the stone throwers who represented a corrupt criminal justice system on the other side of that social chasm. The Church embodies the incarnation of God in Christ when it stands with the poor and faces the power structures that oppress them. These embodying activities are what moves a multiethnic church beyond existing as a diverse congregation to missionally operating as a reconciling church.

The reconciling church is also one that is a redistribution center between the haves and the have nots. CCDA has been a tremendous resource in this area over the years by providing training, consulting, and coaching in how the church can go beyond being simply a worship center to operating as a community transformation center. When the reconciling church provides educational tutoring, job training, financial literacy, transitional housing initiatives, or community re-engagement programs for the formally incarcerated, it serves as a redistribution center of empowerment. When the Church

prioritizes these principles of relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution, it goes beyond commentary about the poor to communal and incarnational solidarity with the poor.

### **The Jewish and Marginalized Messiah**

The incarnation of God in Christ also informs the ministry praxis of the reconciling church through the spiritual-anthropological identity of Christ, meaning both his triune and cultural identity. To avoid exploring and being transformed by the spiritual-anthropological identity of Christ is to potentially worship and project a false image of Christ. The theology and ministry praxis of the reconciling church must also be informed by a Christology that engages the missional and liberating identity of Christ. It is not just about embodying the incarnation of God in Christ but embodying the specific spiritual-anthropological identity of how God chose to reveal himself as human. The Jewishness and social oppression in which God purposely selected to navigate life as human is significant.

The Apostle Paul states that those within the Corinthian church once regarded Christ from a worldly point of view. He also had his own experience of seeing Christ from a worldly point of view. Prior to meeting Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul had been participating in the persecution of the followers of Christ (Acts 9:1-31). When Paul was persecuting the followers of Christ, he was seeing Christ from a worldly point of view because he saw Christ as simply a Jewish male prophet. He saw Christ as merely a human being who was a religious and political threat by claiming that he was the Messiah. In Paul's mind, this worldly Christ had been crucified, yet there was still a growing movement of followers. On the way to see about the incarceration and

persecution of the followers of Christ, Paul met the real Christ. This moment in Paul's life is described in Acts 9:3-6: "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'"

Saul met the real Christ and was transformed. He actually became Paul on that day. Both his name and his life mission were changed. He went from the persecutor to the persecuted. He became a missionary, church planter, and mentor to pastors. Meeting the authentic Christ brought about a new mission of reconciliation and justice in the life of Paul. By encountering the resurrected Christ, Paul comes to know Christ beyond just his humanness. Cone writes of this Christ beyond just humanness: "From the outset, the Gospels wish to convey that the Jesus story is not simply a story about a good man who met an unfortunate fate. Rather, in Jesus, God is at work, telling God's story and disclosing the divine plan of salvation."<sup>8</sup>

The Apostle Paul encounters Christ and a new story about God and God's mission is revealed to him. Out of the overflow of his own reconciling experience with Christ, the Apostle Paul becomes a cross-cultural, reconciling, and justice-oriented disciple-maker. This is shown in his mentoring of a multiethnic young man named Timothy, in his advocacy of women in ministry such as Phoebe, as well as his advocacy for an incarnated man named Onesimus. He also moves from privileged society to the marginalized. He experiences incarceration and police-like brutality. Paul's life as a cross-cultural and

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<sup>8</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 67.

justice-oriented disciple maker informs the reconciling church. His life models what happens when one comes face to face with the spiritual-anthropological identity of Christ: one's theology and ministry praxis is transformed. When the Church embraces a revolutionary understanding of the spiritual-anthropological identity of Christ, it will discover a reconciliation and justice-oriented theology and ministry praxis.

How the Church views Christ matters. This impacts how the Church lives out its missional ecclesiology, specifically, what the Church believes about Christ and how it lives out that belief. This shapes the Church's apologetics praxis because the Christology of the Church informs its missional ecclesiology. There are still examples today of how the American Church views Christ from a worldly point of view. These examples include the White Christ, the Republican Christ, the Democrat Christ, the Hollywood-Celebrity Christ, and the Prosperity-Capitalist Christ. These worldly views of Christ have significant influence in American culture. These are some of the false images of Christ that people who come into the reconciling church may be bringing with them.

The White Christ, historically, has been the most influential of all the worldly Christ figures in the United States. The White Christ still carries great significance in the racialized and racially divided American Church today. DeYoung discusses the historic roots of this reality:

It could be argued that the United States was founded on the premise that God is a white male. When the United States Constitution was written with the words, "We the people," the "we" referred to white men. Only white men could vote; no women or people of color were included in that "we." When the idea that God is, male and white was accepted, women and people of color were not only left out but were treated with contempt because they were not created in the image of

God. Degrading and harassing women and dehumanizing people of color were considered permissible because God was perceived as being a white male.<sup>9</sup>

The White Christ has been used to justify slavery, the Jim Crow system, and the segregated Church in America. Most recently, a White American Christology and ecclesiology was utilized to justify evangelicalism's support of Donald J. Trump for president of the United States and the White nationalist rhetoric that has come with it. The White Christ must be acknowledged and exposed in the reconciling church as the "worldly view" that it is. The worldly Christ has been a divider and an oppressor. The real Christ walked the earth as Jewish, marginalized, oppressed, and yet also liberating and reconciling. The reconciling church can begin the process of rejecting the worldly Christ by embracing the Jewish and marginalized Christ of Scripture. The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy of Christ that informs an accurate view of the Messiah for the Church: "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah . . . and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon . . . and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah" (Matthew 1:1-2, 6, and 16).

This genealogy found in the first chapter of Matthew provides insight into the Jewishness and chosen-ness of Christ. It was important for the audience Matthew was writing to, to understand the supernatural identity of Christ as Messiah. Matthew also wanted to make it clear that Christ was naturally a descendent of the chosen people of God, who were a marginalized minority group. Christ comes from the people out of

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<sup>9</sup> Curtiss DeYoung, *Coming Together in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 51.

whom God birthed a covenant nation. The family tree of Christ was ethnically and culturally connected to a people who had experienced slavery, liberation, wilderness, multiple exiles, and oppression by the Roman Empire. This anthropological understanding of Christ is important because it emphasizes a Messiah who not only brings salvation and transformation to privileged humans like Paul, but to the oppressed and poor as well. He lives out this mission from the social position of being marginalized himself. This was the heresy and scandal of Christ for the religious leaders who opposed him. Christ claimed to be God and King, though he was not born in a community or economic class that was known for producing such leaders. The other part of the scandal was that he offered empowerment and salvation to the outcasts of society.

This spiritual-anthropological identity of Christ was important for understanding the glorious scandal of Christ as he headed to the cross, and it is relevant for the racialized reality of today. Black liberation theologian and historian J. Kameron Carter believes that the covenantal Jewishness of Christ can provide Christians the social offramp from being held captive to race and bring a greater realization of the *imago Dei* to those who suffer from racism. He presents this opportunity as a mandate:

And this is the theological mandate: exit the power structure of whiteness and of blackness (and other modalities of race) that whiteness created, recognizing that all persons are unique and irreplaceable inflections or articulations, not of the power/knowledge nexus of race, but of Christ the covenantal Jew, who is the Image of God, the prototype, and who as such is the fundamental articulation, through the Spirit of God, of YHWH the God of Israel, the one whom Jesus called Father. I mention the Jewishness of Jesus here because of its significance for understanding the I/image of God. An understanding of Christ as the Image of God and of all human persons existing in the Image, who is Christ, cannot bypass or supersede YHWH's promises to Abraham and thus to Israel, for it is from the

history of this people's covenantal interactions with God and thus from God's history that God takes up the history of the world.<sup>10</sup>

Carter's words here, as well as his broader work, remind us that throughout history God has revealed himself as a liberator and covenant maker who seeks to restore the Image of God upon humanity. This is especially reflected in God's interactions with the oppressed. The incarnation of God in the Jewish and marginalized Messiah is a continuation of the revelation of God and his liberating mission. The reconciling church must remove Christ from the false identity of the White and privileged and restore him back to his authentic identity as the Jewish and marginalized Messiah, who saves and serves. This spiritual-anthropological identity informs how the reconciling church engages the marginalized and poor within their surrounding community.

### **The Liberating Mission of Christ**

God is revealed as a liberating God throughout Scripture. In Christ human beings are liberated from a life of sin, but also liberated from sinful and oppressive institutions and structures. Christ receives proclamations of "Messiah" and "King" at the moment of His birth, making it both a spiritual and political event. He disrupts the oppressive religious structures of the day through his use of the words of the prophet Isaiah to launch his public ministry. This moment is captured in Luke 4:14-19:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

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<sup>10</sup> Kameron J. Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford Press, 2008), 250.

freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

The public ministry of Christ that follows his pronouncement in Luke 4 is the liberating words of the prophet Isaiah becoming active. Christ demonstrates his pronouncement through casting out evil spirits, healing the sick, raising the dead, and challenging the abuse of the poor by religious leaders in the temple. The liberating mission of Christ is both salvific and one of social justice. This liberating mission informs the evangelism and outreach ministry of the reconciling church. It calls for the Church to go beyond individualistic salvation initiatives to ministries focused on meeting the physical and social needs of the marginalized and poor. The reconciling church is one that addresses the class and racial disparities within its community in some transformative way. Transitional housing programs for the homeless, summer academies for young people below grade level in math and reading, or providing a mobile health clinic are ways in which the reconciling church can participate in the liberating ministry of Christ. In order to launch and sustain these kinds of ministry initiatives, members of the church must be equipped and mobilized. Therefore, cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers are the continuation of the liberating ministry of Christ.

### **The Message and Ministry of Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is not just the work of God revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ; it is also the message and ministry realized in the work of the Church. In writing to the church in the city of Corinth, the Apostle Paul connects the reconciling work of God and the reconciling ministry of the church. Reconciliation is foundational to the missional ecclesiology of the church. Reconciliation ministry praxis is holistic. The beginning of

reconciliation is the salvific and social justice work of God in Christ. Reconciliation is the discipling and spiritual maturing work of God in the Holy Spirit. Additionally, reconciliation praxis is the restorative work of God embodied in the people of the church. Reconciliation ministry praxis is the work of God upon the whole person and across the whole community. Reconciliation theologians Curtiss Paul DeYoung and Samuel Hines contend that reconciliation is God's one-item agenda. They challenge the Church to put reconciliation at the forefront of their missional ecclesiology:

Reconciliation with God and each other through Christ is the number one item on God's agenda. Oneness must be realized in the midst of an environment prone to alienation and polarization. . . . Reconciliation brings about peace, both between human beings and God and between individual persons. In spite of all the efforts we make to come together, barriers exist and keep driving us apart. God conceived of reconciliation before the formation of the world.<sup>11</sup>

In Christ, diverse yet divided humanity is reconciled to God and reconciled to one another. The Church, as a collection of the reconciled, is given the message and mission of reconciliation. God's agenda becomes the Church's agenda and informs all areas of ministry life. As those having been reconciled to God through Christ, we become vehicles of reconciliation in a socially divided and unjust mission field. Reconciliation ministry praxis then begins with the work of Christ. Christ is the great reconciler, and through his incarnational public ministry, death, and resurrection, human beings are able to experience restored relationship with God. However, the separation between God and humanity is not the only place where the reconciling work of Christ can be applied. Christ also is the great reconciler among divided human beings.

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<sup>11</sup> Hines and DeYoung, *Beyond Rhetoric*, xxii.

Before going to the cross as a spiritual reconciler, Christ shows himself also as a social reconciler. In going to Samaria, he deals with the division between Jews and Samaritans (John 4). By putting himself in position to be touched by a diseased woman, Christ deals with the division between the sick and the healthy (Matthew 9). His reconciling work begins before he goes to the cross purposely stepping into the social divisions between Jew and Gentile, sick and well, male and female, and the religious hierarchy and poor people. Salter McNeil presents a holistic understanding of the reconciling work of Christ:

On the cross Jesus reconciled us to God and he also reconciled us to each other—both in the same act of salvation. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there are no divisions or barriers that separate us from God or from each other. To choose Christ is also to choose his community. . . . As a result of his heroic sacrifice, we are now members of God’s family—a new blood-related people group. Men and women, girls and boys, the young and the old, people from different social classes, ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions have been reconciled and are now of the same household. This is the whole truth of the gospel.”<sup>12</sup>

This reconciling work of Christ is given to the followers of Christ. Evangelism, discipleship, reconciliation, and justice as the whole gospel is itself the ministry praxis of the Church. This understanding of reconciliation ministry praxis lays the foundation for the equipping and releasing of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers.

### **Cross-Cultural Disciple Making**

The church of Corinth was a diverse congregation located in a very multiethnic and multicultural city. The Apostle Paul’s words to this church on being given the message and ministry of reconciliation must be understood within that context. Paul also

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<sup>12</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism, and Race* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 17.

connects the Church being given the message and ministry of reconciliation with the reconciling work of God through Christ. The reconciling work of God in Christ is both spiritually salvific and the realization of social justice, which has already been represented in this project. Christ's reconciling journey to Samaria is one place of exploration for understanding cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple making. The story of this reconciling journey is found in John 4:4-10:

Now he had to go through Samaria. So, he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The reconciling work of God revealed in Christ purposely goes into the deepest social divides of humanity. The Scripture states that Christ had to go to Samaria, though religious leaders who saw themselves as the representatives of God took pride in avoiding Samaria. Salter McNeil writes about the deep social divide between the Jews and Samaritans in her book, *Credible Witness*:

Samaritans and Jews absolutely did not associate with each other. Their animosity was rooted in their painful shared history after the Assyrians attacked and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel as recounted in the Old Testament. . . . The Samaritans emerged as a distinct ethnic group whose religious practices were characterized by "unfaithfulness to the covenant established by the God of Israel." The Samaritans therefore were considered pagans and infidels. Every time Jews encountered Samaritans, they were reminded of the sin, the curse and the disgrace of being defiled by falling into idolatrous pagan practices. Over time hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans grew to be insurmountable because of their religious and cultural differences. The Jews felt justified in their religious, social

and cultural hatred of the Samaritans who were seen as a debased people—as dogs! To call someone a Samaritan was to hurl an extreme insult.”<sup>13</sup>

Christ’s journey into this socially divisive climate brings about both spiritual and social transformation. His engagement with the Samaritan woman along with her discovery of a new purpose at the end of their conversation is socially transformative. This marginalized and socially-shamed woman dares to become a public evangelist in her community because of her engagement with Christ. Her voice, calling on others to meet the Messiah based on a transformative experience between a Jewish male and a Samaritan woman, leads to many believing in him (John 4:39).

In this engagement with the Samaritan woman, Christ is modeling what a cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple maker looks like. It is a disciple-making moment because the Samaritan woman becomes a follower of Christ, sharing her testimony with others. It is also a justice moment because of the marginalization of women and Samaritans in the social culture at the time. Christ as God, Jewish, and male looking up from a sitting position at a marginalized and oppressed Samaritan woman is an affront to the Jewish, male-dominated, religious power structure of the Pharisees and Sadducees at the time. When this engagement between Christ and the Samaritan woman is connected with the mandate to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28, a more robust understanding of reconciliation theology is realized. The cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple making of Christ is the message and ministry of reconciliation his followers are called into. Ambassadors of reconciliation must be willing to follow Christ

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

to the people and places that others avoid, crossing cultures and divides for the sake of the gospel.

The incarnation of God in Christ both declares and demonstrates the Kingdom of God on earth. Christ includes the Kingdom of God in the prayer he teaches the disciples to pray (Matthew 6:10). On his journey of reconciliation, he went to various towns and villages, “proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom” (Matthew 9:35). He tells his disciples that it takes a child-like faith to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3). Christ also teaches, though, that it takes more than childlike faith or prayer to experience the Kingdom of God. A commitment to justice is also part of realizing eternal life in the Kingdom of God. For those who believe that individualistic salvation is the only requirement for experiencing the fullness of the Kingdom of God, the words of Christ provide the following wake-up call:

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:34-40)

Christ uses the parable of the sheep and the goats to provide a picture of the invitation to enter into the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The parable of the sheep and goats provides a more communal understanding of salvation and eternal life. But beyond this parable providing a picture of the invitation to enter the Kingdom of God, it also offers deeper insight into the nature of God. God so identifies with the hungry, the thirsty,

the naked, the sick, the immigrant, and the incarcerated that to address their needs is to also serve God. The incarnation of God in Christ is a revelation of God's solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and suffering.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the reconciling church a biblical theology for its ministry praxis toward equipping and releasing cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers. The incarnation of God revealed in the reconciling work of Christ and the ecclesiastical challenge of reconciliation given by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church informs how an ethnically diverse congregation can pursue becoming a reconciling movement in its surrounding community.

First, there is an opportunity for the Church to discover the multiethnic and liberating Christ of Scripture. Christ is revealed as the ultimate reconciler through his identity as both the Son of God and the multiethnic Messiah. From this triune and diverse identity, his ministry can be understood as a liberating mission with significant attention on marginalized and oppressed people.

Second, the Church must embrace the connection between the reconciling Christ as multiethnic and liberating with the opportunity to receive the message and ministry of reconciliation. Out of the overflow of an intimate and maturing relationship with the reconciling Christ, through the Holy Spirit, one becomes a reconciled reconciler. The life of the reconciled reconciler is informed by following Christ in cross-cultural disciple-making. To take on the reconciling mission of cross-cultural disciple-making is to participate in the Great Commission domestically in the United States. The growing

cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the nation, along with its deep division, requires cross-cultural and reconciling life development.

Finally, following Christ into his liberating and reconciling mission includes the work of social justice. Social justice, along with salvific transformation, is central to the reconciling work of Christ and interwoven in the mandate to make the disciples of all nations. The revelation of God in Christ is not just One who dwells among the marginalized and oppressed but, also One who liberates and reconciles the marginalized and oppressed. This holistic understanding of the reconciling mission of God informs how the reconciling church embodies its ministry praxis.

PART THREE

PRACTICE

## CHAPTER 4

### CURRENT CONTEXT AND MINISTRY PLAN

Bayside Church Midtown is one of the fastest-growing multiethnic and urban churches in the Western region of the United States. In just seven years it has realized great ethnic and racial diversity. In the midst of this multiethnic flourishing, there is an opportunity for this large church to move from being a diverse congregation to a reconciling church that equips and releases cross cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers.

Through its core value of “unleashing compassion,” Bayside Church Midtown is reaching the homeless, providing support to those in recovery from addiction, and resourcing a summer school for under-performing students in the areas of math and reading. The church has also recently been a central meeting place for forums on race, diversity, and justice. The election of Donald J. Trump as president as well as the nonviolent protest of Colin Kapernick (in response to police brutality and the shooting death of unarmed African American Stephon Clark by Sacramento police officers) have provided what Salter McNeil refers to as a “catalytic moment.”<sup>1</sup> Bayside Midtown can

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<sup>1</sup> Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 42.

simply use this moment to preserve itself as a growing and diverse congregation, or it can embrace transformation and strive towards becoming a multiethnic and reconciling church. The hope is that this proposed project will lead to the realization of the latter.

### **Demographic Context**

Bayside Church Midtown (originally planted as The House Church) is a campus of Bayside Church, which is a member congregation of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) denomination. Bayside Church Midtown is a unique campus within the Bayside family of churches, as it is currently the only multi-ethnic and urban expression of Bayside Church. It is the only campus currently located in the heart of a major city. Bayside Midtown has an average weekend attendance of three thousand, and its demographic breakdown is 30% White, 30% Black, 20% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and the rest a mix of other ethnicities.<sup>2</sup> It is located in the Midtown Community of Sacramento, California, an ever-increasing multi-ethnic and multicultural community.

Sacramento is one of the most multicultural cities in the United States. Its diversity rivals both Los Angeles and the Bay Area (Oakland/San Francisco/San Jose) of California. The Midtown community is in the shadow of downtown Sacramento and the state capitol building. In 2002 Sacramento was named the most diverse city in America

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<sup>2</sup> Demographic Information is based on surveys distributed and data collected during weekend worship services of Bayside Church Midtown in July of 2016.

by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.<sup>3</sup> The population demographic is 45% White, 26.9% Hispanic, 18.3% Asian, and 14.6% Black.<sup>4</sup>

This community is also experiencing gentrification. It is quite normal to see homelessness and other pictures of urban poverty on one block and a few blocks later see hipster coffee shops and new housing developments. At Bayside Church Midtown, our desire as a church is not just to continue to grow as a “sneak preview of heaven” in our multi-ethnic diversity, but to also unleash compassion and facilitate individual and systemic transformation in our surrounding multicultural and urban community, which also struggles with disparities across race, class, and place. The desired goal and the focus of this doctoral project is to put in place a sustained training strategy to equip our members to be cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers. The hope is that our church will be a transformative asset in the Midtown community and beyond.

### **The Multi-Campus Church Model of Bayside Church**

The move from being The House Church to Bayside Church Midtown has played a significant role in the areas of growth, capacity building, and self-sustainability. Bayside Church Midtown is not only one of the fastest growing multiethnic and urban churches on the West Coast, but it is also a campus of Bayside Church, which is the seventeenth largest church in the United States and the sixteenth fastest growing church in the United States, according to Outreach Magazine’s annual issue on the fastest

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Anfuso, *A City That Looks like Heaven: Building Bridges of Unity and Love in America’s Most Racially Diverse City* (Roseville, CA: The Rock of Roseville Publishing, 2014), 15.

<sup>4</sup> World Population Review, “Sacramento: Population,” accessed April 22, 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/sacramento-population/>.

growing and largest churches in America (2017).<sup>5</sup> As a Bayside Church campus, there are some advantages as well as challenges. Some of the challenges raise the importance of the need for reconciliation praxis strategies, especially when there is one lone multiethnic and urban campus, and the rest of the campuses (outside of the Folsom Prison campus) are predominately White, suburban, and located in very politically conservative counties.

One of the advantages of being a campus of Bayside Church is having central services that support and resource all campuses. Bayside Church Midtown did not have to create and sustain organizational areas such as finance, human resources, communications and marketing, property management, and ministry advancement. These already existed within the original Bayside Church (now the Granite Bay campus) and have now moved to a central services model in order to support all campuses. New campus plants or campus adoptions are also able to glean from and gain support from existing ministry areas at Bayside Church Granite Bay and other stronger campuses. Existing ministries within these campuses can assist in building the capacity of ministries not developed yet or that are in the beginning stages of development on other campuses.

Local and Global Missions has also moved to a central-services focus that allows for greater impact. One example of this is an annual Mexicali Missions trip that takes place every spring. High school and college students as well as adult small groups spend a week in Mexico building homes, tutoring kids, and putting on outreach events. This past spring, all campuses combined to send over one thousand people to Mexico for a week of impact.

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<sup>5</sup> *Outreach Magazine*, “100 Fastest-Growing Churches: The American Megachurch Annual Report” (October 2018), accessed April 22, 2019, <https://outreachmagazine.com/outreach-100.html>.

Another example of this collective impact came last year when forest fires broke out in the Santa Rosa Area of Northern California, which brought much devastation. The combined Bayside Church campuses raised a second offering of half a million dollars to help with recovery efforts, and the church sent hundreds of volunteers to assist the Bayside Santa Rosa campus in ministry initiatives to provide hope and healing. This brought encouragement and energy to our church to know that we were part of something bigger than Bayside Church Midtown.

### **Bayside Midtown Senior Leadership**

One of the reasons for the success of Bayside Church Midtown is that it was initially planted by an indigenous urban leader, Bob Balian. Balian has lived just about his entire life in Sacramento. He is also well known and well respected within the city of Sacramento. He was a standout baseball and basketball player at Kennedy High School in Sacramento and went on to play at Sacramento Area College, American River Community College before playing at UCLA where he would graduate with a bachelor's degree. He returned home to work for his father's construction business and eventually he took over the business. A call to ministry played a role in his decision to sell the business and become a youth pastor in the city of Sacramento. It was from there that he eventually joined Sherwood Carthen to plant Bayside Church of South Sacramento (BOSS).

If you spend a day in Sacramento with Bob Balian, you soon get a feel for how well known he is. His influence and network has led to him serving on a number of community boards as well as serving as chaplain of the Sacramento Kings professional

basketball team. There is indeed a “home field advantage” to planting a church in the city where one was born and raised.

Balian had success in planting The House Church, but he did not start with significant financial support. Due to tensions with Ray Johnston and Sherwood Carthen, he did not initially receive support from the Pacific Southwest Conference or the national department of Church Growth and Evangelism of the Evangelical Covenant Church. As a result, Bob and his wife Letty invested their own resources into the church plant, and they depended on their initial core team to financially support the church during the first couple of years. As a well-known and well-respected indigenous urban leader, Balian played a major role in the early success that was experienced. This suggests the importance of being an indigenous urban leader in cross-cultural and justice-oriented ministry development.

I came on the staff of Bayside Church Midtown initially part time as a teaching pastor, preaching monthly in August of 2016. At the time, I also served as President and CEO of World Impact, an urban missions organization. A year later in August of 2017, I came on full time as Co-Senior Pastor of Bayside Church Midtown with Bob Balian and Global Teaching Pastor of Bayside Church. In this role, I preach twenty-two weekends a year at Bayside Midtown and oversee Men’s Ministry, Women’s Ministry, the Experience of Worship, and aspects of our Outreach and Reconciliation initiatives. More broadly, I serve on the Global Vision Team and Campus Pastors Team. I preach on the other Bayside campuses six to eight weekends a year and participate as a faculty member for our Thrive Leadership Conferences and Thrive School.

Thrive Leadership Conferences and Thrive School are the leadership development initiatives within Thriving Churches International, a partner organization of Bayside Church. Both Bayside Church and Thriving Churches International were founded by Pastor Ray Johnston, the Global Senior Pastor of Bayside Church. Through Bayside Church and Thriving Churches International, thousands of pastors, ministry leaders, and emerging leaders are influenced and equipped across the country and around the world. A commitment to the equipping and releasing of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers can not only transform Bayside Church Midtown and Bayside Church as a whole, but also impact the way in which Bayside influences church planting, pastoral leadership development, and church revitalization across the country and beyond.

### **Core Values and Vision**

The mission statement of Bayside Church Midtown, as reflected in the original documents of The House Church, was “to make disciple makers, strategically meet long-term needs in an ethnically diverse community, and plant other intentionally multiethnic churches.”<sup>6</sup> This mission was deeply connected to the founding pastor’s upbringing in the city and passion his for multiethnicity. Therefore, the church was planted with the following core values:

- Multiethnic: Modeling diversity for other churches and for the city
- Community Service: Leading the way in compassion and social justice
- Focus on the Lost: Strategically mobilizing the congregants to reach the lost
- Exhilarating Worship: Create an irresistible Sunday morning environment.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The House Church, “Core Values,” handout at The House Church Core Team Meeting, fall 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Since these values go beyond simply the development of a diverse church, there is an opportunity to strengthen this congregation as a reconciling and empowering movement in an urban and multicultural mission field. The original mission statement and core values provide the foundation for developing ministries that can equip and release cross-cultural and justice-oriented Christ followers.

There is a need for the development of a new ministry strategy that focuses on reconciliation and disciple-making—an initiative that points to the next level of the development of a multiethnic church beyond simply becoming diverse. We have been able to reach many people because of our diversity. Some attend our church because their family is biracial. Some attend because they are looking for a church as ethnically diverse as the places where they live, work, or go to school. Because such a large percentage of the churches in America and specifically in Sacramento remain homogenous in their makeup, a number of people are initially attracted to us because of our intentionality in being multiethnic. This initial attraction and connection does not automatically mean that once they make our church their home, they will develop meaningful, reconciling relationships. It also does not mean they will go out as followers of Christ, serving as God's vehicles of transformation and social justice. This project provides the development of a new ministry strategy for that purpose.

### **Opportunity for Transformation in Sacramento**

Bayside Church Midtown has an opportunity to deepen its impact within its surrounding community and beyond. We are fortunate that the Chief of Police, city council members, business owners, public school administrators, and professional

athletes attend our church. This blessing provides a significant network and opportunity for great influence. It would be a shame for us to look out each Sunday at the diversity of influential city leaders in our midst and not see that as a major opportunity to change the Midtown community of Sacramento. These influential faith leaders are a critical part of the pool of potential cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers within our church. Bob Balian and I have monthly appointments with some of these influential community leaders.

Recently, we have been working with the Sacramento Chief of Police, Daniel Hahn, to improve relations between the police department and communities that are predominantly African American. This is especially needed now because of the recent shooting death of unarmed African American Stephon Clark at the hands of two Sacramento police officers. On the evening of March 18, 2018, Sacramento city police officers and Sacramento County sheriff's officers were responding to a 911 call, that an African American male was breaking into cars with a crowbar in a South Sacramento neighborhood. Two Sacramento City police officers came upon Stephon Clark in the backyard of a house nearby. Suspecting that he may have been hiding from police, potentially breaking into the house, and that he pointed a gun towards them once they called out to him, they fired shots, killing Stephon Clark. Later it was discovered that Stephon Clark had no gun, but only a cell phone, which he pointed in the direction of the officers perhaps simply to show them it was a phone, not a gun. Also, no crowbar was found in order to help clearly identify him as the suspect who was breaking into cars that

night. Even more heartbreaking was that the backyard that Stephon Clark was found in was the backyard of his own grandparents.<sup>8</sup>

The police body cam video released and shown on the Sacramento local news led to weeks of protests by the local chapter of Black Lives Matter and other groups. A town hall meeting put on by the mayor and city council was filled with shouts and cries of anger and deep pain from the African American community and other concerned members of the city. The death of Stephon Clark revealed a deeper tension between the police of Sacramento and the African American community. The police department of Sacramento, even with the recent appointment of its first African American chief, is still a predominantly White police department. Officers are 74.65% White compared to only 3.44% Black.<sup>9</sup> This disparity, along with little hope of justice being served in the death of Stephon Clark, has led to significant racial tensions in America's most diverse city.

This really hits home for us at Bayside Church Midtown because the police chief and his family, the deputy police chief, the grandparents of Stephon Clark, and relatives of the Sacramento County district attorney all attend our church. Just a few days before the one-year anniversary of the death of Stephon Clark, the Sacramento County district attorney held a press conference to announce her findings in the investigation of the police officers who shot and killed Stephon Clark. She not only announced that no charges would be made against the police officers, but she spent most of the time painting a very dehumanizing picture of the deceased Stephon Clark. She referred to video that

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<sup>8</sup> *Sacramento Bee*, "Top Stephon Clark Shooting Stories and Video," accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/crime/article206604044.html>.

<sup>9</sup> City of Sacramento, "2016 Annual Report," accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.cityofsacramento.org/Police/About-SPD/Annual-Report>, 10-11.

showed he was smashing car windows prior to his encounter with police officers. She spoke of text messages found on his cell phone that revealed tensions between himself and his girlfriend and struggles with thoughts of suicide. She used this information to justify the actions of the police officers with no sensitivity to how these remarks would only ignite new racialized anger and tensions in the city. It is hoped that this doctoral project hopes brings a needed and sustainable reconciling initiative to Bayside Church Midtown at a crucial moment in the life of its surrounding community as well as those currently attending.

### **Description of Reconciling Church Ministry Plan**

The main purpose of this project is to explore whether a long-term ministry strategy could be developed within a growing urban and multiethnic congregation for equipping and releasing cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers. The project is informed by reconciliation ministry praxis and theology, Black liberation theology, and urban apologetics. Secondary purposes of this project are to raise awareness and understanding for the members of a multiethnic church of the biblical connections between the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), the Great Commission with its call to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), and the call to social justice given by Christ (Matthew 25:31-46).

It is also desired that members of the multiethnic church participating in this project would go beyond church attendance to becoming agents of reconciliation, justice, and transformation in their surrounding community and beyond. There is an opportunity to deconstruct how the role of the church is perceived, especially if that perception is

based on a transactional-programmatic model which primarily serves the attenders. Finally, this project presents an ecclesiastical model of the church as a multiethnic and intergenerational house of worship, equipping, and empowerment, calling its members and attenders to live as reconciling missionaries.

### **Project Scope**

Bayside Church Midtown represents the main focus of the project along with a secondary focus on Bayside Church as a whole. The project consists of the development of a four-week summer class on reconciliation ministry praxis; five expository sermons emphasizing the intersections between disciple-making, justice, and reconciliation within Scriptures; and an intentional focus on the cross-cultural and justice-oriented opportunities within Serve Day, the Breakaway Summer Academy and Outreach, and Pilgrimage Homelessness Ministry. The class and the sermons are intended to emphasize the connection between the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus and the call upon the church to serve as a community of reconciliation among each other and as a vehicle of reconciliation within its surrounding community. Combined, they become a potential onramp to increased participation in outreach opportunities and greater reconciling and justice competencies among those currently involved.

There is also an opportunity for Bayside Church Midtown to mobilize a core group of its members to respond in some meaningful way to address the unrest in the city following the death of Stephon Clark. During the implementation of the project, Pastor Balian and I gathered a core team of those inspired and equipped by the sermons and class to explore this opportunity. The hope is that this group can serve as a reconciling

and justice-oriented response to the death of Stephon Clark as part of the project's results. By connecting the class, sermons, outreach initiatives, core values development, and community core team development, the overall project becomes an integrated approach to equipping and releasing cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers and prioritizing reconciliation beyond the Midtown campus to our surrounding community and the entire Bayside family of churches.

The timeline for the implementation of the project took place during the 2017/2018 ministry and fiscal calendar year, which began on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and ended on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018. There were some interviews conducted beyond the timeline. The project is integrated within the following ministry initiatives of Bayside Church Midtown: 1) the Annual Big Wednesday Summer Class Series; 2) the Uncensored, Gospel of John, and Live Called Sermon Series; 3) Serve Day, the Breakaway Summer Academy, and Pilgrimage Homelessness Ministry; and 4) the Bayside All-Staff Retreat. The following sequence of steps was followed in accomplishing the project's purpose: 1) selection of the population and participants; 2) development and preaching of five sermons; 3) development and teaching of four-week summer class; 4) development of surveys and conducting of interviews; 5) and development of reconciliation core value and message for Bayside all-staff retreat.

#### Selection of the Population and Participants

The members and regular attenders within the experience of worship services at Bayside Church Midtown represent the population focus for the five sermons. There are six worship services held every week; on Thursdays at 7:00 pm and Sundays at 8:30 am,

10:00 am, 11:30 am, 12:55 pm, and 7:00 pm. This large congregation, representing an average of three thousand in weekend attendance, serves as the first phase of influence in the journey of moving from a multiethnic church to a reconciling church.

The multiethnic demographic of the church provides a very diverse target audience reached by the sermons. From this broader target audience, forty-three participants were recruited for the first Reconciliation and Discipleship class, offered during the 2017 Big Wednesday Summer Series. To assist in recruiting these participants, announcements were given during the worship services for three consecutive weekends, flyers were created and given out at the Welcome Center in the church lobby area, and information was provided through the church website. Members and regular attenders were encouraged to pre-register in order to track the number of participants.

#### Development and Preaching of Five Sermons

Expository preaching in the African American homiletic tradition was utilized during the duration of the project. The way sermons are developed at Bayside Church presented both a challenge and new opportunity for this part of the project. Because of the overall ecclesiastical model of Bayside Church, I was not able to develop these sermons strictly on my own. Sermons are developed within the Bayside family of churches through a weekly sermon prep meeting of all the senior campus pastors and other teaching pastors. Initial outlines are developed by the co-senior pastors of the Granite Bay campus, meaning there is no initial input coming from a person of color in an urban context. There is also a quarterly meeting with Founder and Global Senior Pastor Ray Johnston to develop larger sermons series ideas. This was a challenge I had to

stay mindful of through the duration of the project. At the same time, this team approach to sermon development provided an opportunity for this part of the project to bring a new cultural influence within the preaching across all Bayside campuses. Theologian Henry H. Mitchell's book, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, served as an important resource here.<sup>10</sup> The utilizing of this resource led to a deeper exploration for me as an African American pastor, on how the foundational elements in the art and science of Black preaching could be brought into the sermon development process at Bayside Church.

The five sermons were developed and delivered within three larger sermon series: "Uncensored: Let Jesus Speak," "Good News for a Change: A Series on the Gospel of John," and "Live Called: Life without Purpose Is Pointless." Sermon outlines were provided in the worship service bulletins, online, and through the Bayside Church app.

The first sermon, titled "Beyond the Flavor of the Month: A Life of Salt and Light," was delivered within the 2017 spring and summer sermon series titled, "Uncensored: Let Jesus Speak." The focus of this series was to highlight how the words of Jesus ought to have lasting impact and show up through the lives of believers today. The goal of this sermon series was to present embodied urban apologetics as well as cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple making and make it practical for a multiethnic congregation. Matthew 5:13-16 and John 1:1-14 were used as the main Scripture texts.

The purpose of the sermon was to challenge a multiethnic church to live as "a new people" representing, "a new kingdom" within a surrounding community in need of

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<sup>10</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

“a new picture” of the mission of the Church. From Christ’s words on salt in Mathew 5:13-16, the sermon called the multiethnic congregation to become the lasting flavor of God, which is love, reconciliation, and justice in a tasteless world of division, oppression, and injustice. John 1:1-14 presents Christ, who calls us to live a salty life, as the incarnation of God. The sermon focused on the connection between Christ as God showing up in a community over two thousand years ago with our showing up as salty Christ followers in the tasteless places of our city. The sermon closed by using a salt shaker as a symbol of the Christian life and asking the question, “What is on the inside of you, that if shaken out into the world, could bring about love, empowerment, reconciliation, and justice?”<sup>11</sup>

The next two sermons were delivered within the 2018 spring and summer sermon series titled, “Good News for a Change: A Series on the Gospel of John.” In the first sermon from this series, titled “Everyday Jesus: Showing Up by Invitation,” John 2:1-12 was the main text, and it focused on the first public miracle of Christ. Attention was given to Christ performing the miracle, not in a religious institution, but at a wedding reception. Christ was at a wedding reception simply because he was invited along with his initial followers. The incarnation of God is supernaturally present in places outside the church and temple, such as barn mangers and wedding receptions. The marginalized and miracle-working Messiah is one who crosses the border as a refugee and stands in proximity to an outcast woman with a seemingly incurable disease.

In the sermon, Christ was presented to the multiethnic congregation as the incarnation of God, showing up in ordinary and unexpected places, doing the

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<sup>11</sup> A more detailed sermon outline is provided in Appendix 1.

extraordinary. Finally, attention was paid to the disciples and the servants of the story. The first public miracle of Christ takes place with the assistance of not the wealthy and privileged, but the servants carrying ceremonial washing jars, which became vessels for new wine. The multiethnic church is called to follow Christ into the various sectors of our community, to the places sending out an invitation for love, justice, and transformation. The multiethnic church should not see the poor, broken, and oppressed as simply the objects of our compassion, but the servant-vehicles of God's public miracles.<sup>12</sup> Howard Thurman's, *Jesus and the Disinherited* and J. Alfred Smith, Sr.'s, *On the Jericho Road: A Memoir of Racial Justice, Social Action, and Prophetic Ministry* served as supplemental resources for this sermon.<sup>13</sup>

In the second sermon in the series, titled "Empowered by Meeting Jesus," John 4:1-42 was used as the main text. Christ's journey to Samaria served as an opportunity to present to the multiethnic congregation the intersections between the incarnation of God in the marginalized Messiah, an embodied urban apologetics, and reconciliation as spiritually and socially transformative. Salter McNeil's book, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism, and Race*, served as a supplemental resource for this sermon.<sup>14</sup> The main idea in the sermon was to challenge the multiethnic congregation to follow Christ into a missional life of reconciliation and justice that creates beloved

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<sup>12</sup> A more detailed sermon outline is provided in Appendix 2.

<sup>13</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); J. Alfred Smith, Sr., *On the Jericho Road: A Memoir of Racial Justice, Social Action, and Prophetic Ministry*, new title ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Salter McNeil, *A Credible Witness*.

community. We ought to follow Christ to the places and people others avoid, into new identity and new worship, and into a revolutionary movement of social justice.<sup>15</sup>

I closed the sermon by stating that there are neighborhoods and communities in our city that are treated like modern-day Samaritans. The multiethnic church is called to follow Christ to the “wells” of our city and to join him in his posture there. Christ empowers the marginalized and the outcast at the well. For the multiethnic church to become a reconciling church, it must go beyond an unleashing of compassion that hands down blessings to the poor and marginalized, to an unleashing of empowerment that looks up at the full personhood and potential of the poor and marginalized.

The next two sermons comprised the series called, “Lived Called: Life without Purpose Is Pointless.” This series focused on the intersections between spiritual formation, reconciliation, justice, and disciple making. The broader goal for this entire series was to present to the members of the multiethnic church the biblically-rooted understanding of being deeply loved by God, amazingly gifted by God, and spiritually empowered by God for works of reconciliation and justice.

For the first sermon in this particular series, titled “Discovering and Developing Your Calling and Spiritual Gifts,” 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 served as the main Scripture texts. The sermon presents to the multiethnic church, the mission field of the United States as an ever-increasing diverse, yet deeply divided one. Racism, sexism, dehumanization, and political exploitation of the other is still very much plaguing this mission field of ours. It is a tragedy that a multiethnic church is unable to reach this mission field in a transformative manner if it is diverse, yet immature.

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<sup>15</sup> A more detailed sermon outline is provided in Appendix 3.

Paul's first and second letters to the church in the city of Corinth were used to present to the multiethnic church the opportunity to function as a diverse, maturing, and reconciling church. The church in the city of Corinth provides the multiethnic church a picture of the biblical alignment between the mission of Christ and the mission of the church in an urban, multicultural, and divided context. The sermon with a presentation of the reconciling church as a beloved, unified, gifted, and justice-seeking community.<sup>16</sup>

The second sermon in this series, titled "Living Out Your Destiny," used Ephesians 4: 11-16 as the main Scripture text. The sermon challenged the multiethnic church to find solidarity with the Christian Church of the first century instead of the power-seeking Church of Christendom birthed in the fourth century through Constantine and still having influence in American churches today. The church of Ephesus was presented as a community of the marginalized, oppressed, and suffering in an occupied land. Even in this state, the church of Ephesus was a thriving, flourishing, and transformative movement. The Ephesian church is a shining example of a people living as representatives of the Kingdom of God, under the oppression of the empire, and yet living out their destiny in the face of opposition. In fact, the Apostle Paul penned this letter to the church while incarcerated.

The call of the sermon was to find solidarity with the Apostle Paul, with the church of Ephesus, with the antebellum Church of American slavery, and with underground churches facing persecution around the world today. Being informed by the ancient and present suffering church equips the church to find liberation from the American power-seeking Church and to find new identity as an outpost of the Kingdom

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<sup>16</sup> A more detailed sermon outline is provided in Appendix 4.

of God. In conclusion, I cast a vision of the reconciling church as a diverse community, with many expressions, united in Christ to reach a diverse, divided, and broken mission field plagued by injustice.<sup>17</sup>

#### Development and Teaching of Four-week Summer Class

The annual Big Wednesday Summer Class Series takes place for four weeks in the month of July. The summer months are when we take a break from our weekly small groups and Tuesday evening men's and women's ministry gatherings. We utilize a portion of the summer to offer equipping classes to assist in Christian formation and development.

As part of this project, a four-week class entitled "Rise of the Reconcilers: Cross Cultural and Urban Disciple Makers" was developed. Over the four weeks of the Big Wednesday Summer Series, offered both in July of 2017 and 2018, the class served as one of the offerings for formation and development. Each class was ninety minutes in duration. The "Rise of the Reconcilers" class provided a biblical foundation for reconciliation and justice. It also explored issues of race, multiethnicity, and diversity. Finally, the class studied the intersections of the incarnation of God, the mission of Christ, and the mission of the church. Beside the utilizing of Scripture, the class also utilized supplemental reconciliation praxis resources including but not limited to the following: *Roadmap to Reconciliation* by Brenda Salter McNeil, *Radical Reconciliation* by Allen Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung, *Beyond Rhetoric* by Curtiss DeYoung and Samuel Hines, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* by John W. De Gruchy, *Race: A*

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<sup>17</sup> A more detailed sermon outline is provided in Appendix 5.

*Theological Account* by J. Kameron Carter, *The Post-Black and Post-White Church* by Efrem Smith, *Liberation and Reconciliation* by J. Deotis Roberts, and *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander.<sup>18</sup> The intent is that this class will go from an initial pilot as part of this doctoral project to a long-term annual class, foundational to the formation and developmental strategy of Bayside Midtown Church.

I served as the content developer and main instructor for the class. Co-Senior Pastor Bob Balian also served as an instructor as well. His connecting of the class content with the original vision and mission of Bayside Church Midtown was very valuable. The remainder of this section provides a brief overview of each week of the class.

### **Week One: The Reconciling Church and The Great Connection**

The class began with introductions based on the following questions: 1) What's your name and how long have you been attending Bayside Church Midtown? 2) How would you describe your ethnicity or race? 3) What are you hoping to get out of the four-week class? The purpose of the first week of the class was to provide a more biblically robust understanding of the mission of the church and the purpose of the Christian life.

The book of Acts within the New Testament was utilized to present the first century Church as a community of minority, marginalized, and exiled people representing the Kingdom of God in an occupied land. This understanding of the first-century Church led to the exploration of the interconnectedness of the advancement of the Kingdom of God and justice. The Gospel of John was utilized to review from the

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<sup>18</sup> Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*; Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation*; Hines and DeYoung, *Beyond Rhetoric*; De Gruchy, *Reconciliation*; Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*; Efrem Smith, *The Post-Black and Post-White Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012); J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

sermons already preached, an understanding of Christ as the marginalized Messiah. This understanding of the first-century Church was presented as the biblical foundation for the discovery of the reconciling church and the reconciling life. The secondary purpose of the class was to show the connection between “The Call to Reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5), “The Call to Labor-ship” (Matthew 9 and 10), and “The Call to Disciple-Making” (Matthew 28). The class ended with a time for questions as well as prayer.

## **Week 2: Reconciliation and Race**

The class began with review from week one and then provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions and provide comments regarding last week’s focus. Next, reconciliation was presented biblically as part of “The Great Connection” informing the mission of the church. “The Good News” (Luke 4), “The Great Opportunity” (Matthew 9 and 10), “The Great Concern” (Matthew 25), “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28), and “The Great Message and Ministry” (2 Corinthians 5) were presented for a holistic understanding of what it means to be live as a Christ follower. All this together form “The Great Connection” the multiethnic church must make in order to understand the biblical significance of reconciliation. Reconciliation was presented in the following three dimensions: theological (spiritual) reconciliation, national (political) reconciliation, and relational (personal) reconciliation.

Next, the need for reconciliation as well as the work of reconciliation, both spiritually and socially, were explored. Christ was presented as “the Great Reconciler.” Finally, to set up the next class, we briefly explored how reconciliation can be applied to

the issue of race, racial division, and racism. The class ended with a time for questions as well as prayer.

### **Week 3: Reconciliation Theology and Race**

The class began with review from week two and a time for questions and comments. The main purpose of this class was to understand the intersections between reconciliation, race, and racism based on insights given in the previous class on reconciliation as political, relational, and spiritual. Racism was juxtaposed to reconciliation and presented in the dimensions of individual, systemic, and sin. Though race is not biblical, the Bible was used explore a theodicy of race.

The following topics were discussed: “One Image, One Race, One Blood” (Genesis 1 and 2); “Division and Idolatry” (Genesis 11); “God as Liberator” (Exodus 3); “Christ as Liberator and Reconciler” (Luke 4); “The Coming of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2); and “The Church and Reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5). Each of these represents part of a biblical framework for applying reconciliation to racial division. The issue of race was revisited, specifically focusing on the invention and impact of whiteness. The class ended with a time for questions as well as prayer.

### **Week 4: The Multiethnic and Reconciling Church**

The class began with a small group exercise exploring ethnic background. Building on the idea that race is not biblical, but culture, ethnicity, and nationality are found in the Scripture, participants were asked to describe themselves. After this exercise, the multiethnic and reconciling church as well as the Kingdom of God were explored using the Scripture texts Acts 2, Acts 10, Acts 11, and Revelation 7. The last

half of the class was led by Pastor Bob Balian. He shared about his calling into multiethnic and reconciling ministry and what led him and his wife Letty to plant The House Church, which would eventually become Bayside Church Midtown. The class ended with a time for questions as well as prayer.

### Development of Surveys and Conducting of Interviews

All of the participants in the class filled out pre-class surveys. The pre-class survey provided insights on the participants' understanding of reconciliation, the vision of Bayside Church Midtown, and their current involvement in cross cultural disciple-making. The following questions made up the pre-class survey:

- 1.) How long have you been attending Bayside Church Midtown?
- 2.) Did the church being urban, multiracial, and multiethnic play a role in your becoming a regular attender?
- 3.) Are you comfortable sharing your faith with others?
- 4.) Are you comfortable sharing your faith with people of a different race or ethnicity?
- 5.) Do you feel the church should play a role in dealing with racial and class divisions within its community and city?
- 6.) Do you consider yourself a reconciler? Why or why not?<sup>19</sup>

Twenty class participants who serve on staff or as volunteer ministry leaders were recruited to fill out post-class surveys. The intention here was to evaluate the initial impact of the class upon congregants of significant influence. The post-class survey provided insights on how the sermons leading up to the class and the class itself impacted their views on race, reconciliation, and disciple-making. The post-class survey was administered after the Breakaway Summer Academy and Outreach as well as Fall Serve

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<sup>19</sup> Bayside Church Midtown, "Pre-Class Survey," distributed to participants in July 2017 and July 2018. Question 6 was asked to determine a person's previous reference point in understanding the biblical concept of reconciliation.

Day in order to see how these cross-cultural and reconciling opportunities impacted participants. The follow questions made up the post-class survey:

- 1.) How did the sermons and the Big Wednesday Summer Class impact your thoughts on race, reconciliation, and the multiethnic church?
- 2.) Did you participate in Breakaway Summer Academy and Outreach or Serve Day?
- 3.) Share examples of how you are involved in cross cultural or multiethnic community at church beyond the experience of worship?
- 4.) Do you feel Bayside Church Midtown focuses too much on issues of race, multiethnicity, and justice?
- 5.) Do you have examples of sharing your faith across race and ethnicity?<sup>20</sup>

Interviews were also conducted in order to elicit feedback. Four full-time staff members of Bayside Church Midtown were recruited to participate in interviews. An intentionally diverse group made up the four staff persons interviewed, including a biracial female, an African American male, a Southeast Asian American female, and a Russian American female. The following interview questions were asked:

- 1.) What originally led you to Bayside Church Midtown?
- 2.) How does Bayside Church Midtown address the issues of race and justice?
- 3.) In what ways have you been personally challenged by being at a multiethnic and urban church?
- 4.) Do you see a difference between being a multiethnic church and being a reconciling and justice-oriented church?
- 5.) What can Bayside Church Midtown do to equip members and regular attenders in becoming cross cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers?<sup>21</sup>

#### Development of Reconciliation Core Value and Message for Bayside All-Staff Retreat

The project also included participation in the development of core values for the Bayside family of churches and to develop a presentation on diversity and race for the

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<sup>20</sup> Bayside Church Midtown, "Post-Class Survey," distributed to participants in July 2017 and July 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Bayside Church Midtown, "Interview Questions," created for interviews which followed this pilot project in July 2017 and July 2018.

fall All-Staff Retreat. Bob Balian and I were asked by Global Senior Pastor Ray Johnston to serve on a Global Vision and Strategy Team. One of the major initiatives of this team was the development of core values for the entire Bayside family of churches. Balian and I were specifically asked to work with Johnston on the development of a core value which encompasses diversity, race, and compassion in some meaningful way. The goal was to have all the core values developed in time to be presented at the All-Staff Retreat in September of 2018. During spring and summer of 2018, two retreats were held—a Global Vision and Strategy Team Retreat and a Campus Pastors and Spouses Retreat. The three of us were able to use these times to finalize the core values in time for the fall All-Staff Retreat.

I was also asked by Ray Johnston to speak in the opening general session at the fall All-Staff Retreat on the core value developed on diversity and race. The message was titled “One Big Family,” and 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 were utilized as the main Scripture texts. The message explored the opportunity for the Bayside family of churches to embrace the transition from historically operating as a predominantly White, evangelical, suburban church to becoming a multiethnic, multi-campus, reconciling church. I challenged the Bayside family of churches to no longer see Bayside Church Midtown as the multiethnic and urban expression of Bayside Church, but instead to collectively embrace the idea of functioning as one church committed to multi-ethnicity, reconciliation, and justice. The church in the city of Corinth as a diverse, metropolitan church should not simply inform the identity of Bayside Church Midtown, but it should impact the missional ecclesiology of the entire Bayside family of churches. The following were the main points of the message: 1) One Big God: No More Segregated

Gods; 2) One Big Community: No More Not Seeing Others; 3) One Big Church: No More Segregated Church; and 4) One Big Love: No More Separating Compassion and Justice.<sup>22</sup> I closed by calling the entire Bayside Church staff to embrace the future Bayside Church as a diverse, reconciling, and justice-oriented movement.

### **Conclusion**

All of the elements of the project presented in this chapter have the potential to collectively serve as a dynamic holistic strategy for reconciliation ministry praxis and the embodiment of urban apologetics. The ultimate ends of this project are not simply sermons, classes, and core values on paper. This project will truly be meaningful as it extends to an ongoing Christian formation and missional strategy which leads to a multiethnic army of reconciling and justice-filled soldiers engaging an ever-increasing multicultural, yet deeply divided mission field. This is why the mobilization of a core team from those inspired by the components of this project will be necessary. If this happens, the divisiveness from the election of President Donald Trump and the tragic death of Stephon Clark can become catalytic events for a sustainable transformation within Bayside Church Midtown. Then Bayside Church Midtown can serve as a center of compassion, reconciliation, and justice in one of the most diverse cities in America.

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<sup>22</sup> A more detailed sermon outline is provided in Appendix 6.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

A recent occurrence was a stark reminder of why this project is so extremely necessary. Thomas Williams and his brother Carlos, both African American men, attend Bayside Midtown Church. They are identical twin brothers, and the story they shared with Pastor Bob Balian and me was heartbreaking. They recalled how one evening Thomas was with Carlos outside his house. Carlos, his fiancé, and their young child had recently moved into a home in a new housing development in a suburb of Sacramento.

Carlos and Thomas had been looking at some things in his backyard and on the side of the house. His fiancé and child were asleep in the house. After this, they were going to head out to take care of some other business. Thomas left in his vehicle first and Carlos was going to follow behind. While in his front yard, a White male who also lived in the neighborhood approached Carlos asking him why he was hanging out around the house. Carlos told him he lived there. The White male did not believe him and accused him of attempting to break into the house. He demanded that Carlos prove to him that he lived there. Carlos in turn demanded that the White male get off his property. Once the

White male left, Carlos went to his vehicle and left to catch up with Thomas. As Carlos left, Thomas returned wondering why Carlos had not followed him.

As he approached Carlos's house, that same White male, along with another White male and two White females approached Thomas and accused him of trying to break into his brother's house. After a few minutes of a heated confrontation, the White group left. Carlos returned to the house, but by this time county sheriff's officers were on the scene, throwing both Carlos and Thomas to the ground. One of the members of the White group had called the 911 and told the dispatcher that he saw two Black men wearing ski masks, with crowbars in their hands, attempting to break into a house. By the time the police realized that Carlos and Thomas were not trying to burglarize a home and that Carlos indeed lived there, they had already beaten them, thrown them to the ground, handcuffed them, and thrown them into the back of police cars. Even after realizing they were wrong, the officers charged Carlos and Thomas with resisting arrest and took them to jail.

With watered eyes, Carlos and Thomas said, "We just need the support of our church and were wondering if our pastors would join us in some way to seek justice and change in our city." This is why this project is necessary. There is a need for much more than ethnically diverse churches. The church must be the modern-day incarnation of the God of reconciliation, justice, and transformation. Until the once marginalized and now resurrected Messiah returns to make all things just, the reconciling and justice-oriented church, as an outpost of the Kingdom of God, must hear the cries of and respond to unarmed and beaten African Americans.

## **Participant Feedback and Survey Data**

The data collected through the surveys and interviews during the implementation of this doctoral project was analyzed to determine if participants of Bayside Church Midtown grew as reconciling, justice-oriented, and disciple makers. It was especially important to understand if the participants had previously held a view of Bayside Church Midtown as primarily or solely focused on multiethnic diversity. The strategic goal among participants was to develop cross-cultural competencies and skills, undergirded by a greater awareness of the biblical intersection between reconciliation, justice, and disciple making. A desired outcome of this project was for the participants to encounter and engage the ministry of reconciliation as both spiritually and socially transformative. A secondary outcome was for the participants to experience personal transformation that would equip and release them to become agents of social change and racial healing in our surrounding community. To that end, the results of this project and the effectiveness of its findings are now discussed and analyzed in the remainder of this chapter.

All of the participants in the “Reconciliation and Discipleship” summer series filled out a pre-class survey. These surveys were filled out anonymously to get as much participation and transparency regarding the participants’ initial understanding of reconciliation, race, and the mission of Bayside Church Midtown. Out of the forty-three participants who filled out the pre-class surveys, only eight participants had been attending Bayside Church Midtown for three years or more. The majority of participants answered, “yes” to the question, “Did the church being urban, multiracial, and multiethnic play a role in your becoming a regular attender?” Five participants responded “no” to that question.

One of the attenders of the Bayside Granite Bay campus, a predominantly White, upper-class congregation, identified himself as Hispanic and a staff member. He also revealed that he had spent most of his adult life trying to escape “the urban lower class.” In answering the survey question, “Do you consider yourself a reconciler? Why or why not?” this participant wrote the following:

I’m not sure. Honestly, I have fought my Hispanic culture and assimilated to what my white friends were doing . . . then I moved from the Bay Area to Texas and then a mostly White area of Sacramento. I found I really missed it (my Hispanic culture). I started to embrace my culture and lose the shame I felt from it. But I still feel the battle of both sides. It’s easier to assimilate, but I think if I fully go that way, I’ll never have peace with it. So, I guess to make a long answer short, I’m trying to be.<sup>1</sup>

All the participants answered “yes” to the question, “Do you feel the church should play a role in dealing with racial and class divisions within its surrounding community and city?” The following statements are from eight participants who provided additional comments after their affirmative answers:

- “I feel that in a neighborhood like ours, ignoring this aspect would be a detriment.”
- “Yes, it truly should but it usually doesn’t. I believe reconciliation is a major part of our faith.”
- “The church needs to be the leader of these conversations in our community.”
- “I think many people are afraid of doing it wrong, so they don’t do it at all.”
- “I need more training and tools to deal with these issues, from a biblical standpoint.”
- “Yes, Midtown is a good example! Thank you for offering this class- an effective step.”
- “Yes, especially with such a diverse church. We are not ‘colorblind.’ I believe we need to share our lives, educate, share love, and learn.”
- “In addition to the Gospel, but not in the replacement of it.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bayside Midtown Church, Reconciliation and Discipleship Summer Series, “Survey Responses to the Pre-Class Survey,” collected in July 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

It is important to note from the last comment, that the participant does not see the church playing a role in dealing with racial and class divisions as central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This inability to see the gospel as directly interconnected with social justice causes this participant to be concerned that the work of economic and racial justice might “replace” the gospel. This mindset has been historically fueled by a significant segment of evangelicalism and continues to this day. This provides a compelling reason for the importance of an ongoing class on reconciliation and disciple making.

After the completion of the Reconciliation and Discipleship class, twenty church staff and volunteer ministry leaders were recruited to take a post-class survey. The post-class surveys provided information on how the sermons, class, and community outreach initiatives impacted the participants’ ability to embrace the mission of cross-cultural, reconciling, and justice-oriented disciple making. After collecting the data from the post-class surveys, five participants who serve as volunteer ministry leaders were recruited to provide extended answers to the post-class survey questions. This was done to more deeply gauge the process of Bayside Church Midtown transforming from a diverse congregation to a reconciling and justice-oriented church. The participants were asked to expound upon the following three questions:

- 1) How did the sermons and summer class impact your thoughts on race, reconciliation, and the multi-ethnic church?
- 2) Did your participation in outreach and community service increase your understanding of racial and economic justice?
- 3) How does your involvement in cross cultural and multiethnic community extend beyond the weekly experience of worship?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bayside Midtown Church, Reconciliation and Discipleship Summer Series, “Post-Class Survey,” distributed in August 2018.

Overall, the responses demonstrated positive feedback. One White female participant wrote,

I started coming to Bayside Midtown after the 2016 elections and my questioning Christians who voted the opposite way I did. I was struggling with the Christian church and had decided not to attend anymore. My daughter told me about Bayside Church Midtown. It is the most ethnically diverse church I ever attended. I love that I can meet and get to know people from different backgrounds. It helps me understand others better. I had been so hopeless as our culture has become so divided, especially when the church is divided. The sermons have made me more aware than ever that we cannot be divided as Christians. That must come first before anything else and we need to work together to spread the love of Jesus.

I participated by helping to make gift baskets for the Arab refugees who have newly arrived in our area. I don't personally know any Muslims and I want to get to understand their religion more. But I must admit that my instinct is to be afraid of Muslims.

I serve with the homeless outreach. The homeless consist of so many different ethnicities and walks of life, and my heart aches for them. I want people to start caring about them as human beings so we can help them get into housing and other services they need.<sup>4</sup>

This woman's response suggests that those who have become disenchanted with the Church and carry a sense of hopelessness after the 2016 presidential election can have their hope restored by engaging with a multiethnic congregation committed to community involvement and social action.

Another White female described her experience by writing,

The Big Wednesday Summer classes were my first introduction to the relationship between the gospel and racial reconciliation. The classes made me more aware of individual differences and gave me a better understanding of myself and the diversity of others. I gained a deeper understanding of the importance of the church's work and what it means to live a Christian life. These classes left me wanting to be part of the solution and not part of the problem and the sermons showed me the way. They challenged me to break old habits and replace them with new habits, Jesus style. They have shown me that it is all up to us to make the effort to live a life that pleases God and live for Christ in

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<sup>4</sup> Bayside Midtown Church, Reconciliation and Discipleship Summer Series, "Survey Responses to the Post-Class Survey," collected in August 2018.

community with compassion and generosity. They have helped me recognize the gifts God has given me and say yes to His calling and have helped me realize the importance of breaking down walls and becoming one family of God.<sup>5</sup>

Another respondent, a Hispanic male, wrote, “I had always been aware of the issues that were covered, but I never saw things from a biblical viewpoint. Since the classes, now I hear all of the current news with a more Christian context.”<sup>6</sup> He went on to affirm the need for this emphasis in the church by writing,

This [racism] is the great unspoken issue of the Church. There are times when I have to defend the Church from others because they see the church as a narrow minded, privileged, White, judgmental, conservative, and racist organization that has only one way of seeing the world and that everyone is either with them or against them. I have to explain that there is really no such thing as a typical Christian. I grew up during the “Jesus Youth Movement” of the early 1970s. Our youth group did community projects and social outings with Campus Life and other youth groups from all churches, Catholic and Protestant. We learned from each other as we worked side by side collecting food and serving as St. Mary’s Kitchen. It was only one of the few times when kids from both Stockton’s Southside and Northside let their walls down to see that others are more alike than different. We all were able to learn that to understand others we need to walk a mile in their shoes and at least try to understand the world from their eyes.<sup>7</sup>

A new member, a White female, reported the following regarding her participation in the summer classes:

I was excited to participate in the Big Wednesday class as it was my first opportunity to hear teaching on racial reconciliation in any church. I have been on a journey of learning about racial issues, especially relating to the African American community. All of my prior information had come from books and blogs. To hear the discussion in person with people of color challenged my thinking on many levels. The biblical teaching was clear and compelling. Meeting and interacting with other believers, has started new friendships that are personalizing my understanding of the issues. The diversity of the pastoral staff

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

and congregation at Midtown is exciting to me. It seems to be a real gift from the Lord and an answer to prayer personally.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, an Asian American female discussed why her participation in this project was so significant to understanding Christianity and her own ethnic identity. She wrote,

My experience as a Christian, ever since I was in seventh grade, has solely been in predominantly White spaces. Therefore, when I moved to Sacramento, Bayside Church Midtown seemed like a slice of what heaven would truly be like because of how diverse the church is. What makes it even more amazing to me was the fact that even in the sermons on any given Sunday and through the summer classes, this diverse church addresses relevant issues regarding race. The Big Wednesday Summer classes provided me with a tangible example of what happens when the church thoughtfully engages in the conversation about race and racial reconciliation. I was really struck by the conversation about the theology of race and felt I was missing out by not knowing about that sooner in my Christian experience. By participating in the Big Wednesday Summer class and engaging in the sermons, I believe now, more than ever, that social justice is an imperative for the modern-day Christian church.<sup>9</sup>

This increased awareness and understanding has led her to a greater commitment to diversity in the church. She continues,

At church, I am involved in cross-cultural and reconciling ministry through serving with the kids' ministry where the pre-K kids are reflective of a multitude of ethnicities. I interact with the kids and their parents at least once a month and sometimes help translate the Bible stories to the kids' cultural experience. I also serve at the Welcome Center, where I talk to those who are attending Bayside Church Midtown for the first time or have questions about different aspects of the church. I am also plugged into two different small groups. One which is quite diverse is comprised of some friends from Midtown, and the other one is a Young Professionals Group from Granite Bay which is more homogenous. The group that is more homogenous requires me to be intentional about sharing my different cultural/ethnic/racial lens with the predominantly White group.<sup>10</sup>

The answers from this group of five participants were very helpful in assessing how the project impacted the journey of moving from an ethnically diverse congregation

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

to a reconciling and justice-oriented church. During the duration of the project, I only received two emails containing negative feedback on the sermons and the content of the class on Reconciliation and Discipleship. At the same time, so many people have come up to me and Pastor Bob Balian expressing how grateful they are that we are deeply biblical in our preaching and teaching and also courageously speaking to the social issues facing our city and our nation.

One recent conversation I had was with church member Ron Knapp. Ron is White and is a senior-level executive of a company in Sacramento. He visited Bayside Church Granite Bay with his wife, thinking they might join there, but after they visited Bayside Church Midtown he said, “We knew this was going to be our church.” Initially drawn by the diversity, he shared with me that he has been challenged in a powerful way by the sermons on reconciliation and justice. He also attended the Reconciliation and Discipleship class. “I know I have a lot to learn,” he said to me, “but I believe that Bayside Church Midtown is the future of the church within the Bayside Family of Churches and in the nation.” After being at Bayside Church Midtown for two years, Ron is now the volunteer team leader for the Pilgrimage Homeless Outreach Ministry. He is on the journey of becoming a cross-cultural, reconciling, justice-oriented disciple maker.

### **Ministry Staff Interviews**

In addition to the survey data collected, four full-time staff from Bayside Church Midtown agreed to be interviewed as part of this project. Each of them also heard the sermons, attended the Big Wednesday Summer class series, and participated in the community outreach initiatives. The following is a summary of their interview responses.

As the only female associate pastor at Bayside Church Midtown, the first person interviewed oversees the worship ministry, serves on the women's ministry leadership team, and also serves as a teaching and preaching pastor. She is a biracial woman who has been a part of Bayside Church Midtown from the very beginning. She and her husband were on the original core team that joined Bob and Letty Balian to plant the church. Since she is the only staff person interviewed that has been at Bayside Church Midtown from its inception eight years ago, more time was spent to understand race and social justice in the church based on her experience. She reported,

The issues of race and social justice has become more important at Bayside Church Midtown. Diversity has always been a big issue, but in recent years there has been a greater focus on justice. This ministry focus has brought a new understanding and perspective. The recent teaching and preaching on systemic racism and injustice has brought new biblical insights and highlights the responsibility upon the church. As a church we are going beyond compassion to justice. We're now at a whole new level. This is impacting Bayside Church as a whole, not just Bayside Midtown.<sup>11</sup>

The second person interviewed serves in the role of Growth Track and Small Groups Ministry coordinator. She is a second generation Ukrainian-American, who has been on staff for two years. Growth Track is a four-week class focused on getting church attenders connected to the vision and mission of the church, into church membership, and serving on a ministry team. She also oversees the Small Groups Ministry with an emphasis on recruiting, training, and resourcing small group leaders. In answer to the question of how she has been personally challenged by being at a multiethnic and urban church, she said,

I have been truly challenged since the first day I came on staff. I have been challenged in learning to engage other staff and key volunteers more

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<sup>11</sup> Associate Pastor for Worship, interviewed by author, Sacramento, CA, October 2018.

collaboratively across culture and race. I'm also learning different leadership styles across culture and race, especially in the areas of communication and conflict resolution. I'm learning to observe the cultural and mental models of others. This has been a challenge for me in the past. I'm wrestling with what it means to be cross cultural and multiethnic.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of her direct participation in the church, she was able to give the following feedback about our goal of becoming a reconciling church. She said, "We have an opportunity to practice being diverse and practice living in grace while also calling out individual and systemic sin. We must deal head on with the aftermath of the Trump election by having the right conversations and moving beyond a lukewarm approach to disciple making."<sup>13</sup>

The Children's Ministry director at Bayside Church Midtown is a Hmong woman who has been on staff for four years. She and her husband, who is White, have been a part of the church for seven years. They attended the original meeting that led The House Church to become Bayside Church Midtown. As a result of her longstanding relationship with the church, the insights she provided were extremely helpful. In answer to how she has personally been challenged to grow, she said,

I have been challenged by overseeing such a multiethnic and multiracial children's ministry. I have to deal with the different parent personalities cross culturally in terms of how they raise their children. I am also dealing with issues of cultural appropriation with my staff and volunteers. When you become a part of a church that is multiethnic and committed to justice, it challenges how you live out your faith not only at church, but within your own family. If I wasn't working here the last four years, I wouldn't be having the challenging conversations I'm now having with my husband and in-laws.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Growth Track Coordinator, interviewed by author, Sacramento, CA, October 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Children's Ministry Director, interviewed by author, Sacramento, CA, October 2018.

When reflecting on our transition as a church to become a reconciling and justice-oriented congregation, she provided the following feedback:

We must be willing to have the hard yet needed conversations. Leaders and volunteers have to allow for conversations that go deeper into issues of justice which affects others instead of simply celebrating having friends at church that are different than yourselves. As staff we need to help people find common ground through equipping them to have these hard conversations around race and justice. By equipping people to have these conversations it will also lead to spiritual growth.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the other male on the pastoral staff is a biracial male who identifies as African American. He has been on staff for seven years and came to Bayside Church Midtown when it was newly established. As an associate pastor, he oversees ministry support teams, the facilities team, and operations. He is currently in training to become the executive pastor of the church. In his interview he described the opportunities and challenges of moving towards becoming a justice-oriented church. He said,

I've come to understand that there is a big difference between being a multiethnic church and being a reconciling and justice-oriented church. Some people attend our church simply for the diversity, preaching, and the music, but they don't interact with each other and pursue both awareness and understanding of justice issues. We have an opportunity to provide the space for people to have the right conversations around issues of justice. We also need to provide ongoing training.<sup>16</sup>

### **Summary of Results**

The responses from these interviews provided important insights for the continued journey of moving from a diverse congregation to a reconciling and justice-oriented church. Their journeys play a significant role in influencing the desired long-range goals

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Associate Pastor for Operations, interviewed by author, Sacramento, CA, October 2018.

of this project. One of the major learnings from this project was to discover that so many people attending our church desire to gain a biblical understanding for navigating issues of race, racism, sexism, and division. They are also looking for safe spaces to have the hard conversations necessary for awareness and understanding around social issues such as immigration, mass incarceration, as well as police brutality and the killing of unarmed African Americans.

In order to capitalize on this catalytic opportunity, it will take more than five sermons and an annual summer class on reconciliation and discipleship. This project has revealed that our staff are not fully equipped to leverage this catalytic opportunity. They have shown success in growing ethnically diverse teams, but they have not realized equal success in reconciling disciple-making development. Our staff have communicated their desire for more training and tools to create spaces and facilitate needed conversations on race, reconciliation, and justice. They are also desirous to work together to create new and sustainable reconciling and justice-oriented initiatives within their ministry areas. The long-term strategy of this project must also include staff development in the areas of intercultural competencies and reconciliation praxis. Bayside Church Midtown must now go beyond a project to a long-term ministry journey, presenting reconciliation and justice as a biblical mandate and an essential component of Christian formation.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, in answer to the question, “Will the development of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers in a multiethnic congregation increase the credibility and relevancy of a church located in an urban and multicultural context to advance reconciliation?” this project has concluded that a new global opportunity is presented by the development of a core value on diversity for the Bayside family of churches and the appointment of an African American male as co-senior pastor of a predominantly White suburban campus. Though there is much more that can be done in proving a long-term commitment to diversity, reconciliation, and justice on all campuses of Bayside Church, this core value is an opportunity to prioritize the equipping of cross-cultural and justice-oriented disciple makers globally. However, the focus on cross-cultural, reconciling, and justice-oriented disciple making must go beyond a multiethnic and urban campus and influence the entire system of Bayside Church.

One of the key global initiatives of the Bayside family of churches was the development of the Bayside Culture and Values document. Pastor Bob Balian and I were asked by Ray Johnston to assist in the development of a core value focused on diversity and unity. The following was developed:

Family: We Are All Us

All people are created in the image of God! All people matter to God! There is far too much division in our culture and sadly in our churches. We believe a unified church could be God’s way of healing the divisions in our community and culture. Racism, discrimination, injustice, and division break the heart of God. We believe diversity is a picture of eternity. We are doing something here on earth that is in anticipation of what is to come. We begin with the end in mind.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bayside Culture and Values Document, “Core Value of Diversity and Unity,” distributed at the All-Staff Retreat in 2018.

For Bayside Church as whole to become a multiethnic and reconciling church, it will take more than the appointment of one African American pastor on a predominantly White, suburban campus. There is a need for a more comprehensive cross-cultural, reconciling, and justice-oriented strategic plan. This is why a long-term commitment to the project is needed. One way to ensure this is the recently created Diversity and Urban Ministry Collective Team. This team is made up of board members, senior level pastors, and staff from multiple campuses. The initial goal is to identify challenges and success factors and create strategic ministry goals within the areas of urban ministry expansion, cross-cultural development, and justice.

In conclusion and on a personal note, this project was much more for me than a scholarly exercise in practical theology. It was much more than discovering a thesis and worthy project in the context of multiethnic and urban ministry. This endeavor has been both heartbreaking and liberating for me as the developer and facilitator of this project. It is been heartbreaking because as an urban pastor I have been deeply impacted by the national epidemic of racial profiling and the brutalizing and killing of unarmed African Americans by police officers. I am engaged in evangelicalism and surrounded by many who voted for a President who called on police officers at a national convention to “rough up those they arrest a little more.”<sup>2</sup> He also called professional athletes who nonviolently protest this tragedy “sons of bitches.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Berman, “Trump Tells Police Not to Worry about Injuring Suspects during Arrests,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 2017, accessed May 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../trump-tells-police-not-to-worry-about-injuring-suspects>.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Edelman, “Trump Rips NFL Players after Anthem Protests during Preseason Games,” *NBC News*, August 10, 2018, accessed May 7, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/.../trump/trump-rips-nfl-players-after-protests-during-preseason-games>.

At the same time that I am grieved by this state of affairs, this project has brought a greater sense of empowerment that I can make a difference. I am so blessed to co-pastor a growing urban, multiethnic, and reconciling church that can join in solidarity with other like-minded congregations in the country to serve as urban apologists and missionaries of truth, justice, and transformation. I pray that this project is much more than words on pages, but fire in the bones of an army of cross-cultural, reconciling, and justice-oriented disciple makers.

## APPENDIX 1

### Sermon One

#### **Beyond the Flavor of the Month: A Life of Salt and Light**

Main Text: Matthew 5: 13-16

Other Text(s): John 1:1-14

Intro: Most People Would Like to Be Famous (If Just for A Moment)

Big Idea: The Christian Life Is about Long-term and Committed Connection to God as well as a Lasting Impact in This World

- A New People
- A New Kingdom
- A New Representation of God

Main Points:

- 1.) A Salty Life Brings Good Taste
- 2.) A Salty Life Keeps Things from Spoiling
- 3.) A Salty Life Keeps Others from Falling
- 4.) A Salty Life Brings Light into a Dark World

Close: Shaking the Salt of God's Kingdom upon a World of Injustice, Brokenness, and Oppression

## APPENDIX 2

### **Sermon Two**

#### **Everyday Jesus: Showing Up by Invitation**

Main Text: John 2:1-12

Other Text(s): John 7:6, John 7:30

Intro: What Makes a Wedding Memorable?

Big Idea: Allow Jesus to Show Up in You Every Day

Main Points:

- 1.) Every Day Presence
- 2.) Every Day Priorities
- 3.) Every Day Possibilities
- 4.) Every Day Power

Close: God Uses the Servants, the Marginalized, the Oppressed, and the Disinherited to Bring about Public Miracles

## APPENDIX 3

### **Sermon Three**

#### **Empowered by Meeting Jesus**

Main Text: John 4:1-42

Other Text(s) Ezekiel 37

Intro: The Beloved Community and the Kingdom of God

Big Idea: We Have an Opportunity to Follow Christ into a Life of Reconciliation and Justice  
That Creates Beloved Community

Main Points:

- 1.) Following Christ to the Places and People Others Avoid
- 2.) Following Christ into New Identity and New Worship
- 3.) Following Christ into a Revolutionary Movement of Social Justice

Close: Find Christ, Find Your Well, and Find Your Calling

## APPENDIX 4

### **Sermon Four**

#### **Discovering and Developing Your Calling and Spiritual Gifts**

Main Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Other Text(s): 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11

Intro: You Are Deeply Loved and Amazingly Gifted

Main Points:

- 1.) When Will You Realize How Gifted You Are?
- 2.) Why Are Spiritual Gifts Important?
- 3.) What Are Spiritual Gifts?
- 4.) What Are the Misconceptions About Spiritual Gifts?
- 5.) How Do You Discover and Develop Your Spiritual Gifts?

Close: Beloved, Gifted, and Justice-Oriented

## APPENDIX 5

### **Sermon Five**

#### **Living Out Your Destiny**

Main Text: Ephesians 4:11-16

Intro: The Church as One Big Family

Big Idea: One Church, Many Expressions, and United in Christ- In Order to Reach a Diverse, Yet Deeply Divided World.

Main Points:

- 1.) You Can Be Prepared Before the Problem
- 2.) You Can Be Stable in The Storm
- 3.) We Will See Growth If We All Serve as Soldiers of Reconciliation, Justice, and Unity

Close: When the Church Becomes a Bridge Over Troubled Waters

APPENDIX 6

**All-Staff Retreat Sermon**

**One Big Family**

Main Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Other Text(s): 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 12:28-31, 13:1-13

Intro: Discovering My Big, Diverse Family Tree

Big Idea: Embracing the Expansion of the Christ-Centered, Multiethnic, and Justice-Oriented Family

Main Points:

- 1.) One Big God: No More Segregated Gods
- 2.) One Big Community: No More Not Seeing Others
- 3.) One Big Church: No More Segregated Church
- 4.) One Big Love: No More Separating Compassion and Justice

Close: Who We Can Be in a Divided and Unjust World

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