

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this final project as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my final project in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this final project. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the final project. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this final project.

Signature:

Derrick Mercer

Date

Re-Examining the Gospel: Personal Piety, Justice, and the Church

By
Derrick Mercer
Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

Dr. Kendall Soulen
Project Consultant

Dr.
Jennifer Ayres
Director of DMin Program

Abstract

Re-Examining the Gospel: Personal Piety, Justice, and the Church

By Derrick Mercer

My research question focus on how a pastor can help a congregation focus on individual salvation (piety)and expand their conception of God's calling to include a ministry of justice? How does a pastor help a congregation see justice as central to the mission of the church? I argue that many Christians have an incomplete understanding of the gospel and the mission of Jesus Christ. This incomplete understanding has blinded the eyes of many from seeing the central role that justice plays in the gospel narrative. The gospel of Jesus Christ is bigger than individual salvation for the purposes of spending eternity with God in heaven. If heaven were the goal, it would make sense for us to be taken into heaven immediately after salvation. I argue that salvation is not so much about going to heaven, as it is about heaven coming to earth, which is what Christ told us to pray for in what is known as the "Lord's Prayer": your Kingdom Come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This project forces us to reexamine the meaning of the gospel and the implications the gospel has on our lives as it relates to God, each other, and all of creation.

Re-Examining the Gospel: Personal Piety, Justice, and the Church

By

Derrick Mercer

Master of Divinity Degree
Duke University '15
Bachelor of Science
Florida A& M University '11

Project Consultant: Dr. Kendall Soulen

A Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the
Candler School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
2021

On June 2, 2019, I begin serving as Pastor of the Second Missionary Baptist Church (SMBC) in Jacksonville, Florida. The Church, SMBC, is in a neighborhood known as Lavilla. Historically, Lavilla was a thriving neighborhood in downtown Jacksonville, specifically for African Americans. However, due to desegregation, gentrification, and lack of resources, the landscape of Lavilla changed significantly. The once-thriving neighborhood is now an area plagued with homelessness, poverty, high unemployment rates, underserved schools, illegal drugs, and high crime rates. When driving around Lavilla, one cannot help but notice the suffering and devastation present within the community. Getting acquainted with the Church, I saw the lack of attention given to the people and the community's issues. I wondered why the congregation did not have any ministries dealing with any of the above problems. As the Church of Jesus Christ, it is our job to be attuned to the community's suffering and actively alleviate the suffering in our communities. The Apostle Paul views meeting needs as the core of Christian commitment. Titus 3:14: "And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."

A guest at a town hall meeting and one of the guests raised a startling critique of the Church. He said: The Church does not do anything for the community; all the Church cares about is money and themselves. While this was a general statement and is not valid for every church, the information is accurate in some cases. However, Christians who call themselves evangelicals, which our church claims to be, should not be the case. The core of evangelicalism is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The word "evangelical" means good news.

In Eric Mason's book "*Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*" he says four primary characteristics identify evangelicals: (1)

Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a "born again" experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus. (2) Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority. (3) Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible humanity's redemption. (4) Activism: the expression and demonstration of the Gospel in missionary and social reform efforts (Mason 2008, 30). Much attention is paid to conversionism – saving souls, biblicism – having a high regard for scripture, and crucicentrism – stressing on Jesus Christ's sacrifice. However, activism does not receive much attention – demonstrating the Gospel in missionary and social reform efforts. In some cases, the activism aspect is ignored or dismissed altogether. According to the book of Matthew, Jesus rebukes the Scribes and the Pharisees for this exact thing. Matthew 23:23: “Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: Justice and mercy and faith.” In all their work to know, worship, and serve God, they have neglected a key area, Justice. We are often devoted to spiritual matters or disciplines such as prayer, fasting, worship, tithing, and personal morality. However, Jesus calls "Justice" a weighty matter of scripture.

As a new Pastor, I wanted to understand how the congregation understood the gospel and the church's mission. Close to halfway into my tenure as Pastor, I called together the leaders of the church for a roundtable meeting in our fellowship hall. The church leaders consist of deacons and trustees. The Baptist church is democratic in nature. The congregation has the autonomy to choose their leaders through a 2/3 majority of the vote. The deacons are tasked with taking care of the congregation immediate needs, and the trustees' task is to oversee the church's financial operation. Any ministry idea must pass through the deacons and the trustees for approval before being presented to the congregation for final approval. The congregation looks to the leadership

for guidance and direction. As a result of the influence deacons and trustees carry within the congregation, it is essential for a pastor, particularly a new pastor in a Baptist church, to build a relationship with this leadership body. The meeting was very informal. In the meeting, I asked a series of questions:

What does this church mean to you?

What are you most proud of about our church?

What concerns or bothers you the most?

What do you think we can do better and how?

How do you define the mission of the church?

How do you define a good pastor?

How do you define a good member?

Do you think this church can grow? If yes, how?

Is there anything else you want to share with me as your new pastor?

I requested the group to anonymously respond to these questions on a piece of paper and submit them to me for further discussion. The question: “how do you define the mission of the church?” garnered a series of responses with similar themes. The majority of the feedback to this question focused on piety. Saving souls, leading persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ, knowing and teaching God’s word is viewed as the primary call of the church. Justice is not mentioned once. Helping persons in the community was mentioned, but very vaguely. I knew that for us as a church to impact the community of Lavilla needs, we needed to expand our understanding of the church’s mission. Perhaps, this narrow view of the mission of the church explains the seeming lack of attention to the Lavilla community.

The Aim of This Project.

After our small group meeting, I started asking how a pastor can help a congregation focus on individual salvation (piety) to expand their conception of God's calling to include a ministry of Justice? How does a Pastor help a congregation see Justice as central to our mission as Church? I will attempt to communicate this to the congregation through preaching a series of sermons (see appendix) focusing on three themes for an entire year: (1) The Bible and Justice, (2) The Gospel of Jesus Christ and Justice, and (3) The Church and Justice. The goal of this series is to awaken the Second Missionary Baptist church to God's call to Justice. My vision for SMBC is to be a "justice-centered" ministry. I believe the best way to shape and form a congregation is through the preaching moment. Each theme will develop a holistic vision for the Church that encompasses all an evangelical church characteristic. Also, the development of a community-based justice ministry.

What is Justice?

I define justice as the guarantee of human equality and human equity. Equality is the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. At the same time equity aims to ensure that everyone has all of the basic necessities and resources for human flourishing and wholeness. Equity is ensuring everyone has everything needed to live full and healthy lives. Justice ensures that resources will be distributed equally and fairly. Justice is often confused with charity. During my research process, I constructed a congregational survey sent through email. The survey included the following questions:

How would you describe the relationship between our church (SMBC) and the surrounding community?

How do you define Justice?

How often do you hear sermons talking about justice?

Do you notice any opportunities for justice in the Lavilla Community? If so, please explain.

As I read through the responses, I discovered justice is often confused with charity. Many of the examples given to define justice were examples of charity. When asked about opportunities for justice in the community? Responses varied from starting a food pantry, providing clothes, visiting and providing services for the surrounding homeless shelters and nursing homes, etc. All of these are great examples of ways we can help the community. Charity is important. However, being committed to charity does not necessarily mean being committed to Justice. Charity responds to immediate needs and provides direct services like food, clothing, and shelter. Charity is also directed at the effects of injustice, its symptoms. Charity enables persons to survive “within” the system. Justice aims at changing the system which makes charity necessary. Justice is directed at the root causes of social problems such as poverty, homelessness, and crime. Charity is starting a food pantry, while Justice asks why are they hungry in the first place? Justice addresses the underlying structures and causes of these problems. Justice promotes social change in institutions and systems through political action. We do an excellent job of acknowledging God’s call to charity but fail to recognize God’s call to justice. More than that, we fail to see God’s call to justice as central to the church’s mission.

The Bible and Justice

Our Church considers the Bible as the Word of God upon which Jesus Christ built the Church. The first paragraph of our constitution and bylaws read as follows: "We, the members of Second Missionary Baptist Church, accepting the Lord Jesus as our Savior and Lord and the King James Version of the Holy Bible as the sufficient rule of our faith and practice, so bind ourselves together as a body of baptized believers in Jesus Christ. We at this moment declare and establish the following constitution and bylaws to preserve and secure the principles of our faith."

SMBC believes that Christians must remain faithful to the Bible in its original autographs. We must correctly interpret the Bible considering the history, culture, communications, original purpose, etc. It is wholly and entirely true and never false in all that the Bible affirms within the scripture's words. This view of the Bible is consistent with what the Apostle Paul said in 2nd Timothy 3:16-17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that his people may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." When we seek to learn about God and how God calls us to live, the scriptures are always the starting point.

Justice in The Old Testament.

When it comes to biblical studies, there are many themes mentioned. As a student at Duke Divinity School, we discussed an array of themes in the scripture. Themes such as original sin, creation, redemption, Christology (the person), nature, and role of Jesus Christ, Ecclesiology (the study of the Church), Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, Eschatology – the doctrine of the last things, Pneumatology – the study of the holy spirit, among others. However, detailed discussions and frequently recurring themes are in the Bible, Justice. Such themes were still concerning, considering the class was full of persons going into full-time ministry. How can we talk so little about what God spoke about so much?

The Hebrew word for Justice, *mispat*, occurs in various forms more than 200 times in the Old Testament Hebrew Bible. One cannot read beyond the first chapter of the Bible without seeing Justice at work. Equality and Equity the basis of justice, for me, is seen in the creation narrative. Equality is seen in the creation of mankind. In Genesis 1:26 -27, God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the

birds of the sky and over the livestock and over all the earth, and over every crawling thing that crawls on the earth. So, God created man in His own image, in the image of God, God created him, male and female God created them. This scripture reveals that while Mankind male and female was created to rule over the earth, they were not created to rule over each other. In the creation narrative we do not see the creation of human hierarchy. All of mankind is created equally in the Image of God.

Secondly, this idea of equity is also present in the creation narrative. Equity aims to ensure that everyone has all of the basic necessities and resources for human flourishing and wholeness. Equity is ensuring everyone has everything needed to live full and healthy lives. In Genesis 2:4-25 we see that God intentionally created an environment for human flourishing. In "God of Justice," Abraham George & Nikki A. Toyama-Szeto says that "God desired that Adam and Eve would live in a garden of beauty, where they would be fully and perfectly cared for, provided for and protected. They would have joyful fellowship with God and with each other" (George and Toyama-Szeto 2015, 22). The Garden of Eden is a picture of Shalom. Nicholas Wolterstorff describes Shalom as the state of flourishing in all dimensions of one's existence: in one's relation to God, in one's relations to one's fellow human beings, in one's relation to nature, and one's relation to oneself (p. 22). Shalom reflects critical relationships in our lives: our relationship to self, God, others, and the environment. The author argues that when Adam and Eve stepped outside of God's intentional design and decided to sin, shalom was damaged (George and Toyama-Szeto 2015, 23). The once good creation now marred by sin and evil, and the perfect world became broken. The fruit of a broken world immediately manifested itself in injustice, as seen in Cain and Abel's story. The authors state the sin of injustice is when one person uses his or her power to take the life or liberties away from another (George, Toyama-Szeto 2015, 33). From the creation narrative, we see the original plan that God had for mankind and creation. God created the world with enough resources for EVERYONE to be able to live whole lives. The creation narrative

shows that inequality and the lack of equity are not the will of God. God is concerned about the well-being of mankind, which is why God was very deliberate about the environment, God created for mankind to dwell.

The theme of justice is revealed in the exodus narrative and continued in Israel's formation as a nation. The exodus narrative reveals God as the savior of an oppressed people. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God heard their groaning and saw their misery, and God decided to take Israel by the hand to deliver them out of Egyptian captivity. By choosing to deliver Israel, God shows Godself as the God who takes up the vulnerable cause and care. Dr. James Cone argues that by choosing Israel, Godself to be the God of the Oppressed. In his book, *God of the Oppressed*, James Cone writes: "The Israelites were a weak and defenseless people, a fact that played a crucial role in its election, for Yahweh's very nature stands against the so-called mighty in their oppression of the poor. Thus, Israel's election cannot be separated from its servitude and liberation. Here God is disclosed as the God history whose will is identical with the liberation of the oppressed from social and political bondage. The doing of revelation of Yahweh, must involve the politics which takes its stand with the poor against the rich." (Tsaka 2018, 59) We tend to overlook the political nature of the scriptures. However, the exodus narrative reveals a God who does not shy away from society's political affairs but gets involved for the purposes of freedom.

One of the things that contribute to a lack of commitment to justice is this errant view that God calls us the church to be anti-politics. Politics is revealed throughout the old testament, beginning with the formation of Israel. The function of the king of Israel was to govern as God's representative, establishing and executing justice. When God formed Israel's nation, God specifically gave instructions on living in relation with God and their neighbors. A few passages

for reference: “You must not deny justice to a poor person among you in his lawsuit” (Exodus 23:6). “Pursue justice and justice alone, so that you will live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 16:20). “Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly” (Leviticus 19:15).

Committing themselves to justice was a critical component of the covenant God made with Israel. When Israel failed to meet the requirements of that covenant, God punished them for their wrongdoings. The prophet Amos rebukes Israel because of their treatment of the weak and poor in their community. Amos 8:4,7-9: “Hear this, you who trample the needy. The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob; indeed, I will never forget your deeds. Because of this, will the land, not quake, and everyone who lives in it mourns? Indeed, all of it will rise like the Nile, and it will be tossed about and subside like the Nile of Egypt. And it will come about on that day, declares the Lord.” Amos 3:2: “For you alone have I cared among all the nations of the world; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.” The iniquities Amos spoke of involved Israel’s oppression of the weak and vulnerable. The theme of justice and God’s care and concern for the poor is highlighted throughout all of the prophetic literature. (See: Jeremiah 5:26-28, Micah 6:8, Hosea 13:5-6)

Justice in The New Testament.

The theme of justice continues in the new testament. As we will discuss later, in the earliest stages of Jesus ministry, he announced that his ministry aims towards the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. I argue that many understand the cross of Jesus Christ as an expression of the love of God; the cross is an expression of the Justice of God as well. On the cross, we see God's justice and God's love intertwined. We see justice as an expression of love.

Letty Russell highlights the work of Margaret Farley's book, "Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics, in which she observes that Justice and Love are not two separate actions. Instead, love includes justice in other persons' care, and justice includes love in our relationships (Russell 2009,106). God's justice, or putting things right, she says includes the absence of oppression, not just the presence of distributive rights (Russell 2009,106).

Biblical justice is right relationships. The right relationship is only made possible through love. We affirm the love of God through Jesus Christ as the means through which we are brought into a relationship with God and in the right relationship with each other. Matthew 36-39:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus tells a parable known as the "Good Samaritan" to exemplify a neighbor's love.

According to the story, a man fell among thieves who stripped him of clothes, wounded him, and left him half dead. The Samaritan in the story was the one who had compassion i.e., love, and his love moved him to alleviate the suffering of another human being (Luke 10:30-37). This Samaritan story shows the connection between justice and righteousness. Righteousness is doing right by people, producing good deeds and acts of generosity toward those in need. Being committed to justice moves us into acts of righteousness.

In his article "Understanding God's Justice and the New Testament," Dr. Terry Tramel argues that many bible readers fail to grasp the importance that the scriptures place on Justice because of the Greek term "dikaiosune" (Tramel 2019). Most English translations, including the King James Version, which is the primary translation used in SMBC, render this word righteous.

Often when we think of righteousness, we think of personal morality or spiritual disciplines. However, Tramel argues that "justice" is the better term in several passages; and Jesus' sermon on the mount, Jesus expresses this language over a half dozen times, making Justice a dominant theme (Tramel 2019). For example, Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after justice; for they will be filled." Matthew 5:10: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for justice sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 6:20: "For I say unto you, that except your Justice exceed the Justice of the Pharisees and scribes, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His Justice; and all these things shall be added to you. Tramel provides clarity to Matthew's overarching message about the kingdom that Jesus brings.

Another word for righteousness in the New Testament is "Tzadeqah." Tzadeqah in the Bible refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity, and equity. Primary Justice or Tzadeqah means taking time for the needs in our surrounding communities. Righteousness and justice are connected, because to make things right and solve the needs in the community requires engaging and eradicating systems of oppression. When righteousness is adequately understood, commitment to justice is the response. Any neglect to society's welfare and well-being shows a lack of mercy and a violation of justice.

Jesus and Justice

In the Christian faith, everything centers and evolves around Jesus Christ. The very essence of Christianity revolves around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no question that Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and follow his teachings have high

admiration and love for Jesus Christ. This section will argue that it is impossible to be committed to Jesus and not committed to Justice. Jesus explicitly states his mission in Luke 4:16-21. When he comes to earth, he introduces himself by quoting the prophet Isaiah and announcing that he has come to bring “sight to the blind” and “proclaim freedom for prisoners” among other redemptive and restorative acts (George, Toyama-Szeto 2015, 59). These are tangible actions that Jesus proclaims as a significant part of his mission. In Matthew 25:31-40, Jesus explicitly identifies himself with those on the margins of society. Stating one of the primary ways judgment will fall on a nation is based on their most vulnerable treatment. Justice is a part of who Jesus is and at the heart of what Jesus came to do.

This next section will focus on two critical questions: First, who Jesus is? In other words, the person of Jesus. Second is the question of what Jesus came to do? In other words, the purpose of Jesus. Justice is at the center of both who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do.

The Person of Jesus

The person of Jesus deals with the question of who Jesus is. Before we can examine what Jesus, came to do, we must be clear on who Jesus is. Analyzing the person of Jesus is known in theological terms as Christology. Christology is the branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ. While attending seminary at Duke Divinity School I learned about the Doctrine of Christology for the first time. While attending Duke Divinity School we also studied the early teachings of the Church and why we as the Church believe what we believe about Christ. Explaining the person or nature of Jesus throughout church history has not been without controversy. This controversy surrounding Christology led to one of the most critical ecumenical council meetings in the Christian Church, known as the Council of Nicaea. This

council is to solve the problem created in the Eastern Church by Arianism. Arius of Alexandria proposed that Christ is not divine but a created being. The council condemned Arius and incorporated the term "homoousios" meaning of one substance, into a creed to signify the absolute equality of the Son with the Father (First Council of Nicaea). One of Christianity's fundamental beliefs is the Godhead's equality: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, known as the Trinity.

Second Missionary Baptist Church affirms the deity of Christ based on John 1:1,14, which says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Furthermore, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We saw his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." We affirm the belief that the Son is the same essence and substance as the Father. Jesus affirmed this relationship of equality in John 10:30 when he says: "the Father and I are one." Jesus says that the works that he does bear witness to who he is as Son of God; these works are done in his Father's "name" (John 10:25). In his article "The Image of God," Jeff Benner highlights a name is nothing more than an identifier, no different from being assigned a number in our western culture. However, in Hebrew culture, the word for name is "shem" and shem is much more than a name; it is the individual's breath. To the Hebrews, the breath is more than just the exchange of air in the lungs; it is the person's "character," the individual's internal qualities that make them unique (Benner 1999). The God present in the old testament, whom Isaiah calls a God of justice, is the God present in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 30:18).

As a church, we believe that not only is God present in Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. There is no distinction in attributes of the God revealed in the Old Testament, and the God revealed in and as Jesus Christ. The same God concerned about the oppression of

the Israelites and who held the community of Israel responsible for violating the command to maintain justice, as discussed earlier is revealed in Jesus Christ. I argue that the Son and the Father are one and possess the same qualities and attributes. If the scripture in the Old Testament reveals justice as an attribute, similarly we should attribute justice to Jesus Christ.

The Purpose of Jesus Christ

When describing his purpose Jesus Christ says in Luke 19:10: For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost. Restoration is at the heart of Jesus' ministry. If you take the word restoration and break it down, you have "re" which means again, and "store" means to put back into alignment with its original purpose. Jesus Christ came to restore what was lost. Earlier in the section, "The old testament and justice" I argued that justice was at the center of the creation narrative. In the creation narrative, we see human equality and mankind created on equal footing, and we see human equity. Humanity received everything needed to live abundant lives. The creation narrative is a picture of shalom. Nicholas Wolterstorff describes Shalom as the state of flourishing in all dimensions of one's existence: in one's relation to God, in one's relations to one's fellow human beings, in one's relation to nature, and one's relation to oneself (George, Toyama-Szeto 2015, 22). Shalom reflects critical relationships in our lives: our relationship to self, God, others, and the environment. The author argues that when Adam and Eve stepped outside of God's intentional design and decided to sin, shalom was damaged (George, Toyama-Szeto 2015, 23). The once good creation now marred by sin and evil, and the perfect world became broken. The fruit of a broken world immediately manifested itself in injustice, as seen in Cain and Abel's story. The authors state the sin of injustice is when one person uses his or her power to take the life or liberties away from another (George,

ToyamaSzeto 2015, 33). Cain violated the God-given dignity and worth of his brother. Injustice is sin.

When we think of sin, we tend to limit sin to personal morality. However, sin is much broader than personal morality. Injustice and Inequality is sin, because it violates the dignity and worth of mankind. Injustice and Inequality prevent persons from experiencing Shalom and goes against God's original intent for mankind. When speaking of Jesus, John the Baptist sees Jesus and exclaims, "Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John does not say Jesus comes to take away the sin of individuals but the sin of the world. Jesus' mission is to restore a broken world, through the means of the cross.

In his work, "The Day the Revolution began: Reconstructing the Meaning of the Cross," N.T Wright argues that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the start of a revolution. Like most Christians, he once interpreted the death of Jesus with the assumption of what Western Christianity could teach. The death of Jesus was all about God saving us from sin to go to heaven in the future and have fellowship with God in the present. While this may be revolutionary, he argues this is not quite the revolution the early Christians reference. The cross meaning is not incorrect, but as I previously said, the personal aspect is incomplete. N.T Wright argues that the early followers of Jesus had a much larger vision of what the death of Jesus accomplished. Wright further says, "In order to understand any event in history, you must put it firmly into that history and rest content with what later generations have said about it, if not we will fail to grasp its original meaning" (Wright 2016, 51).

Jesus Christ was a Jew, and to understand him, we must place him and his ministry, particularly the cross, within that of the early Jewish world. N.T Wright highlights how Jews of the first century, like many Jews today, organized their lives around the major festivals and holy

days. Among the celebrations, the greatest was Passover, which commemorated the time when, in the book of Exodus, Israel's God had acted to break the power of Pharaoh of Egypt; and set free his enslaved people. In this story, as previously discussed we see the depths of God's heart for Justice. God does not sit idly by and allows injustice and oppression to take place. God explicitly says to Moses: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So, I have come down to rescue (save) them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:7-8).

N.T Wright says, "We have every reason to suppose that when the Jewish people celebrated the Passover year after year, it was thought of as the freedom festival; that not only looked back to the original act of liberation but ahead to another liberation, especially when the people once more felt themselves enslaved or oppressed (Wright 2016, 64). Jesus intentionally chose Passover to do what he came to do. By Jesus choosing the Passover as the set time gives insight into the meaning of the cross, liberation. Liberation not just in the future, but liberation on earth. Jesus Christ came to bring real tangible Justice on earth. Isaiah 42:1 refers to the Servant of God, who brings justice by his suffering. Psalm 2:7 emphasizes his role as King, God's representative, to bring justice to the nation. In "God of the Oppressed" Dr. Cone argues that Jesus synthesis of these two themes produced a new messianic image. He says, "servanthood provides the context for exercising kingship and lordship. The King is a servant who suffers on behalf of his people. He takes their pain and affliction upon himself, thereby redeeming them from oppression and for freedom. Here, then, we have the key to Jesus understanding his mission: Lordship and Servanthood together, that is, the establishment of justice through

suffering.” (Tsaka 2018, 68) This theme of God’s liberation through Jesus Christ continues in Luke 4:18-19.

In most of our Christianity, going to heaven and having fellowship in the presence of God is the goal, and which we often define as bad moral behavior is the problem. N.T Wright argues how much of this thinking and preaching was about the cross assumed a tradition. The seventeenth century came to be known as a "covenant of works"; a contract that functions in the popular mind like this. God told his human creatures to keep a moral code; their continuing life in the Garden of Eden depended on their keeping that code perfectly. Failure would incur the punishment of death. Humans were therefore heading for hell rather than heaven. Finally, Jesus obeyed this moral law perfectly and, in his death, paid the penalty on behalf of the rest of humanity. Those who avail themselves of this achievement by believing in him and benefiting from his accomplishment go to heaven, where they enjoy eternal fellowship with God; those who do not- do not, which is the message I heard and even preached for most of my life.

I argue this understanding of the Gospel is part of why the commitment to pursuing Justice in this world is absent. This interpretation of the Gospel gives the Gospel's aim, not for the world but an escape from this world. This interpretation makes preparing to leave the world the objective of the Gospel. If leaving the world and going to heaven is the goal, there is no use to improve this world for others. All that matters is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. N.T Wright argues this view is unbiblical. He states, “The Hope of Israel as expressed variously in the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms was not for a rescue mission that would snatch Israel (or humans or the faithful) from the world, but for a rescue option that would be for the world, an operation through which redeemed humans would play once more the role for which they were designed” (Wright 2016, 145). "What the Bible offers is not a "works contract," but a

covenant of vocation. This vocation in question is that of being a genuine human being, with genuinely human tasks to perform in the world. The main task is "image-bearing, reflecting the creator's wise stewardship into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker (Wright 2016,75).

The Hebrew word image (tselem) is a shadow called the outline or representation of the original. In his "Image of God" article, Jeff Benner highlights that through this text's Hebrew words: "God created man in his image," God placed within humanity a shadow or representation of his function – goal, purpose, and thought. It is our responsibility to live our lives as representatives of God, acting in the same manner as God. Highlighted in the book of Revelation is the renewal of human vocation. Revelation 5:9-10: "You are worthy to take the scroll; you are worthy to open its seals; for you were slaughtered and with your blood, you purchased a people for God, from every tribe and tongue, from every people and nation, and made them a kingdom and priests to God, and they will "reign" on the earth. The Revelation highlights the means through which the purchase was through the death on the cross. The new heaven and new earth's original vocation was one of Justice and righteousness because our calling is to govern in the image of God.

The Church and Justice

In his book "The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety & Public Witness" Raphael Warnock pose the question: "As an instrument of the salvation through Jesus Christ, is the mission of the black Church to save souls or to transform the social order, or both? (Warnock 2013, 3). As it would seek to be faithful to the gospel message and mission of Jesus Christ, is it called to be an evangelical church or a liberationist church?" (Warnock 2013, 3). A church

cannot be faithful to the gospel message while being evangelical and not a liberationist. I believe the Church cannot be a liberationist without being evangelical. Why? Because the two are interconnected. An evangelical church is a liberationist or justice seeking Church, both being a key component of evangelicalism, advocacy. Justice is the offspring or fruit of evangelicalism. Faithful to the gospel message and mission of Jesus Christ requires the Church must be an evangelical and liberationist church and cannot be separated.

Worship as An Act of Justice.

The church as evangelical and liberationist first mission is to be a worshipping community. The writer of Hebrews encourages the community to gather. Hebrews 10:25: “Forsake not the assembling of ourselves together.” The gospel is preached at the local assembly, but also where the Word of God applies to our lives’ circumstances. The church is called to sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among us and making melody to the Lord in our hearts (Ephesians 5:19). Lamentation, celebration, and praise are indispensable parts of the life of the church. As an act of worship, the church not only involves scripture, songs, and celebration, the church must live as followers of Jesus Christ. Based on God’s mercy, the Apostle Paul implores believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice as an authentic way to worship him (Romans 12:1). Paul means as believers, and the community should use their bodies to serve and obey God. Jesus says if we truly love him, we will obey his commandments (John 14:15).

For a church to be evangelical and liberationist in worship, we must expand our understanding that true worship is biblical. We tend not to connect worship with justice, which is

one of the problems. We tend to look at these two as total opposites. I argue that justice is an act of worship. We must expand our definition of worship beyond the Sunday morning gathering. The highest expression of worship is obedience to what God commands. John 14:15 “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Justice is a commandment; it is non-negotiable according to Micah 6:8. Justice derives from principle of two commands: to love God with our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves. We worship God to express our love for God. We prove our love for God by our love for our neighbor. Worship to God that does not produce love for neighbor is no worship at all.

Too often, our individual and corporate worship do not produce the fruit of justice and righteousness that God seeks, which is the rebuke of Israel by God through the prophet Amos. Amos 5:21-24: Verse 21: I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies, Verse 22: Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings; Verse 23: Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments, verse 24: but let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. God rebuke of Israel was much about their worship, not producing the fruit of justice. Too often, in church when we speak of worship or talk about worship in church has to do with our musical preference: traditional or contemporary, organ or guitars, praise teams or choirs. However, God shows the main concern for worship is what type of fruit our worship produces. Worship goes beyond external religious acts; worship involves the way we live. When we worship God correctly, our worship of God will manifest itself in seeking the well-being of our neighbors.

In his book “The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice”. Mark

Labberton writes: “Worship encompasses every dimension of our lives. True worship includes the glory and honor due to God – Father, Son and Spirit. It includes the enactment of God’s love and justice, mercy and kindness in the world. It includes how we treat those around us, how we spend our money, and how we care for the lost and oppressed. Worship is meant to be the tangible embodiment of God’s hope for the world” (Labberton 2007,107). Worship inside the church building that does not manifest in love and care for neighbors, especially those on the margins, is not true worship of God. Worshipping God never bypasses or overlooks our neighbors. Justice must portray as an act of worshipping God. As we worship God, our hearts become more in line with God’s heart; and begin to care about the same things. In worship, we become concerned with the same things as God. A church that seeks and embodies God’s justice and care in the world comes out of worship.

Witnessing as Act of Justice.

The Church, as evangelical and liberationist, is also called to be a witnessing community. The central meaning of Christianity intimately connects with evangelism. Norman Maring says that Christianity is evangelism, the public proclamation of the gospel, the good news of God’s victory over sin and death in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Maring and Hudson 2012, 35). True evangelism is also the church’s public outreach to spread the good news of God’s forgiving love as revealed in Jesus Christ and to invite men and women to claim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (Maring and Hudson 2012, 35).

In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells the community of disciples they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them, and they shall be witnesses to him, in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Rarely do we connect evangelism and justice; however, we

witness this in the church's early days in the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, we see evangelism throughout the work of justice. Acts 2:44-45 says: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." The scriptures say the community praised God and had favor with all people. As they were meeting needs, the Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved (verse 47). We do not seek justice to convert people; however, the scripture does attest to persons wanting to get to know God because of what they witnessed as the church was being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

For example, in Acts 3: Peter and John, through the Spirit's power, heals a man who was oppressed and forgotten by society because of his physical condition. Notice: this man was not poor because he was lazy or lacked a proper work ethic. However, he was poor because of his physical condition: lameness: barred him from specific opportunities. His condition, not his work ethic, forced him to live off handouts. When Peter and John saw him, they had compassion, and they sought this man's healing, which was an act of justice. As a result of this act of justice, the people who witnessed his transformation became filled with wonder and amazement. The change in this man's life was not so much spiritual as it was physical. He was transformed and given a new life with new meaning and opportunities in the present. Peter and John showed that God was concerned with his life on earth. A gospel that only concerns itself with heaven is suitable for the earth. However, the gospel is holistic. In his book "Stride Toward Freedom" Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial" (King 1959, 200). Dr. King understood that the Gospel is concerned about the total person. He understood

that God desires for humanity to be and live whole. Wholeness is the essence of the Gospel. Here the words of the prophet Isaiah speaking concerning Christ: “but he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins, He was beaten so we could be whole.” (Isaiah 53:5) Wholeness builds upon justice. Justice is a human right. Justice is not only a human right, but Justice is at the center of the gospel.

Innovation: Getting back to our roots

Fighting against injustice and oppression is what the church, mainly, the black church was birth from. The black church was born in protest against racism and white supremacy. In 1787 in Philadelphia, methodist preachers Absalom Jones and Richard Allen left St. George’s Methodist church in protest on racism and segregation. Without a commitment to justice and freedom, Second Missionary Baptist Church would not exist. The black church was at the forefront of the civil rights movement. Black and white Christians protested, boycotted, and died for the end of Jim Crow Segregation. For any church, particularly the black church being indifferent to issues of society that affects lives is a betrayal to God, but also a betrayal to our ancestors. Not only our ancestors at large but our ancestors who started this church.

Second Missionary Baptist Church was also born in protest. I was able to learn about the history of the church during my tenure at SMBC. Before the inception of SMBC in 1850, the founding members former slaves were members of First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. First Baptist was an all-white congregation. Due to the treatment of blacks, the founding members left and organized Second Missionary Baptist Church located two miles from First Baptist Church. Throughout this history of SMBC, the founding members made it their mission to minister to the spiritual and social needs of the Lavilla Community. This Church has a history of caring for the least of these. What happened? In speaking with a member who has been at

SMBC for over sixty years, gentrification and the changes in downtown Jacksonville, the neighborhood changed. In her opinion, the church got away from its mission. During the roundtable discussion with the church leaders, as discussed earlier, I asked the question: What concerns or bothers you the most? One of the responses from a key leader is the lack of vision. When interviewing for the position of Pastor, I asked the deacon and trustee board, in your opinion what does SMBC need the most? The overwhelming response was a vision. SMBC did not a new vision but return to the original vision. A vision that took the wholistic nature, the spiritual and social aspect of the gospel serious.

A Renewal of Vision

(see Appendix D)

The vision for SMBC was born out of our reexamination of the Gospel. Our idea of the Gospel grew beyond personal piety to include Justice. However, SMBC did not want to create the traditional "justice ministry"; but wanted to be a "justice church," with justice being the central component to who we are and everything we do as a church. To accomplish this, SMBC developed a simple mission statement to guide as we seek to live out God's call in the world. The mission statement, "We are a community of believers who are committed to loving God and loving our neighbors." The two greatest commandments are the engine that drives our Church. SMBC shifted from thinking inwardly to an outward focus on building relationships with persons in our community. We wanted to help our community but wanted to assist in the right way. The first ministry of focus was the Outreach Ministry. I did not like the typical outreach ministry that consisted of the Church doing things "for" the community. But an outreach ministry that was "for" the community, most importantly, a ministry that participates "with" the community. Doing outreach "with" the community denotes a relationship.

Like the Lavilla community, SMBC is a church in need of restoration. Restoration is the theme around which we centered the vision for the church. SMBC was once considered a staple church in the community. Like, the community, SMBC was a thriving and vibrant church with over seventy-five families and community-based ministries. During its peak, SMBC membership was over 2, 500 active members. This large membership led to the construction of a brand-new church facility in 1979. The Jacksonville City Council officially designated the old church building a historic landmark on December 9, 2014. However, the church has experience significant change and decline over the last 30 years. The once multigenerational church dwindled to the following membership: 3 percent of membership between the ages of 16-19, 5 percent between the ages of 20-29, 1 percent between the ages of 30-39, 4 percent between the ages of 40-49, 11 percent between the ages of 50-59, 25 percent between the ages of 60-69, and 51 percent between the ages of 70-79.

In calculating membership by years: 2 percent of the congregation have been members between 1-2 years, 3 percent have been members between 3-5 years, 4 percent have been members between 6-9 years, 14 percent have been members between 10-19 years and 77 percent have been members 20 plus years. During my short tenure, the membership increased 25 percent membership for sixteen through forty-five.

One of the significant reasons SMBC experienced such a decline was due to the changes in the community. State laws passed near the turn of the century effectively disenfranchised most of the surrounding black neighborhoods. When segregation ended, many of the area residents, some former members of SMBC, moved out of the community looking for jobs and opportunities. Gentrification hidden behind the revitalization language led to the eradication of many neighborhoods, businesses, and schools. By the mid-eighties and early nineties, the Lavilla

community became a shell of its former self, composed primarily of abandoned buildings and drug dens. As the population of Lavilla changed, so did the membership of Second Missionary Baptist Church. The injustice taking place in the community had a direct impact on SMBC membership which why commitment to justice is crucial for the church. Often the church will reflect the community, if the community is suffering, in most cases, so will the church. SMBC and the residents of Lavilla must come together to make the type of long term needed change.

Helping the community is critical to our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ and knowing how to help is equally important. Sometimes in our quest to assist persons in our communities, we create damage because we tend to operate from the wrong perspective. For us to make a longterm change and develop a community-based outreach ministry, our perspective must change. We need to make sure we are "seeing" right in our attempt to help. In most cases, we do not because we typically focus on their need for helping others, and we usually look at ourselves as the saviors: those who are coming to their rescue. However, the first thing we should see is not the need but their humanity. Seeing someone's humanity is an act of Justice. In seeing them, their personhood, worth, and value is acknowledged. One cannot build relationships with persons unseen. When we see persons in our communities as "people," our approach will change because we will not see them as helpless persons. Instead of focusing on our community's lacks or weaknesses, we can learn to focus on strengths to change, beginning with the people who live in the community.

In his book "Having Nothing Possessing Everything: Finding Abundant Communities," Michael Mather highlights he first started working in inner cities to bring change by serving the least of them. To become conditioned to focus on the needs and see himself as the one called to help. This stance blinded him to the power and agency of the persons in the community. Michael

introduces Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), founded by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann. John and Jody proposed that when working with low-income citizens, begin by focusing on the community's gifts rather than starting with unexpected places that our community lacks. John and Jody urged communities, both the helpers and the ones receiving help, to notice individuals' gifts, gifts of associations, and institutions' gifts (Mather 2018, 22). At SMBC, we wanted an outreach ministry where community members would be involved but did not have a concrete starting point. We did not have specific practices rooted in Justice.

Implementation

In his book "Slow Coming Kingdom," Kent Annan suggests four practices churches can seek justice. These practices aim to encourage persons within a community; discover how their gifts fit into working together for Justice. These practices include attention, confession, respect, and partnership. The first practice is attention: awakening to Justice. Ephesians 5:14 "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Annan argues for far too long, much of the Church has been asleep to the call of Justice. Our sleepiness as a church was primarily due to an incomplete view of the Gospel and consumed with the inward church responsibilities.

However, when we went through the series on Bible and Justice, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Justice, and the Church and Justice, the awakening took place. The membership became more focused on what is most important: not church attendance, budgets, or maintaining our institution but being the hands and feet in the world.

The second practice was Confession: The posture of engaging. 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient, not wanting any to perish, but all the come to repentance. As a church community, we had to repent for how we have not lived up to God's call to Justice. We had to repent for being consumed with our personal lives

and life inside the building that we overlooked our brothers and sisters in the community. In too many instances, we were not like Peter and John, who stopped and helped the man who was lame outside of the temple gates but was more like the others who overlooked him on their way "inside" the temple. We repented for not living up to the Apostle Paul's instructions in Philippians 2:4 which tells us not to look out only for our interest, but out for others' interest, which is the mind of Christ. We repented of our pride and self-centeredness.

Justice and Repentance are extricable linked. Repentance is a function of Justice. In Luke 19, when Zacchaeus, a tax collector known for cheating persons through extortion, repented, his repentance was tied to Justice. He said: "Lord, if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" To which Jesus responded: "Today, salvation has come to this home" (verses 8 and 9). Annan says this act of confession frees us to see more clearly how to become agents of healing and Justice (Annan 2016, 45). The Apostle James calls us to confess our sins to one another and pray for healing.

The third practice is Respect: the golden rule for Helping. Annan defines "Respect" as "having due regard for the feelings, wishes, and rights of others. Due regards outline the relationship well; each created in God's image fills in the colors. Suppose the person we're visiting or working with bears the very image of our loving creator, the regard we owe is high indeed" (Annan 2016, 64). The practice of respect must happen at every stage of doing Justice. Doing Justice and helping others must be done from the right posture. Respect comes when we do not see persons as "others," but as persons created in the image of God. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus gives what is known as the "Golden Rule": Do to others whatever you would like others to do unto you, which is the essence of what the law and the prophets teach.

A key aspect of respecting is willing to listen; we are to listen to learn. Often, the Church takes the teacher's posture, but this type of listening requires us to take the student's posture.

What would it look like to have persons in our community teach us how to be the Church?

Listening to learn is a sign of respect, because the wisdom that exists in the other individual is acknowledged. I will say more about this, but one of the practical steps we took to establish a relationship with the community and practice justice was implementing “Engage” in partnership with an organization grounded in the community called ICARE. Engage was designed to allow persons in the community to tell their life stories. Annan list partnership as an act of justice.

Since we did not have relationships with persons within the community and I was new to the community, I began to research different community organizations that were already doing work in and with the community. This research led to being introduced to an organization entitled "ICare." ICare was formed in 1997 by a diverse coalition of congregations. ICare aims to use ministry networks to hold elected officials accountable and powerfully address community problems. ICare is known for establishing Nehemiah assembly in Jacksonville, Florida. In Nehemiah 5:1-13, we learn how Nehemiah used the power of the people to successfully do Justice. Nehemiah was the Cupbearer to the King of Persia and went to his homeland, Jerusalem, to restore the people's identity by rebuilding the wall around the city. Because of a drought, crops failed, and people had to borrow money to buy food and pay taxes. When the drought continued a second year, and the people could not repay the loans, the money lenders took everything: their fields, vineyards, and orchards. The money lenders even forced people to sell their children into slavery to pay their debts.

Nehemiah was angry when he heard their cries, and he thought it over. Nehemiah, even though his Cup Bearer status was now the King of Persia, still could not fix it alone but needed

more power. Nehemiah Verse 7 of Chapter 5 tells us that he organized a "Great Assembly" of people and brought the money lenders before it. He knew there was power in numbers. When pressed during this assembly, the money lenders agreed to restore everything they had taken from the people, and they did as they had promised! To do Justice, we must do like Nehemiah: build our capacity to organize Great Assemblies in Jacksonville. We build our power by joining with other congregations under the banner of ICARE. Together, we exercise our ability to do Justice by turning out thousands of people to an extraordinary Nehemiah Action Assembly each year. This partnership allowed us to start building relationships with persons in the community. What is beautiful about this organization is the different congregations working together not to alleviate problems "for" the community but to help "with" problems in the community.

I met Amanda Nelson, the president of ICARE and shared heartfully as a new pastor in the community, who has a heart for Justice; articulating we wanted our work in the community to be relational. Through my relationship with Amanda, I established a relationship with persons who lived in the Lavilla community. A group of community members and some of our Church's key leaders met and discussed ways to build this relationship. As previously stated, we developed "Engage", which aims to create space for persons in the community to come to church and share stories about events in their community.

SMBCgoverns democratically, and every initiative must obtain approval by a majority vote of the congregation. During the quarterly church meeting the deacons and I presented Engage to the congregation. This conference gave the ability to connect the sermon series highlighting the importance of justice. Now that we have awakened to God's call to justice, implementing Engage present us with an opportunity to live it out through the practice of listening. The vote to pass Engage and partner with ICare passed unanimously. After, the

meeting, the chairman of the deacon board who has been a member of SMBC for over forty years stated that this was the most straightforward voting he has been a part of at SMBC. As a church, we committed to including Engage and our partner ICare in the church annual church budget.

Engage

Many from the Lavilla community shared stories about the high rent cost and the strain on families to pay. Many families must pay half or most of their income in rent each month which has placed them in a position to choose between paying rent or buying food; or paying rent or buying medication. Many families are at risk of becoming homeless. News media report approximately 1,800 men, women, and children are homeless in Jacksonville. Many neighbors also told stories about crime, drugs, and law enforcement in our community. Persons also shared how they live in constant fear for their lives, even during a global pandemic. During November and December 2020, record numbers of shooting in Jacksonville, Florida, despite the city shut down. Violent crime has outpaced previous years.

One lady shared how the sound of gunfire in her neighborhood has become so regular that she takes little notice. Certain areas of our community have become like warzones. Many persons shared the entrapment of their beloved family members in the cycle of drug addiction and abuse. Many expressed concerns and worry about the young black men in their family regarding law enforcement. During 2015 and 2019, we learned that Jacksonville Sherriff's office use of force has increased by 61%. Health disparities exist in Jacksonville, particularly within black and brown communities. The Florida Times-Union reported over half of the persons in Jacksonville who died of Covid-19 were African American. Many are choosing between food and medical treatment. We discovered that it is one thing to read about these issues in the

newspaper or hear statistics. However, it is another thing to listen to these stories from persons who are directly affected. Nevertheless, these issues do not just affect the persons sharing these stories. These issues affect all of us. Why? Because we are all interconnected. Dr. Martin Luther King said it best: "We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly (MLK50).

Since justice aims at systems and structures, we knew it was crucial to speak with city officials to talk about the community issues and present action items we wanted to see addressed by our elected officials. We used Engage as an opportunity to speak to elected officials to share our concerns and work towards solutions. Due to Covid-19, these discussions took place over zoom. Appendix E is a brief outline of our meeting with the sheriff and the superintendent of schools in Jacksonville, Florida.

Conclusion

As a result of our engaging conversations came the development of our first two community-led projects. As a collective group, we decided to help persons during Covid 19 with food by starting a "food pantry" and a "homeless and hungry" initiative. The first Saturday of the month, volunteers come and bag groceries to place in our neighbors' trunks. The third Saturday of the month, SMBC and our neighborhood partners bag lunches for the homeless within our community. The Lavilla community resides in a food desert, so we decided to eventually use some of SMBC vacant land and develop a community garden. One of our neighbors who works in the food industry will spearhead this garden. The garden will help create as many congregation and community partnerships as possible. To ensure we do not lose sight of our community-based vision, our outreach board consists of two church members and three community volunteers. We want to make sure everyone is valuable and has a voice in what is

going on with the community. Another way we will fulfill our mission; to love God and love our neighbors.

Bibliography Page

- Annan Kent. (2016). *Slow Kingdom Coming: Practices for doing Justice, Loving Mercy, and Walking Humbly in the World*. Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Benner Jeff. 1999. "The Image of God". *Ancient Hebrew Research Center*. Strong #430
www.ancient-hebrew.org
- First Council of Nicaea/Description, History, Significance & Facts.
<https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Council-of-Nicaea-325>
- George Abraham and Nikki A. Toyama-Szeto. (2015). *The God of Justice: The IJM Institute Global Church Curriculum*. Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press.
- King, Martin L. (1959). "Address at the Religious Leaders Conference". *Faiths: Joined for Action*: (May): 197-202.
- Labberton Mark. (2007). *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice*. Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity
- Letty Russell. (2009). *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*. Louisville, edited by J, Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott. Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press Press.
- Maring Norman and Winthrop Hudson. (2012). *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*. Valley Forge, PA. Judson Press.
- Mason Eric. (2018). *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*. Forward by John M. Perkins and Ligon Duncan. Chicago Illinois: Moody Publishers
- Mather Micheal. (2018). *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything: Finding Abundant Communities in Unexpected Places*. Chicago IL. Moody Publishers
- MLK50. *Platform Justice*. <https://mlk50.civilrightsmuseum.org/justice>
- Tramel Terry. Understanding God's Justice and the New Testament. *IPHC Encourage Magazine*
iphc.org/gso/2019/04/15/understanding-gods-justice-and-the-new-testament/ Tsaka
- Rothney. (2018). "Tributes to Rev. Dr. James H. Cone". *Union News*
<https://utsnyc.edu/tribute>
- Warnock Raphael. (2013). *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety and Public Witness*. New York, New York University Press
- Wright N.T. (2016). *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus Crucifixion*. San Francisco. Harper One

Appendix A

The Bible and Justice

Sermon Series

The aim: The purpose of this series is to awaken the congregation at Second Missionary Baptist Church to God's call to Justice.

Sermon 1:

Title: The God of the Oppressed!

Text: Exodus 2:23-3:15

The story of the Exodus reveals God's heart for Justice. The people of Israel are under the oppressive regime of Pharaoh. Verses 23-25 says: The children of Israel groaned because of their bondage, and they cried out, and their cry for help ascended to God. So, God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.

This story reveals a God who does not sit idly by while his people suffer, but a God who's concerned about their welfare and a God who willingly gets INVOLVED to alleviate the suffering of God's people. God explicitly told Moses, "I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So, I have come down to "rescue" them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Exodus 3:7-8)

Key points

Point 1: This story reveals that Justice involves Punishment.

In this story, Pharaoh and the Egyptians are held accountable for their actions. God punished Pharaoh and the Egyptians for the crimes against Israel. I know it is hard to imagine a loving God with all of the

punishment we read about in this story in the form of plagues. But we must remember these plagues were in response to the crimes Pharaoh and the Egyptians afflicted upon the Israelites. God has to be fair. Fairness is a critical component of Justice. God shows that those who commit crimes must be held accountable. One way we do Justice is by ensuring that those who commit injustice are held responsible by law.

Point 2: This story reveals that God accomplishes justice through his People.

God worked through Moses to deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity. The same way God worked through Moses to alleviate Israel's suffering is the same way God desires to work through us – the body of Christ. We are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. God wants to use us in similar ways, but like Moses, we must make ourselves available.

Point 3: This story reveals that God is not only concerned about bringing relief and salvation in the distant future, but God has promised tangible Justice on Earth.

Israel's rescue was not an otherworld experience, but Israel experienced the Justice of God in a tangible way on earth. Israel's liberation was not from the purpose of ascending into heaven but liberation for life on earth. We can find ourselves caught between the tension of the here and now vs. the not yet.

Sermon 2:

Title: Non-negotiable.

Text: Micah 6:8

One of the ways we seek to be pleasing to God is by doing what God says. Obedience to God is the primary way we prove our love to God. John 14:15 says: "If you love Me, keep my commandment." We must learn to accept doing Justice as a command of God. In Micah 6, God says that doing Justice is a requirement. Verse 8: What does the Lord require of you? Require means essential, necessary, mandatory, or " non-negotiable. We are not allowed by God to pick and choose rather or not we are committed to Justice. God places a demand on Mankind.

Key Points

Do Justice: The Hebrew word (Mishpat) means equal access to society's goods and services for all members. The term "Justice" in Micah 6:8 go beyond fairness or rewarding good and punishing evil but

ensures everyone has what they need. Often Justice is dictated by the concerns of those to whom Justice is denied. Justice is about striving to create a world where everyone is valued and has the same rights and resources to live with decency and dignity. Justice is concerned with confronting, changing, and in some instances eradicating structures, systems, and policies that harm the children of God in any way. For example, Justice is working toward ensuring everyone has healthcare, decent housing, equal access to proper education, and wages that enable everyone to survive and live comfortably.

Love Mercy: God calls his people to be lovers of mercy. Jesus declares in Matthew 5:7, "blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy." The same mercy we need and desire from God mirrors the mercy God calls us to extend to others. The act of extending mercy means putting oneself in the place of another and seeing all circumstances from another point of view. Mercy also means one must have a sincere interest in another person's well-being.

To walk humbly with our God: Some scholars have pointed out the word "humbly" might be better understood as "carefully" or "circumspectly." The keyword in this verse is "walk." Our calling is to walk and put God first and strive to live in conformity. We are to live in constant fellowship and communion with God. We should live every moment of our lives with a God-consciousness and awareness that he is always present among us.

Sermon 3: Misguided Worship Text:

Isaiah 58:1-12

Isaiah 58 attempts to address the issue of personal piety while ignoring the call to Justice within society. In this passage, churches emphasize specific religious observances, rituals, and traditions instead of Justice. Justice is essential. Scripture of support: Matthew 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: Justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."

Isaiah 58 shows a connection between the worship of God and acts of Justice on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Key Point: Worship that does not lead to taking up the cause and concern of the vulnerable is no worship at all.

Prayer, fasting, singing, and liturgy are not among what God "requires"; these acts certainly have their place, but Isaiah emphasizes the mandate given: to lose the chains of injustice, to untie the yoke, to set the oppressed free, to break every yoke, to share food, to provide shelter, to clothe the naked and not turn from our flesh and blood. These acts are what God requires from his people.

When we do, listen to what God says of us: Verse 12: “And you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.”

All around us, we see neighborhoods, streets, and communities in need of restoration for persons to safely dwell and go back to the idea of shalom present in Genesis 1 and 2. Shalom is present when people live in harmony with God, and it is present when they live in harmony with nature. God desires humans to live in a particular environment and an environment conducive to human flourishing.

Appendix B

Jesus and Justice

Sermon Series

Title: The Mission of Jesus

Text: Luke 4:18-19

This text shows this primary mission as to why Jesus Christ came into the earth. When asked: what is the mission of Jesus Christ? Many Christians respond by saying Christ came to offer salvation by dying for our sins on the cross and through the resurrection. In no way do I disagree with this response. However, when we speak about Christ's mission in the world, it is essential to allow the scriptures to speak. Jesus Christ explicitly states in mission in Luke 4. I have discovered that rarely is Luke 4 mentioned when Christians explain the mission of Jesus. Luke 4:18 reveals the work of Justice as central to Christ's purpose on earth.

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-3. The book of Isaiah includes several verses that describe God's heart for the most vulnerable. Christ was very aware of the scriptures, and when Jesus comes to earth, the first way he introduces himself is by quoting the prophet Isaiah and announcing that he has come to "bring good news to the poor," "proclaim release to captives," "recovery of sight to the blind," "set free those who are oppressed," and "proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Verse 21 Jesus says: Today, this scripture fulfills your hearing. Jesus came to bring natural, tangible justice on earth. Jesus claims that his mission in this world reflects God's heart for the poor and the oppressed, which means that Justice and Christlikeness are interconnected. To work for Justice is to be Christlike. To be Christlike is to reach out to those on the margins of society whom Christ calls the "least of these." (Matthew 25:31-40)

Title: Go and Do Likewise

Text: Luke 10:25-37

One of the most famous parables told by Jesus is probably the parable of the good Samaritan. I love this parable because this parable contains many attributes as it relates to the work of Justice. In this parable, Jesus tells the story of a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. While traveling to Jericho, he encountered robbers who stripped and beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. I think it's interesting to note that the text does not tell us anything about this man, not even his name. All we know is that he was a human being, perhaps because that's all that matters.

Verse 31-32 says: By coincidence, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed to the other side. Likewise, a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. You would think if anyone should stop and attend to this man who's wounded; indeed, it's the persons who claim to have a relationship with God. The Priest and the Levite both claim to know God and are well-versed in the law; they know the scriptures. And yet, instead of stopping to help this man, the text says that they passed by on the other side when they saw him. How can you speak for God as a priest and worship God as a Levite and be unmoved by the pain and the plight of one of God's children?

Let's not beat up the Priest and the Levite because, if we are honest, many of us have encountered persons who have experienced forms of abuse and violence. If we are honest, many of us have met people suffering and need help. However, instead of stopping to help like the Priest and the Levite, we have in our way passed by to the other side. We have, in some ways, been guilty of ignoring the suffering we see around us. But what I love about this story is that Jesus shows that God can use anyone in this work of Justice, even those we consider to be "other."

While the Priest and the Levite passed by on the other side, verse 33 says: But a Samaritan who was on a journey came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion.

What is compassion? Compassion is recognizing the suffering of others and taking action to help. Compassion embodies a tangible expression of love for those who are suffering. This Samaritan teaches us what the work of Justice entails.

Key Points:

The Samaritan shows that sometimes to do Justice will require you to be inconvenienced,

It means being willing sometimes to put your plans and schedule to the side to tend to the problem at hand. The text does not tell us why the Priest and the Levite did not stop to help. Perhaps they were too

busy. Maybe they were headed somewhere deemed more critical. I'm sure the Samaritan traveled somewhere as well. However, the Samaritan allowed himself to be inconvenienced on his trip because we understood that nothing is more important than helping alleviate another human being's suffering. Assisting others requires time.

The Samaritan story shows that doing Justice means taking a risk.

This Samaritan was risking his safety by helping the man. The Jericho road was dangerous. Many persons perhaps would avoid the Jericho road out of fear of their safety. However, the Samaritan shows our calling is not to prevent the Jericho road, out of fear of our safety, but to fix the Jericho road. We must be willing to risk our security and our reputation.

The Samaritan story shows that doing Justice involves generosity.

Verse 35 says: the Samaritan used his resources to care for the man attacked. Generosity is a form of Justice which is why God blessed us with resources. We are blessed to be a blessing, not blessed to hoard given resources. If we are going to do Justice and alleviate others' suffering, we must be willing to release our resources. We must be ready to help those who cannot help themselves.

Helping others is what it means to have compassion and is our call as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Title: The Pursuit of Happiness Text:

Matthew 5:1-12:

This sermon focuses on Jesus' famous sermon on the mount. The premise of this series rests on the fact that everyone desires to be happy. Nobody wants to live a life of unhappiness. Happiness is liked by everyone, so much so that happiness is one of the themes embedded within the declaration of independence: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are equally created, that their creator endows them with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. I argue that just like our country encourages that pursuit of happiness, so does Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came for us to experience happiness. (John 10:10) Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus Christ does not have a problem with us pursuing happiness, as long as we clearly understand what true happiness looks like and how to achieve it. The happiness Jesus speaks of is very different from the way the world looks at happiness. Happiness, according to the world, has a lot to do with what is happening. Happiness in the world must deal with our material possessions or our achievements. However, happiness, according to Jesus, is a way of life-based on values. Values are essential because our values dictate how we think and, ultimately, how we live, which is what Jesus teaches in the sermon on the mount. Christ teaches us a different value system, a way of life that is radically different from the course of the world around us. The

word "blessed" that Jesus uses means happy, fortunate, prosperous. Jesus describes the characteristics of those who will experience "his" type of happiness.

Key points:

Poor in spirit – humble

Mourn – everyone will mourn at some point in life, but Jesus is speaking of a different type of mourning. He talks about grieving over the same things God mourns about, like sin and injustice.

Gentle – Kind, compassionate

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness/Justice – this beatitude is spiritual and social. The word in Greek means Justice. Thirst for Justice means to live with the poor and vulnerable in solidarity and identification and to work to make sure that every human being has what they need.

Merciful – Mercy springs from a love that responds to human need; it is to give relief from suffering and practicing forgiveness.

Pure in heart – the Greek word pure means to be clean, blameless, unstained by guilt. The heart is not only the organ that beats in your chest. In scripture, the heart is also where thoughts, desires, will, emotions, and character resides.

Peacemakers – a peacemaker seeks to end the conflict. A peacemaker seeks to reconcile and restore.

Persecuted for the sake of righteousness – Here again, the word righteousness is the same word often translated as Justice. Jesus bestows a blessing on those who are willing to be persecuted for working for Justice. The promise is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Appendix C.

The Church and Justice

Sermon Series

Sermon 1

Title: Get in the Streets

Text: Acts 3:1-10

This sermon is a call for the church to think outside of the four walls of the church. Ministry takes place within but also outside of the church building. Sometimes we can be so focused on the church's inside, such as church programming, that overlooks what is most important. Such as it is in the case of Acts 3:

In Acts chapter 3, we find Peter and John heading to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been unable to walk from birth was being carried whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple, for him to be begging for alms – charitable gifts from those entering the temple.

Key Point: We need to understand that this man was forced to live as a dependent. He needs a handout, not because he is lazy and does not have a proper work ethic. The reason why he requires a handout is because of his condition that he has experienced since birth. This man was born with the condition that made needing a handout necessary. Sometimes handouts are the result of situations and not work-ethic.

What this man needed was not charity, but he needed a change in condition. Notice he has lived his whole life on charity, but charity did not fix his condition. Charity does not improve conditions, Justice does. When the man asked Peter and James for a charitable gift in Verse 6 Peter said: "I do not have silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk."

The key verse is verse 7: "And grasping him by the hand, he raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened." Peter and James knew what the man needed was a change of condition. When his condition change, he will no longer need the handout. I love how Peter went about this; not only did Peter speak the word of God, but Peter also offered his hand and helped raise the man, which is what Justice is all about. Justice is about stretching out our hands and raising others up and out of conditions that prevent one from experiencing the fullness of life.

Notice the location of Peter and John when this takes place. Peter and John are not in the temple; they are in the streets. I think it's interesting to note that many of the ministry activities of Jesus and the apostles happened outside of the temple. While everyone's focus was on getting into the temple, Peter and John were doing ministry outside the temple.

Sermon 2:

Title: A blueprint to follow

Text: Acts 2:41-47

The early church in Acts gives us a fantastic blueprint for us to follow as the body of Christ. Right from the beginning, we see the work of Justice at the forefront of the church.

Key points:

Their Unity evidences the work of Justice.

Earlier in verse 2, the text says that the church was on "one" accord. This phrase, which is made up 11 times in the book of acts, comprises two words: "same" and "mind." This phrase speaks of persons sharing the same mind or thinking like-minded. It does not refer to people who all think and feel the same way about everything, but to people who are willing to set aside their personal feelings, preferences, and agendas to commit themselves to one task. The bible encourages unity, not uniformity. Unity is a crucial ingredient to the work of Justice. In working for Justice, we must be willing to set aside our personal feelings and preferences, which we all have, and commit ourselves to one task – the bigger picture.

Their care and generosity evidence the work of Justice.

In Acts 2 verses 44-47, we get a picture of the early church having all things in common and paying close attention to the needs of those around them. Verse 45 says: "and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. The scriptures that their generous and grateful attitudes were noticeable by the people around them, who had "favor" with them. Notice, this community was so infectious. People noticed the beautiful care and concern present in the community to the extent that verse 47 says: "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." We spend so much time asking: How do we get more people into the church? The early church never asked this question; all they did was do the work required of them with no hidden motives, and the "Lord" added to the church. Instead of focusing on growing the church, let us focus on living out our call to be witnesses of God's love and care through the work of Justice, which is the blueprint of the early church in acts for us to follow.

Sermon 3:

Title: The Mission of the Church

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

These verses are commonly known as the great commission. Instruction, command, or duty given to a person or group defines commission. To understand this commission is not only for the eleven disciples (Judas has died) but to all who claim to follow Jesus Christ. A commission means not to be discussed or debated when providing instruction, but it is a commandment. To not live out this commandment is an act of disobedience. Jesus' instructions to us as the church is clear:

GO – meaning being called to sit and be idle, but Christ calls us to be active. Our calling is not to wait for persons to come to us but to go to them as the Holy Spirit leads.

Make disciples – notice, Jesus Christ, did not say make members, but disciples. Language is so important, and I fear a lot of damage has occurred related to our call. In too many instances, we have substituted the word member and even Christian for a disciple. The word Christian means so many things in the 21st century. The call given is to make disciples. As the Bible describes, a disciple actively imitated both the life and the teaching of the rabbi. Notice: Life and Teaching

All nations: this speaks to the universal call of the church. Christ calls us to transcend ethnic and racial boundaries for the sake of the gospel. The gospel is for all people.

Baptize – in the Baptist church, we affirm the Lord's Supper or communion and Baptism as the church's two ordinances. We understand baptism is an outward expression of an inward change. In baptism, we renounce our allegiance to the world, and we pledge our commitment to Christ.

Teach them to follow all that I commanded you – The instruction Christ gives is not just to make sure persons are born again and going to heaven. Christ's teaching is to teach believers to observe, which means do everything Christ taught. This misunderstanding, in some cases, attributes to many Christians' silences when it comes to moral and social issues in society. Justice and Righteousness are at the heart of what Jesus calls the greatest commandment: Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself.

I am with you always – Jesus gives us the blessed assurance that while we are in this life seeking to live out his call on our lives both individually and collectively, we are not by ourselves. Jesus Christ is always with us.

Appendix D

Second Missionary Baptist Church Derrick

L. Mercer., Pastor

Vision 2020 & Beyond

A Call to Restoration

Restore: (1) To return something or someone to a former condition, place, or position

(2) To Repair or Renovate (a building, work or art, vehicle, etc.) so as to return to its original condition

Phase 1:

Our Name: Second Missionary Baptist Church (SMBC) (Second Church)

Our Mission: We exist to love God and love our neighbors. **Theme**

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-40

Our Purpose Statement:

We are a community of believers committed to Growing in our walk with the Lord,
Going in our witness for the Lord, and Giving to the work of the Lord.

Our Values: 3G

Growing, Going, Giving

Growing:

2 peter 3:17-18 – You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; But Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We want to be an intergenerational church that meets the needs and caters to the spiritual formation of persons in each generation.

We want to strengthen and develop vibrant and active intergenerational ministries:
Seniors/Retirees, Men, Women, College/Young adults, Children/Youth,
Married/Couples and Singles

For the next 6 -12 months the Pastor will host each listed above 1 night or day out of the month to teach and build relationship and start setting the foundation for the plan and structure of each ministry. These ministries will be developed with the members not solely by The Pastor. The Pastor will give pastoral direction.

Grow Groups: We want to establish small groups. (7-10) Small and intimate settings of community where persons can develop a relationship with other believers through fellowship and spiritual formation.

Ministry Leadership Teams and Grow Group Leaders will be established in 2021. These leaders will work with the Pastor to plan and strategize for the following church year.

Leadership Academy: We want to develop and Strengthen our ministries of support such as:
Deacons/Deaconess, Trustees, Office staff/Administration, Media, Music, Choirs, Ushers/Hospitality,
Culinary and Security

On the first Saturday of each month the Pastor will host Leadership Academy with identified ministries. There will also be planned workshops and leadership training development throughout the year for specific ministries of support.

Worship Service

Sunday School – 9:30

Morning Worship – 10:45

Word Wednesday – 7pm immediately following Prayer at 6.

Going:

Acts 1:8: But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

In obedience to the great commission, we want to be a church without walls. We want to be a church that takes seriously the command to spread the good news.

We want to strengthen and develop outreach ministries and programs to serve and strengthen the community such as: Prison ministry, nursing home, homeless shelter, mental health/counseling, schools, etc.

We want to partner with organizations within the community that deals with issues plaguing the community.

Each ministry listed above will be required to do an outreach ministry initiative during the church calendar year.

Giving:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8: But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So, let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

As an expression of our love for Jesus Christ, we want to be a church that practices radical generosity.

We want to be a church that loves God by dedicating unto him our Time, Talents, and Treasure.

Time: We want to be a church committed to giving God the first of everyday and the First of every week.
Worship is a Priority.

Talents: We want to use the gifts God has given us to build the Body of Christ.

Treasure: We want to be a church committed to proper stewardship with our resources.

Giving is who we are and what we do.

Community Breakfast Program

Adopt A School – Set up an After-School Program

Summer Camp Program

Day/Early Learning Childcare

We will establish a Strategic and Planning team of persons with knowledge and skills who can assist in the development and implementation of each program.

Phase 2:

Isaiah 58:12: Those from among you shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell
in

We want to develop a wholistic renovation and remodel campaign for the historic and church sanctuary.

We want to develop a steering committee to research and establish a complete plan. We will seek out architectures, developers, and contractors to work with us.

We will launch a church wide clean-up campaign.

We want our church property and facilities to reflect the beauty and excellence of the God we serve.

Remember: Where there is Vision, there will always be Provision!

Appendix E

Sheriff Questions

Pre-Meeting at 12:30 PM (We meet with Sheriff at 1:30 PM)

- Opening Prayer
- Introductions
- Appoint a note taker
- Zoom checklist
- Agreements
 - Our goal is to get our questions answered with as much detail as possible. ○ We have a spokesperson. During the actual meeting, they will speak on behalf of the group.
 - Our role as a support team is to reach consensus on a list of questions that will allow the spokesperson to gain all the needed information from the person we are meeting with. We help prepare the spokesperson, make changes or additions to a list of questions.
 - That spokesperson is expected to keep us on agenda and ask questions to gather all the information we need during the meeting. They will often ask to follow up questions for clarity.
 - Sometimes, there is tension in our research meetings. Officials and even professionals in the field do not always want to give the whole story.
 - We back up the spokesperson during tense moments, keeping neutral body language and expression to preserve the tension so we can get the information we need to share with our committee and identify a proven, well-researched solution.
 - We also caucus and evaluate after the meeting, so we can come to an agreement on what we learned and major takeaways. We also identify things we could have done better.
- Background:
 - We are meeting with the Sheriff to share what we are asking him at the Nehemiah Action, get feedback and responses. We are NOT negotiating but we will ask to follow up questions or clarify.

Questions

1. It is good to meet with you today. As you know we are members from ICARE, and we represent 38 congregations in our community. My name is _____ and I am _____. I will be the spokesperson for today. Let us start by going around and introducing ourselves. (Call on members of ICARE one by one, and then ask any others from JSO introduce themselves).
2. We asked to meet with you today to ask some questions about Crisis Intervention Teams, Group Violence Intervention, and civil citations for adults in our community. We also want to share the plan for the assembly. And we set aside some time at the end for you to share anything you would like to discuss with us.
3. We were glad to hear from your office that in 2020, JSO officers issued juvenile civil citations to 99 percent of eligible youth. These are some of the best numbers in the entire state of Florida. At our Nehemiah Assembly, we want to lift your office and celebrate this.
4. We are proud that in our community, we hold young people accountable to make better decisions rather than throwing them away for mistakes. We want to build on this success by creating a similar program for adults in our community. At our Nehemiah Action, we will ask you to work with State Attorney Nelson to develop an adult civil citation program. What is your reaction to this?
5. We also want to use the Nehemiah Action to celebrate your office for sharing important data and information with the public on a regular basis. This makes JSO a national leader in sharing data and information with the public and increases public trust in our law enforcement officers.
6. As you know, data collection and sharing are also a huge part of a successful Crisis Intervention Teams programs. We think that sharing this data publicly is an important next step to both a stronger CIT program and an open, transparent police department. CIT International recommends collecting and tracking this specific data to measure the effectiveness of a CIT program– the number of 911 calls your office receives related to mental health and suicide, how many results in diversion to community services or treatment (not including inside the jail), how many results in arrest, and how many results in injury or death to officers or subjects. We have put that in the chat box. At our Nehemiah Action, we will ask you to commit to collect, track and report this data on your website on an annual basis as early as 2022. What do you think about this proposal?
7. We've had time to review your CIT plan that was sent to us on March 19. We appreciate that JSO has **entry-level** mental health training for all JSO police officers. We agree that it's important that all officers have a basic level of training in mental health. However, we want to see JSO's CIT program reach a higher standard. After reviewing the policy on mentally ill and intoxicated subjects, we see that the policy and what the department is doing are different. The policy specifies that CIT officers should be responding to mental disturbance calls. However, in JSO there is no distinction between CIT officers and regular officers. Can you clarify - are we understanding this correctly?

8. By doing the 40-hour CIT training with brand-new recruits and considering all officers to be “CIT”, JSO is treating CIT like it is just a training curriculum. Crisis Intervention Teams is much more than curriculum. It is a specialization for officers who have a passion for this issue. These officers should get initial 40-hour CIT training and should have regular, continuing education that aligns with Crisis Intervention Teams. It would benefit the officers and the department having this kind of established, concrete, professional development for officers who want to better serve those with mental illness.
9. My son is a member of the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department. There is the basic training that all firefighters need for the job. There is a specialized unit of firefighters with specific training called the Urban Search and Rescue - They only go out on calls that have extreme complications. This is what we are asking for Crisis Intervention Teams. Not only a 101 level of training for entry level, but a more advanced team of officers as well. A specialized group of officers. Do you understand what I mean? (get his feedback/response to this)
10. Training in-field, experienced officers in CIT on a voluntary basis will complement the co-responder program and strengthen MHOP.
11. Ahead of this meeting, we sent you CIT International’s Guide to Best Practices in Mental Health Crisis response. We asked you to pay special attention to the section called “Understanding the Purpose and Structure of CIT Training” on pages 122-123 of that guide. If you review this guide, you will see that the best-practice model of CIT and JSO’s model of training do not match.
12. We learned about a certification process run by CIT International called the CIT Program Certification. They assess CIT programs and give feedback to strengthen and improve the program. They even provide support and help in strengthening the program. For JSO, the total cost of this certification program would be \$500. At our Nehemiah Action, we will ask for you to commit to have JSO’s CIT program apply for the CIT International Program Certification by June 1 and share the full results of that assessment with ICARE. What is your reaction?
13. At our Nehemiah Action, we will ask you to commit to attend our Community Problems Assembly on November 8, 2021 to report what steps JSO has taken to improve the program based on the feedback from CIT International.
14. We also are concerned about the spread of violence. We are glad that your office worked with the National Network for Safe Communities to implement Group Violence Intervention, or GVI, in Jacksonville. We know that this strategy produces amazing results in other communities – significant reductions in homicides and shootings. So far, we have not seen these kinds of results in Jacksonville. Why do you believe this is the case?
15. Because we believe you brought in a good program and we want that program to reduce homicides, we will ask you at the Nehemiah Assembly to contract with the National Network for Safe Communities to do a problem analysis of GVI in Jacksonville to

uncover why the program is not producing results. We have spoken to the National Network and they would be willing to do this analysis for around \$80,000 to \$90,000. We believe that the expertise of this organization is needed to uncover why this best-practice, nationally recognized model is not producing results in our city. What is your reaction?

16. We will also be asking for JSO to share quarterly update on this process, as well as the full results of the analysis with ICARE, and for you to report the number of shootings resulting in injury on your open data website in the same way that homicides are reported by the end of the year.
17. To review, our Nehemiah Action will officially be called to order on April 19, 2021 at 7:00 PM. After today's meeting, we will send you details, including the Zoom link, by email. We will send you a summary of the questions you will be asked at the Nehemiah Action by ____.
18. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Appendix F

Superintendent Questions

Pre-Meeting at 9:45 AM (We meet with Sheriff at 10:30 AM)

- Opening Prayer
- Introductions • Appoint a note taker.
- Zoom checklist.
- Agreements
 - Our goal is to get our questions answered with as much detail as possible. ○ We have a spokesperson. During the actual meeting, they will speak on behalf of the group.
 - Our role as a support team is to reach consensus on a list of questions that will allow the spokesperson to gain all the needed information from the person we are meeting with. We help prepare the spokesperson, make changes or additions to a list of questions.
 - That spokesperson is expected to keep us on agenda and ask questions to gather all the information we need during the meeting. They will often ask to follow up questions for clarity.
 - Sometimes, there is tension in our research meetings. Officials and even professionals in the field do not always want to give the whole story.
 - We back up the spokesperson during tense moments, keeping neutral body language and expression to preserve the tension so we can get the information we need to share with our committee and identify a proven, well-researched solution.

- We also caucus and evaluate after the meeting, so we can come to an agreement on what we learned and major takeaways. We also identify things we could have done better.
- Background:
 - We are meeting with the Superintendent to ask questions about restorative justice, Safe and Civil Schools and arrests in schools. Reminder – Safe and Civil Schools is a best-practice program that helps schools manage misbehavior more effectively. We will also prepare Superintendent Greene with information for her to share a report on these topics at the Nehemiah Action.

Questions

1. Good to meet with you today Superintendent Greene. We know you are already familiar with who we are and what ICARE does. For anyone else who may be in our meeting today – ICARE stands for Interfaith Coalition for Action, Reconciliation and Empowerment. We are a direct-action organization made up of 38 diverse congregations from across Jacksonville and we tackle serious community problems. Let's go around and introduce ourselves. My name is _____ and I am from _____(congregation). *Call on each ICARE person to say their name and congregation. Then call on Dr. Greene and any of DCPS staff.*
2. Our members were excited and energized to hear about the successes in the school system with restorative justice and Safe and Civil Schools. We were able to celebrate many of these successes with you, including an increase of 7,000 more restorative justice opportunities and decreasing out of school suspensions. We are meeting with you today to hear about your office's progress in implementing restorative justice, preventing unnecessary suspensions, and training teachers in Safe and Civil Schools.
3. Let us talk first about restorative justice. We know that implementation of restorative justice has gone up in the past – in the 2016-2017 school year, utilization rate was at 9%. The next year, it was 13.5% and in the year after that it was 18%. When we last met, we were glad to hear that the district was on track with use of restorative justice. What was the utilization rate of restorative justice for last 2019-2020 school year?
4. We know that during the last school year, the district had to shift to online schooling very quickly. In October, you were anticipating that once students were able to return to classrooms, there would be more disciplinary problems and utilizations of restorative

justice. Have more students returned to in-person classrooms since then? If so, where your suspicions correct?

5. Our members were glad to hear that your office is making sure principals, assistant principals and deans are trained in restorative justice so they can use better, more effective forms of discipline. We know that in 2019, your office trained all principals, assistant principals, and deans in restorative justice. What are your plans for training administrators in restorative justice for the 2021-2022 school year?
6. You have been committed to training teachers and staff in Safe and Civil Schools. We know this is a best-practice, data-driven program that helps schools become better places for learning. What are your plans for training all newly hired teachers and staff in the upcoming 2021-2022 school year?
7. I was thrilled to see the article about Duval Schools in the Times Union about the progress that the schools are making. We would still like to ask you a few questions about data. We would like to know if the number of suspensions increased, decreased, or remained during the last 2019-2020 school year. Did you see any change?
 - a. What about the last fall semester, compared to previous semesters?
 - b. *If there is an increase* – why do you think this is?
8. Are there any other successes in regard to restorative justice, Safe and Civil Schools and lowering school suspensions that you would like to share?
9. We would like to also talk about data, which helps show the progress that the district has been making with implementing restorative justice and reducing suspensions over the years. We would like to get a copy of the data for 2019-2020 school year, as well as data first semester of the 2020-2021 school year. This should include utilization of restorative practices, suspensions, and number of school staff trained in Safe and Civil Schools. Can you send us this data via email? (Side note: we know that although Spring 2020 was interrupted by Covid, Dr. Greene's office told us in Oct 2020 that they had data for the Spring 2020 semester. The last data we received was for the Fall 2019 semester, which we were sent in Feb 2020).
 - a. If not immediately, around when should we expect to receive it? (This helps us in terms of following up if they can't send it immediately)

10. We received the February and March report of school arrests you sent recently. We just want to make sure we can expect to continue to receive monthly reports for number of school arrests in the future.
11. What has been the feedback to restorative justice? Can you give us a sense of how teachers, staff, students, and parents are reacting to this program?
12. We also want to talk about our upcoming Nehemiah Assembly on April 19. That assembly will be virtual – we will be sending you the Zoom invitation for you to attend and give your report at that meeting. We have allotted 3 minutes on the agenda for you to share the district’s progress in strengthening restorative justice, reducing arrests, and training teachers and staff in Safe and Civil Schools. Your role is early on the agenda. We anticipate that your role on the agenda will be complete by 7:30 PM. Do you have any questions about the assembly?
13. We appreciated getting to meet with you today and look forward to having you at our Nehemiah Action. We will see you there.

