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_____	28 April 2021_____
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Ethnography, Conflict, and Pastoral Leadership

By

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Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

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Abstract

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The goal for this project is to provide pastoral leadership in a highly conflicted ministry setting while both addressing the issue of systemic racism facing the church and the wider community and maintaining my sense of self. Ethnography offers social and biblical hermeneutics for effective pastoral leadership to address divisive theological views about ethnicity polarizing the church today. Use of these research methods gives pastors an awareness of the ministry context and a theological hermeneutic through which to be present and engaged in the life of the faith community.

Ethnography, Conflict, and Pastoral Leadership

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A Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the
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DEDICATION

TO DR. CYNTHIA MILLER, WHOSE PASSION FOR THE ANCIENT HEBREW LANGUAGE, AND WHOSE PATIENT ENDURANCE WITH ME OVER FOUR SEMESTERS, REVEALED TO ME AN ENTIRE NEW WORLD OF ACADEMIC SCHOLARSAHIP THAT HAS INSPIRED A LIFE-LONG PASSION OF MY OWN.

מְנַחֵם

"Our difficulty lies in the content of our task. As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and our inability and by that very recognition give God the glory. This is our perplexity. The rest of our task fades into insignificance in comparison."[1]

—Karl Barth-*The Word of God and the Word of Man*

[1] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (Boston & Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), 186.

I. Introduction

"What you are preaching is dangerous. You need to be careful."

The words stunned me and elevated the palpable tension in my church office. The couple sitting across from me had requested a meeting to discuss my recent sermon series entitled, *Can We Be Honest?* in which I addressed the growing racial protests and considered how the church might find ways to engage in constructive dialog. They were in their early fifties, both educated working professionals. The pandemic of 2020 was in its early stages, the contentious presidential election was quickly approaching, polarizing the country, and the Black Lives Matter movement protesting the recent death of George Floyd was growing stronger by the day. For two hours, sometimes with raised voices, the couple passionately explained to me their deeply held convictions regarding the corruption of the Black Lives Matter movement, the threats facing true Christians in our country, the misinformation of the mainstream media on which I was basing my comments, and the lack of biblical grounding I was using in my sermons. In an email to my District Superintendent, I shared the following:

> I was told by [----] that what I was preaching was not "biblically grounded," was "dangerous" and that I needed to "be careful." It became very clear that their intent was to inform, not to have conversation other than to help me understand the ways I am misinformed.
>
> You are already aware of the strong conservative mindset in this community. What I am now realizing, based on multiple experiences over the last two years, is how unyielding and closed many in my congregations are to new ideas, perspectives, and world views.[2]

[2] Email to Rev. Laura Auten, Uwharrie District Superintendent, Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, July 9, 2020.

On that summer evening in my office, the couple and I may have been sitting ten feet away from each other, but we were miles apart in our perspectives on ethnicity, the Gospel, and the response of the church. Though we used similar words and phrases, our definitions were vastly different. It was as though we were from foreign countries and we did not understand each other's language. I came to the realization through conversations with other members of my congregations that many shared the same sentiments expressed to me by the couple in my office.

Originally the goal of this Doctor of Ministry project was to focus on Jewish Feminist Midrash as a hermeneutic to create opportunities for conversation on differing worldviews without attempting to change the other's point of view. Much of my research for this project focused on Jewish Feminist Midrash. My sermon series *Can We Be Honest?* addressing racial protests was intended to be followed by another sermon series. Using the research on Jewish Feminist Midrash as a hermeneutic for interpretation, the series would have focused on Jesus' interactions with people who were marginalized and excluded, such as the Gerasene Demoniac, the Syrophoenician woman, and persons like Zacchaeus who found themselves ostracized by both the Roman and Jewish societies. Given the highly conflicted reaction to my prophetic preaching, a pivot in my preaching and approach to ministry was necessary. Maintaining my pastoral care and leadership responsibilities while serving in a high conflict ministry context inhabited by people with vastly different worldviews from me became the focus of the project instead.

II. Claim of the Project

I experience in my congregants an unwillingness and inability to listen to and discuss from a scriptural and theological perspective the controversial issues that affect the local church and

surrounding community.[3] With so many in my congregation having made up their minds, the challenge becomes how to provide pastoral care to such folks while maintaining my own self-understanding and integrity. This problem is not limited to my ministry context, of course. The inability to have thoughtful and reflective conversation on issues on which conversations partners have widely differing views paralyzes communities of faith and prevents the opportunity for sacred space of open dialogue. Such encumbrances hinder the witness and ministry of the church in the world by presenting a hegemonic view of scripture and theology, alienating many inside and outside the church community.

The goal for this project is to provide pastoral leadership in a highly conflicted ministry setting while both addressing the issue of systemic racism facing the church and the wider community and maintaining my sense of self. Ethnography offers social and biblical hermeneutics for effective pastoral leadership to address divisive theological views about ethnicity polarizing the church today. Use of these research methods gives pastors an awareness of the ministry context and a theological hermeneutic through which to be present and engaged in the life of the faith community.

III. Ethnography

Ethnography as a pastoral practice is the application of immersive study of a ministry context for the purpose of better understanding the histories and stories that shape the community of faith. Interpretation of these formative narratives enhances the pastor's ability to build

[3] In 2018 and 2019 I led discussions in both congregations regarding Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church's denomination wide attempts to address the divisions within the church over the standards in the Book of Discipline. These discussions were in preparation for the Special Called Session of the General Conference in 2019. During these discussions I perceived an almost unified mindset embracing the Traditional view upholding the current language in the Book of Discipline stating, "the practice of homosexuality is inconsistent with Christian teaching." There was not an openness to hear another view and little or no opportunity for dialog. In February both congregations voted by margins of 98 percent and 95 percent to disaffiliate from the UMC.

relationships and provide leadership guided by the underlying currents of meaning imbedded in the social and theological praxis of the church. Stories are central to ethnographic research, as is demographic data. Stories give meaning to people's experience of the world. Everybody has a story. The couple in my office have a story. I have a story. You have a story. Story is as old as time, a basic form of communication that enables us to share, learn, and grow. Our lives are intertwined with an ongoing narrative from the moment we are born. Often unaware that we are doing so, we adopt these narrations as reality, and they are reinforced by one generation after another. Narrative traditions handed down over generations become woven into the fabric of the social and religious culture. Human beings are "embedded in stories that influence us and describe the range of possibilities that we can imagine for our lives."[4] Using ethnographic research, I will examine the past and present histories, narratives, and demographics of my ministry context. I will explore the historical narratives that have shaped and influenced my ministry context from the late 1700s to 2021.

Demographic data provides the pastor a view of the community that may or may not be readily seen or understood. The ministry context is shaped and influenced by these community demographics beyond the immediate walls of the church. Understanding of the broader community helps inform current dynamics and forces at work. When these demographics are placed alongside the historical narratives, insight into underlying themes and influences can be elucidated. Demographic data and historical narratives allow the pastor to be more effective in knowing, understanding, and leading the community of faith.

[4] Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press,2008), 4–5.

IV. Ethnographic Research

Using ethnographic research, I will examine the complex issue of ethnicity within my ministry context from historical narratives, demographic data, and anecdotal experiences. My research will explore the history of ethnicity within my ministry context. I will connect this research with current trends and attitudes toward non-dominant members of the community, providing a context for and analysis of why members of my congregation's resist engaging in difficult conversations about ethnicity. I will use these stories and analysis to inform my sermon preparation, keeping in mind the cultural and historical contexts that suffuse current beliefs and practices.

Demographic data will provide an understanding of population trends, economic influences, and educational factors shaping the ministry context. Exploration of historical narrative will focus on the formation of cultural identity in Union County, North Carolina. Finally, ethnographic observations from an interview with three black men who live in the community will provide a counter narrative to the predominant attitudes of their white neighbors. They tell what it was like for them growing up and the challenges they have faced as Black boys and men in a southern and predominantly white population.

V. Ministry Context

I currently serve Mt. Carmel and Prospect UMC in Monroe, North Carolina, as pastor in charge. I am responsible for leading worship and preaching, administering the sacraments, pastoral care, and overseeing the life of the church in its ministry and witness to the community and world. My pastoral responsibilities began on July 1, 2018.

Prospect UMC, established in 1817, recently celebrated its two-hundredth anniversary, the first Methodist Church in Union County. Mount Carmel UMC was founded in 1885. Monroe, the county seat in which both churches are located, has a population close to 33,000. Union County, located in the rapidly growing Charlotte metro area of 2.5 million people, faces challenges in the ever-shifting culture from agricultural rural south to suburban bedroom communities.

Cultural Identity

The importance of family defines the community and cannot be understated. Many members, born and raised in the community, have long established roots in the area, in some cases going back to the colonial era. This cultural identity has been cultivated and nurtured through worship practices and community events. The life cycle is narrated through the theology of Family Church.

Population

Despite the influx of development and neighborhoods over the last twenty years ten to fifteen miles away, the average worship attendance for both churches has been one of steady twenty-year decline. Prospect, the larger of the two churches, averages sixty-five persons in worship, while Mt. Carmel averages forty-five. There has been a consistent twenty-year decline in population within a five-mile radius as well. An aging population and declining birth rate constitute two contributing reasons for the population decline. Median age in both churches is fifty-five to sixty, with Mt. Carmel's population being slightly older.

Many of the Boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) and the subsequent generations are leaving the community to pursue higher education and employment

opportunities. Of those who remain, many have left the church altogether. As I have developed relationships with some of those who no longer attend church, I have discovered that the major reasons for this include strong sentiments within the church against progressive, social and political ideologies and lifestyles, negative gender stereotypes within the church, infighting among the power brokers, and the lack of relevance of church to their daily lives.

Ethnicity

The racial distribution of the population within a five-mile radius around Mt. Carmel is 57 percent White, 20 percent Latino, and 18 percent Black. Ethnic diversity changes significantly further away from the city of Monroe. The ethnic distribution for a five-mile radius around Prospect reveals the ethnic distribution to be 86 percent White, 7.4 percent Black, and 4 percent Latino.[5] Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Latino population may be underreported. Community ministries such as PUMC's Food and Clothing Ministry along with attendance at our community Thanksgiving meal suggest that the Latino population is much higher than reported. Even within the shifting percentages of ethnicity, overall population numbers continue to decline.

Education

Parkwood and Monroe represent the two high schools in the study area. For the 2007–2008 school year, Parkwood's graduation rate stood at 78.5 percent and Monroe's at 62.5 percent. Ten years later, Parkwood's graduation rate for 2017-2018 stood at 92.4 percent,

[5] MissionInsite. *The QuickInsite Report.* (Charlotte: Western North Carolina Conference, 2018), 4–5.

revealing a 13.9 percent increase in graduation rates over ten years. Monroe's graduation rate for 2017–2018 stood at 82.7 percent, a 20.2 percent increase.[6]

The recent increase in graduation rates represent significant investment in and achievement by the community and county school systems. These schools still fall short of the consistently higher graduation rates of the schools located in the western portion of Union County, where the majority of the economic and housing development has taken place over the last twenty years. Fair and equitable distribution of resources remains a difficult political challenge among County and School Board officials. The low graduation rates of the previous decade and further back also highlight a generational gap in education between those graduating today and the adults in the community. Demographic data also reveals that large numbers of the adults in the ministry context have only a high school diploma or less education. The importance of post-secondary education in expanding worldviews will be highlighted in the interview with Travis Deese later in the project.

Income

Median household incomes for southern Union County currently fall short of state averages, and five-year projections reveal this trend is likely to continue. Approximately 20 percent of the population around Mt. Carmel fall below the poverty line, exceeding state averages. The higher ethnic diversity around Mt. Carmel may contribute to this difference. However, Principal Chinnis, of Prospect Elementary, estimates that 45 to 50 percent of her school students qualify for free or reduced lunch, while only 20 percent participate in free or reduced lunch. Before the pandemic, every morning a volunteer from Prospect would carry a

[6] Data provided by Anne Sutton, Parkwood High School Drop Out Prevention Coordinator.

basket of breakfast bars and fruit for kids to grab as they needed on the way to class. Teachers and volunteers recognize that students who are hungry and lacking basic needs do not perform as well as they could if they received proper nutrition, sleep, and support. Free and reduced lunch and breakfast are available. The cultural values of hard work and self-sufficiency often prevent families in need from seeking the help they are eligible to receive.

Land Use Policies

Another economic concern is reflected in the Union County Future Land Use maps through 2025, which divide the county into five employment corridors. Notably none of these projected corridors fall within a fifteen-mile radius of the ministry context footprint. Zoning for the area remains agricultural. Housing and economic development are projected west and north of the area, closer to the Charlotte Metro Area.[7]

Conversations with members and residents of the area reveal the challenges of farming and agriculture as sustainable and viable means to support a family. As one resident and long-time farmer stated, “It’s no longer farmland. It’s real estate. The homeplace is now becoming the subdivision.” Many in the area find themselves to be “land poor” meaning the property they own is becoming taxed so heavily that they can no longer afford to maintain their land. Taxes primarily support the development of the five economic corridors and the growing populations to the north and west of the county. Farmland is going up for sale, but projections indicate that the economic development seen over the last several years in other corridors will bypass this area.

These economic shifts place an increasing value on education as a path to greater economic stability. If the county continues to resource the already prospering areas of the county,

[7] http://www.co.union.nc.us/departments/gismaps/resources/standard-maps

residents and high school graduates will be forced to move to follow viable jobs. If the data projections found through MissionInsite remain reliable, this area will be negatively affected. Change is possible, but significant change will require intentional allocation of time and resources from the state and local governments.

Each of these demographics pose areas of concern for the people in my congregations and community. They contribute to the anxiety and fear many of them experience related to shifting paradigms. Cultural, economic, and ethnic diversification represent the changes that the white dominant culture perceives to be threatening the—or their—status quo. This underlying fear manifests in the ideology that a marginalized group's gain means a loss for those in the dominant culture. A zero-sum paradigm entrenched in scarcity plagues the white community.

The Need to Examine Challenges to Cultural Identity

A social analysis of southern Union County must take into consideration the underlying and very present forces at work within the community. The social forces of changing ethnic demographics, education, economy, and politics shape the past, present, and future of the people in these communities and congregations. While these forces may be unseen by many in the dominant culture, their presence challenges the cultural identity of Family Church. Studying these forces can elucidate cultural and congregational identity and can contribute to a better understanding of the church in context.[8]

Historical Narrative and the Formation of Cultural Identity

Demographics are important to understanding any ministry context. Shifts and trends can be identified. They provide a realistic snapshot, a moment in time of the dynamics, seen and

[8] Lenora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 70.

unseen, taking place within the community. History can serve a similar function, identifying shifts and trends, highlighting well-known "chamber of commerce" narratives. History can also serve as a corrective, bringing to the fore the not so familiar voices of history. Some members of the community may want to forget these stories. Such is often the privilege of the dominant culture. For other members of the community, the silent omission is deafening, leaving many of them unseen and unheard. The ministry and teaching of Jesus toward the marginalized and oppressed found in the pastoral integrity, and the search for understanding demands that we weave these divergent and sometimes incompatible narratives together to the best of our ability to gain a more complete picture of the ministry context, then and now, and to understand the implications that these narratives hold for present decision making and future dreams. A complete history and detailed analysis are beyond the scope of this project. Any attempt to narrate a people's history is inextricably bound by the ethnographer's own context, history, and bias.

Ethnic diversity and tensions, past and present, are the specific focus for this project. I focus on three specific time periods in the history of Union County, North Carolina. The first period of focus is the pre-colonial and antebellum south. The second is the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s. The third is specific events occurring in 2020. I focus on these in a pastoral attempt to understand better the people called Methodist whom I have been entrusted to pastor. I hope that these narratives will serve a higher purpose of aiding the church in being a faithful witness to God in our community, nation, and world.

Pre-colonial and Antebellum, North Carolina

The indigenous Waxhaw Tribe once populated the area of the ministry context. By the 1720s, many of the Waxhaw people had died as a result of European immigration and

colonization and the violence and disease these precipitated. The remnant members of the Waxhaw joined the nearby Catawba and Seminole Tribes.

In 1767, Andrew Jackson was born in what is now the community of Waxhaw. Claimed as a Union County native, Jackson became the seventh president of the United States in 1829. Prospect Methodist Church, founded in 1817, is located within the Waxhaw tribal land and is less than ten miles away from Jackson's birthplace. Since the days of Andrew Jackson, the study area, like Jackson himself, has been both politically conservative, supporting states' rights and decentralization of federal government, and fiercely patriotic, with a focus on agrarianism and populism. Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 directly affected the remaining members of Waxhaw Tribe and their adopted tribal clans.

During this same period of the 1830s, the percentage of the population enslaved around the ministry context ranged from 30 to 40 percent. President Jackson, like many other elected officials, wrestled with the question regarding Westward expansion and which states would be slave holding states. Jackson's policies sought to maintain the Union by making concessions to the secessionist leaning Southern states. When war erupted following the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, men from the ministry context area served in the Confederate Army, several of whom are buried in the Prospect UMC cemetery.

The Prospect UMC cemetery, well documented by church historical records, is a source of pride for the church and the people in the community. Every Memorial Day, members place American flags on the graves of all the men and women who served in the military forces, including the Confederacy. In ethnographic terms, this could be considered one example of community praxis reflecting the intersection of faith and culture.

Civil Rights Movement, Monroe, North Carolina

Throughout much of the south, by 1900 Reconstruction had given way to Jim Crow laws and the oppression of the black community by groups like the Red Shirts and the Ku Klux Klan. Union County, North Carolina was no different. The three documented lynchings in Union County (in 1881, 1885, and 1903) exemplify the rise of violent white supremacy within the ministry context.[9] The KKK openly advertised their meetings in the Monroe newspaper.

In 1958, two young children—James Thompson age nine, and David Simpson age seven—were arrested, jailed, and denied seeing their parents for six days. "The Kissing Case" became internationally known and placed Monroe, N.C. squarely amid unwanted publicity. What started out as kids playing, turned tragic and ruinous. James Thompson recounted details of the incident in an interview with National Public Radio in 2011. (see Appendix.1)

Appeals to the Governor of North Carolina to grant the boys clemency went unheeded. News began to spread worldwide. During the height of the Cold War, such news undermined the legitimacy of U.S. foreign policy as a defender of freedom and democracy. Only after Eleanor Roosevelt interceded with the N.C. Governor were the boys released. No apology has ever been made to the Thompson or Simpson families from state or local authorities. The unconscionable imprisonment of two elementary age prepubescent boys for receiving a kiss on the cheek from a white girl, and the overreaction by the white adults and community and state leaders underscores how deeply embedded was the false narrative of the threat black males posed to white female purity. The false narrative of the malicious and dangerous black male persists in contemporary culture.

[9]https://public.tableau.com/profile/ben.murphy5094#!/vizhome/ARedRecordLynchingintheSouth/SatelliteMapNC

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker stand as some of the most notable figures associated with the Civil Rights Movement. Not so Monroe native, Robert Williams. Yet Williams' influence on the movement arguably shaped the Civil Rights movement as much as these more well-known names and continues to reverberate even today. Upon returning from military service in World War II, Williams began to campaign for civil rights because of his experience serving alongside white soldiers. Williams founded the NAACP chapter in Union County. Under the leadership of King, the Civil Rights movement adopted a non-violent approach to protest. Williams, however, knew from his experience in Union County that a non-violent response allowed white supremacists to flourish and brazenly attack peaceful Black neighborhoods without fear of reprisal from local law enforcement or resistance from the Black community itself. As one response, Williams chartered a National Rifle Association chapter in Union County to serve as a Constitutional basis for the Black community to bear arms.

Williams continued his advocacy of armed resistance as a response to white aggression. Examples such as the disrupted Klan rally in 1957 served as evidence to many in the Civil Rights movement (who were increasingly disenchanted with the non-violent approach of King) that when Black communities responded to white supremacist attacks with armed resistance, the number and frequency of the terrorizing assaults decreased. (see A 1.2) Williams' vocal and public support of armed resistance led to his censure by and ultimately disassociation from the NAACP. King and William wrote editorials published side by side articulating their divergent views on non-violence and armed resistance.[10]

[10]http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol05Scans/Oct1959_TheSocialOrganizationofNonviolence.pdf#page=2

One method of practicing non-violent resistance was the Freedom Riders. Groups of Civil Rights supporters traveling on buses across the South in an attempt to integrate busing terminals. In August 1961, a small group of Freedom Riders arrived in Monroe with the purpose of teaching black youth active non-violent methods. Retired Union County Historical Librarian Patricia Poland documented the event. (see A.1.3)

As a result of the international publicity around the "Kissing Case" and Robert Williams' own well publicized views on active armed resistance, the Freedom Riders attempted a new approach: they sent only a small group to Monroe, rather than a large convoy on buses. This was a novel approach by the movement, and Monroe was chosen as a testing ground because of Williams' residence there.

Accounts of events in Monroe on Thursday, August 17, 1961 are a chilling example of the civil rights movement in Monroe. Truman Nelson in his self-published account, *People With Strength: The Story of Monroe N.C.*, documents the timeline and events of the Freedom Riders' protest march. In graphic detail Truman describes how the vitriolic white mob assembled and lined the streets where the protestors marched, anxious for any reason to descend upon those they considered to be meddlesome troublemakers. The permit for the legally planned march ended at 5:00 p.m. Knowing this, white supremacists blocked access to the public phone, preventing the picket captain, James Foreman, from calling for rides back to Newtown, the black section of Monroe at the time. The white counter protesters seized the moment, violently assaulting and beating the Freedom Riders. Truman captures the chaotic scene: "the mob found their release

and swarmed forward against all the pickets, kicking and pounding them in a madness more terrible than the blows themselves."[11]

Five days later on Tuesday August 22, Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, then Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, arrived in Monroe. The SCLC's leadership had decided to forgo the "jail—no bail" policy, as the racial tinder box of Monroe had now exploded, causing untenable violence. As he attempted to enter the Courthouse to arrange for the release of the Freedom Riders who remained in jail on charges of inciting a riot, a white supremacist grabbed Rev. Walker and hurled him from the top step down to the base of the granite memorial.[12] (see A 1.4)

Though I had lived in Union County for fifteen years, and in North Carolina all my life, I was unaware of these events until I began research on this project. I am not a historian by profession. Yet I have studied North Carolina history and the Civil Rights movement. That I did not know the name Robert Williams, that Freedom Riders had visited Monroe, or that a major figure of the movement such Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker was maliciously assaulted mere miles away from where I now live is unfathomable to me. This omission from the public education of North Carolina history is shocking and troublesome. Even comprehensive accounts of the Civil Rights movement fail to address these events, such as documentaries such as the PBS series *Eyes on the Prize*. These powerful narratives that have indelibly shaped this community would have been lost to history save for the efforts of people like Patricia Poland, a now retired historian for the Union County Public Library and authors like Timothy Tyson and Truman Nelson.

[11] Truman Nelson, People with Strength: The Story of Monroe NC (self-published, 1963) pg. 8.
[12] http://history.union.lib.nc.us/bibliographies/BlackHistory-BROCHURE-FOR-WALK-2013-WEB.pdf

Unity March in Monroe, North Carolina June 2020

On June 20, the local chapter of the NAACP led a Unity March in downtown Monroe. In response to the death of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter organizers sought to protest the presence of the Confederate Monument located outside the historic courthouse. Armed supporters of the Confederate Monument's presence stood guard by the granite obelisk. To avoid any possible clash, the leaders of the Unity March chose to assemble on the opposite side of the courthouse.[13] The event was held peacefully.

The events in 1958, 1961, and 2020 reveal a pattern of deep-seated racial bias. Systemic patterns of racism are evident as far back as the European emigrants' first encounters with the native Waxhaw's in the area. These stories, when juxtaposed with events, culture, and worldviews today begin to elucidate the canon within the canon. Patterns of thinking become narratives that imbue the world around us with meaning. As these narratives are handed down through the generations, an institutional memory becomes rooted in the very framework of the cultural milieu, to the extent that they are accepted as fact, the reality in which we now exist. Losing touch with these historical events enables the dominant culture to create and selectively maintain more acceptable narratives—in this case, racist ones. In so doing, the voices of those most directly affected by these tragedies recede into the shadows of time, unseen and unheard, not deemed important for us today.

Based on these historical narratives, we can see that in this region of North Carolina there exists a consistent political ideology of populism, dating from President Andrew Jackson, to support for Confederate ideology, on to the systemic racism in law enforcement, and finally to

[13] https://www.wcnc.com/article/news/local/demonstrations-monroe-confederate-monuments/275-03a803fd-d2c2-4f04-9266-7536231f3cbb

the presence of violent white supremacy. Each of these ideologies along with current Christian Conservatism displayed among congregants and the surrounding community have not only existed but flourished for over two hundred years. This is my ministry context.

Congregational Survey on the Bible

By exploring how my congregants' perspectives on scripture diverge from my own, I will attempt to define both of my congregations' theology of scripture through a survey and discussion group. (see A.2) Understanding my congregations' theology of scripture will inform how I incorporate their ethnographic histories and will guide my sermon preparation.

Their theology of scripture is grounded in the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, whose primary authorship is God's yet is written by human beings. What to them is the infallibility and authority of scripture is rooted in their understanding of scripture as inerrant. Based on our discussions, I think they would be somewhat hesitant to use the word inerrancy, and yet I suspect they struggle to talk about the authority and faithful interpretation of the Bible without the concept of inerrancy. The phrase they typically use to refer to the Bible is "God's word." Their understanding of the nature of scripture finds expression in the phrase, "God's word is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow." The phrase "God's word says it. I believe it. That settles it," captures how the relate to and use the Bible.

Discussion with the study group began the discussion of how they read the Bible by using the Merriam Webster definitions of "literal." The group initially gravitated toward a definition of "faithfully," but as the conversation progressed, they began emphasizing that the Bible should be read and interpreted "word for word."

Regarding this hegemonic interpretation of scripture as being the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, I suggest there exists great opportunity to offer the church other faithful ways of reading scripture. New ways of interpreting or seeing scripture threaten their theological worldviews, which many people are not comfortable addressing. I perceive my congregants are afraid to consider other ways of thinking about the Bible for fear that they might be "wrong" in some sense of the word.

Some of the open-ended questions I asked participants included in what ways they have changed personally as a result of reading the Bible. The answers ranged from it "help[ing them] to be a better person" to it making them feel "closer to God" to "I once was lost and now I'm found." In response to the question of in what ways their understanding of the Bible changed as a result of actually reading the Bible, answers included "reading is more personal," "God is real," "application to my life," that their "understanding increased through Bible studies," that they experienced "growth in faith," and that they became "more focused on God's plan for us."

The first person to speak noted that the Bible began as an oral tradition. The inspiration of the words came from God even before it was written down. The Bible was written by God through man. Some of them believe God told Moses what to write. They referenced the Gilgamesh flood story as an ancient flood story written before Moses but not before the Bible. They believed the human activity of Moses' writing, but also that the Word of God existed before its written composition. They cited John 1 as scriptural evidence of this position. They also realize that the books of the Bible are organized by narrative, not in chronological order. They cited Job as being the oldest text.

When I asked them to clarify their belief that Moses wrote the Torah, the consensus in the room was affirmative. When I mentioned the passage about Moses' death and burial, one participant quipped, "it was written by a ghost writer. "

Regarding the Creation story in Genesis, it was clear that the majority believe in a literal six days of creation. When I sought to clarify such a literal understanding, they affirmed six twenty-four-hour periods. They referenced the passage in 2 Peter 3.8, "one day to us is like 1000 years to God." As regards the literal interpretation of Genesis, one person stated, "if we have a vote on the word 'day' we will have fifteen different versions or definitions." One person stated that the written words are "enough for me. The details are not necessary. Some things are beyond our comprehension." The final comment on the aspect of creation in Genesis was stated this way, "Does it make a difference? No." And yet, this statement was immediately followed by the expressed concern that any theory of creation as more than six days opens the door to evolution, an untenable position. "There are some things one cannot explain," they said.

Their need to take the Bible literally, it seems, is a matter of faith and salvation. The Bible is not just to be read, but also believed. They pointed to the evidence of how the Bible has been written and rewritten. In their opinion, all the versions say the same thing, just with different words.

Regarding the literal interpretation of scripture in relation to the people who translate the different versions, they accept that the translations are inspired. They believe that God "has his hand in it." "As a believer it is our task to believe it's all true: all or nothing," they said.

There was strong consensus in the room that the Bible speaks to the reader, and also that we wouldn't have the New Testament without the Old Testament. Not surprisingly the

participants expressed their appreciation for Bible study and the growth they have experienced hearing other people's thoughts.

When discussing passages in Joshua, they described the genre as history. They affirmed the truth as well as the reality that these events happened as written. The specific passages we read (Genesis 1-3, Exodus 20-21, Joshua 2.6-7, Luke 1-2, Matthew 5-7, and Revelation 17-20) exemplified the power of God and the result of faithfulness revealed through Joshua and Caleb. The importance of reading the Bible as history comes as we put ourselves in the story, they said.

Shifting to the Lukan birth narrative passages, they described the genre as history while also nuancing the nature of the writing as gospel. The announcement to Mary and the birth of Christ they affirmed as historically true. They did not spend a lot of time discussing the passage in Luke 1-2.

As time was running out, they wanted to spend some time discussing Revelation. They expressed an understanding of the genre as apocalyptic—that it speaks of future events that have not happened yet, that it includes symbolic visions, and that it uses figurative language. They believe that Jesus is the person speaking to John and directing him to write. I asked if they would agree with the statement that Revelation is an attempt by John to use finite words to describe the infinite reality of God. They agreed. To my knowledge and reflection, this was the only time that I led in the conversation. It was my attempt to give words to what I heard them saying rather than to make suggestions.

We ended the study with the following concluding thoughts: They shared that meditation and study of the Bible is key in the life of the believer. They acknowledge that Christians will not always agree on how to read and interpret scripture. Then one member of the group strongly

asserted that there were some things that he felt were non-negotiable. He firmly believes the Bible is to be read literally, believing the earth to be six thousand years old. When I referenced our previous comments about science and the evidence that many people believe points to the existence of creation being much older, more than one person stated, “I believe in science as long as it is consistent with the Bible.” I asked the following question. “Is it possible to be a Christian and believe in evolution?” The answer from more than one person was an unequivocal, “No.” To believe in evolution in their minds is anathema to the Christian faith and represents an atheistic world view.

Interview with Bill Caddell, John Deese, and Travis Deese on June 15, 2020

I conducted an interview with three men, Bill Caddell (48), John Deese (62), and Travis Deese (40). With their foreknowledge and permission, the purpose of the interview sought to gain understanding of what it was like for them growing up Black, experiences they have now as Black fathers, and wisdom that has been handed down to them. I am personally acquainted with all three men. John Deese is a member of Prospect UMC. John is Travis’ father. Travis is married and has two elementary age children. His family attends another church. Bill Caddell and I met while coaching our kids in basketball, and our kids also attend the same school. Bill has two teenage girls. Bill and I and several others participated in an online group hosted by Bill and his wife. The group, which met for six weeks, engaged in constructive conversation about our collective experiences and attitudes toward race and ethnicity in our society.

I filmed our conversation in preparation to share it with my congregations in worship on Father’s Day. The video comprises two segments. The first portion is a conversation among the four of us covering their early years growing up, their experiences as men and fathers, and family wisdom they received growing up that they now hope to pass on to their children. The first

segment was edited and aired in worship. The second segment is a series of quick response questions and answers about their thoughts about the impact of slavery, reparations, the Confederate monuments and the Confederate flag, the "genealogical wall," and white privilege. Excerpts from the interview discussed in this project reveal insights few if any in my ministry context have heard until now. (see A.3). The full videos will be available for viewing on the accompanying digital component of this project.

That these men were so willing to share their life experiences with me with such vulnerability and depth astounded me. I continue to be deeply moved by what they shared. A summary of their thoughts will serve as a counterpoint to the conversation and anecdotes from my ministry context.

Born in 1953, John was eight years old when the Freedom Riders arrived in Monroe in August of 1961. During the interview, John states that his goal was acceptance by the white community. His livelihood as an upholsterer was dependent on being accepted as a Black man. Travis stated it was not until he attended college at North Carolina Central University, a historically Black university in Durham, North Carolina, that he learned to be proud of who he was as a Black man. The generational worldview from John to Travis is transformative. As a result of higher education, Travis acknowledges and appreciates his father's worldview based on the context in which his father grew up. And Travis embraces the pride and agency of being an autonomous person whose value and dignity are not defined by the white dominant culture. Both Travis and Bill speak to the reality of living in two worlds, one white and one black. Travis spoke of the "tightrope" experience of being present in both spaces. Bill spoke of the different set of rules and the systemic bias that exists for Black men contrasted with the rules applied to

the white dominant culture. I acknowledge in the interview, as a member of the dominant culture, that I have the privilege to not think much about my ethnicity. Said Bill Caddell:

> When you are black in America, it is something you think about because being black you do move in these spaces where you are one of the few in a lot of cases… There are two sets of rules when I'm hanging with my white friends, for obvious reasons. I'm carrying more melanin than they are.

Conversation with Couple in my Office, 24 June 2020

A married couple in one of my congregations asked to meet with me, four Sundays in to my sermon series *Can We Be Honest?* On Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020, in response to the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, I chose to read Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter From a Birmingham Jail* to start the series. On Sunday May 31, we were worshiping remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following Sunday and throughout July we met for outdoor worship and also continued broadcasting our worship services. Excerpts from that conversation highlight the very divergent worldviews present in my ministry context. (see A.4)

Throughout the conversation, the couple used the words "heritage," "race," "ethnicity," and "culture" as synonyms. The couple was offended by and rejected my comparison of the "white moderates" of King's letter to our congregation today. They also disagreed with my application of King's letter as being relevant today.

In the video interview, Bill Caddell acknowledges that people who use the term "colorblind" most likely intend it to mean they are without prejudice. Bill highlights the contradiction of being colorblind, understanding it as a failure to embrace the reality the other person. His preference of using the term "color conscious" achieves the purpose of embracing the totality of the person, whereas the term "colorblind" looks beyond the other person's

ethnicity thereby avoiding the discomfort of difference. The use of the term colorblind is an attempt to acknowledge obliquely the injustices of the past without accepting the systemic racism that continues to pervade our society.

Anecdotal responses from other members of the congregations

These observations highlight for me the complexity of serving in the rural south and the need for the church to engage in social justice. These anecdotes also give voice to the tension I experience serving as a pastor in this ministry context.

Driving the six-mile between the two churches I pastor, I pass twelve residences displaying American flags. On that same drive, I pass seven houses displaying Confederate flags.[14] Several of these homes display the American flag and the Confederate flag either alongside each other, or with the Confederate Flag just under the American Flag on the same flagpole. During the election, many houses displaying Trump flags or yard signs also flew Confederate flags. The conflation of Christian Evangelicalism, Populist Nationalism, and inclusion of southern heritage represented by the Confederate Flag carries with it complicated strands of history, theology, and politics. Nearly 620,000 soldiers died under these opposing flags, Union, and Confederate. (see A.4) The juxtaposition of the two flags highlights the complex nature of my current ministry context.

At a fellowship meal, as we filled our plates, one individual expressed a preference for white meat and another a preference for dark meat. A third individual interjected, “let’s don’t be racist now.” This comment was quickly followed up by, “You know I’m only joking. You know

[14] The vast majority of Confederate Flags flown in the ministry context are the Battle Flag of General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.

my heart." The appeal to humor creates a permissive attitude among members of the dominant culture to undermine passive aggressively the seriousness of discrimination in our culture. The cultural stereotype of fried chicken as associated with Black culture may not be conscious to those speaking, but it was to me. To joke that selecting portions of meat to eat from an animal is somehow racist is demeaning and painful to those who have suffered from discrimination based on the color of their skin.

The role of pastor and ethnographer is to be self-differentiated and aware of one's own engagement and participation in the life of the community. I confess that on hearing this comment, I became emotionally dysregulated and needed to dismiss myself from the conversation as quickly as appropriate. People who dismiss white privilege as a "liberal attempt to stir up trouble," lack the awareness of the role that systemic racism has on economic and housing markets. Decades of red-lining, poor wages, lack of education, and voter suppression enabled the dominant white culture to prosper at the expense of those who are not of the dominant culture. The perceived assumption in this remark regarding relocation based on preference to be "closer to other people like them" belies the very white privilege they decry. Families in this ministry context own land that has been maintained for seven, eight, and even nine generations. For a majority of that time, it was illegal for Black people to own land. For another segment of that history, Jim Crow laws prevented Black people from owning land. And when it became legally and economically viable for Black people to own property, practices such as red-lining contributed to the suppression of real estate ownership in prominent and more desirable areas.

Underlying the remark about relocation based on discomfort is the unrealized opportunity to address what is making "other" people uncomfortable in the first place. The assumption that

"other" people would be more "comfortable with people like themselves" is likely an unconscious projection of the speaker's own discomfort living in proximity to "other" people.

On January 6, 2021, the U.S. Capital was attacked by a mob, property inside the Capital was destroyed and some stolen, and threats against members of Congress can be overheard on video recordings. Prior to start of one of our church meetings, there was brief discussion about the recent attack on the Capitol. I overheard the following comment.

> "It was just a protest, right?" said sardonically alluding to the media coverage of BLM protests that turned violent.

The comparison of the attack on the Capitol with the violence that occurred at several Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020 has drawn a great deal of media attention and analysis, the discussion of which is far beyond the scope of this project. Of the many reactions I had to the comment, one image stands out. A reporter photographed a white man inside the Capitol carrying a Confederate Flag, the aforementioned battle flag—the same Confederate Flag on display in yards in my ministry context. The juxtaposition seen in my ministry context was now realized within the halls of the U.S. Capitol. Again, humor passive aggressively undermines the reality of systemic racism.

I overheard the following comments in Men's Adult Sunday School Class (meeting in person throughout the pandemic) on February 7, 2021:

> "They say the COVID vaccine is not being distributed fairly, that minorities do not have equal access. Do you think this is true?"
>
> "No, I really don't. They talk about how skeptical some minorities are about taking the vaccine. They are available to anyone who signs up. I signed up. Got the shots. So, no I don't think it's true. Probably the media trying to stir up trouble."

Underlying the comments spoken to me and overheard within my ministry context is fear. The members of my congregation and those within my ministry context are afraid that their long-held way of life, values, and religious beliefs are under attack and are at risk of being marginalized. Their Family Church identity is threatened by the cultural shifts taking place around them. Acknowledging the reality of white privilege, systemic racism, and other ways of reading and interpreting the Bible challenge their individual and communal identity. Binary thinking of right and wrong does not allow for the possibility of the other person's truth: the other person's experience, the other person's interpretation, the other person's way of thinking, the other person's worldview. I close with a quote from Jon Meachum that captures the ethos of what I heard in the conversations I had officially and unofficially with my congregants:

> King's piece, "The Un-Christian Christian," argued that white religious believers "too often … have responded to Christ emotionally, but they have not responded to His teachings morally." As in the Lost Cause of the South and the reunion narrative of the whole nation, white Christianity of midcentury America chose the comforting elements of history and theology rather than the uncomfortable ones.
>
> Baldwin closes the book by imagining the interior monologue of the white American who has been raised on the false history of the Lost Cause. "Do not blame *me*," Baldwin wrote of the white "stammering" in his conscience. "I was not there. I did not do it. My history has nothing to do with Europe or the slave trade. Anyway, it was *your* chiefs who sold *you* to *me. …* But, on the same day … in the most private chamber of his heart always, he, the white man, remains proud of that history for which he does not wish to pay, and from which, materially, he has profited so much" — a history manipulated to make the unspeakable palatable.
>
> —Jon Meachum[15]

[15] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/23/books/review/lost-cause-meacham.html

VI. Conclusion

Perhaps no image brings into focus the divide present in my ministry context better than the events of June 20, 2020: two groups gathered on opposite sides of the old courthouse, one armed defenders of a monument to the Confederacy, the other a crowd of protesters gathered to speak out against systemic patterns of racial violence and oppression.[16] These self-organizing groups in many ways defined arbitrarily by the amount of melatonin in their skin. Between them stood the historic courthouse, an embodiment of legal proceedings past, reverberating still today.

This is the ministry context into which I have been called to serve for the last three years. This is the social, economic, and political environment to which I have been called to order the life of the church, preside over the sacraments, and proclaim the Gospel. As a white heterosexual male, born and raised in the South, I can pass and be accepted by the defenders of The Lost Cause.[17] As a white heterosexual male, born and raised in the South, I will never truly understand the pain and suffering of those who have so often been unceremoniously cast as other, socially, economically, and politically. I can offer my empathy, solidarity, and my voice.

My attempts to address this divide from the pulpit, though well intended, lacked the gravitas of the circumstances by which I was surrounded. This intrinsic generational struggle played out once again in real time. At the Courthouse on June 20, 2020, it is quite possible that there were descendants present of those who had been there on August 17, 1961, or perhaps even some of the very same persons. I wonder sometimes how many of those before whom I stand on Sunday mornings, those to whom I serve the Sacraments and provide pastoral care, have their own personal stories of these events.

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[16] https://www.wcnc.com/article/news/local/demonstrations-monroe-confederate-monuments/275-03a803fd-d2c2-4f04-9266-7536231f3cbb

[17] Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Confederacy* (Konecky and Konecky Military Books, 1999).

Into this vortex I sought to bring not only the members of my congregations. I was also implicitly inviting generations—in some cases over two hundred years of local history, collective memories and experiences, and biblical preaching and teaching—into a conversation on ethnicity, equality, and what the Bible had to say. In the early days of my ministry here, I assumed my congregations and I shared a common appreciation and reverence for biblical authority. While our belief in biblical authority and inspiration may be shared, we do not share common theologies of interpretation. And though I am willing to agree to disagree, I found in my ministry context an unwillingness to engage in honest open-ended conversation. The prevalent binary system of thinking prevents an openness to anything other than the perceived one true method of reading and interpreting scripture faithfully.

In seeking to create space for the church to address divisive biblical and theological views about ethnicity that are polarizing the church today, I did not find a culturally diverse middle way of being present to each other in the life of the church. I am confident that such ways can be created, ways that enable Christian theological dialog.

Throughout much of my ministry here, I have been very aware of my own progressive views, as well as the familiarity of the surrounding culture, given that this context is very similar to the places where I was raised. The culture, the thought patterns, the worldview, all hauntingly brought to the fore my own childhood and adolescent memories. I have chosen in this ministry context not to pass, not to be silent, not to allow my thoughts and theological perspectives to remain safely and passively in the shadows. There has been a great freedom in claiming my identity, integrating myself within the daily life of ministry. In doing so, I conclude that my efforts have not been in vain. I have created safe spaces for those who are not of the majority, those whose voices are not heard and not necessarily welcome. I think of John Deese, member of

Prospect, who has thanked me for my efforts to engage in this difficult conversation. I think of the young adult who grew up in this community, in this church, who self identifies as gay, lives with his partner, and comes back to visit his mother when possible. I think of the mother whose daughter considered dating a black friend in high school, until she was told by her father that he would disown her if she followed through. I think of the mother of a daughter struggling with her sexual identity as well as depression and anxiety. When her daughter came out at last to her grandfather, who received her with unconditional love, the mother drove to my house to tell me in person. There was no one else in the community with whom she felt she could share the news.

My ministry to engage the majority in difficult conversations may not have had the results I had anticipated. My work resulted in something even better in the form of hope for the very people marginalized and silenced. For such is the kingdom of God. To God be the glory.

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Appendix 1

A 1.1 Excerpts from Interview with James Thompson on National Public Radio April 29, 2011[18]

> "We were playing with some friends over in the white neighborhood, chasing spiders and wrestling and stuff like that," James says.
>
> "One of the little kids suggested that one of the little white girls give us a kiss on the jaw," he says. "The little girl gave me a peck on the cheek, and then she kissed David on the cheek. So, we didn't think nothing of it. We were just little kids."

The girl told her parents of the kiss. Police were dispatched and the boys were arrested.

> "They uh... took us down in the bottom of the police station to a cell. And they had us handcuffed — they started beating us," James says. "They was beating us to our body, you know? They didn't beat us to the face, where nobody could see it; they just punched us all in the stomach, and back and legs. We was hollering and screaming. We thought they was gonna kill us."

James and David were sentenced to reform school until the age of 21 with no parole. James' sister Brenda shares what the family experienced while he was jailed.

> Remembering what life was like for the rest of the family while the authorities were holding James, Brenda says, "I remember that at night, you could see them burning crosses..."
>
> "Right there in the front yard?" Dwight asks.
>
> "Right there in the front yard," Brenda says. "And my mom and them, they would go out in the morning, and sweep bullets off our front porch."

A 1.2 Battle of Maxton Field

> Klan membership and operations in North Carolina increased after the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education that desegregated public schools. The Klan initiated a campaign of terror, seeking to reinforce Jim Crow laws that oppressed people of color, including American Indians in North and South Carolina. On October 5, 1957, James W. "Catfish" Cole, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan of South Carolina, organized a Klan rally in Monroe, North Carolina, which was disrupted by Union County's NAACP chapter.[19]

A 1.3 Freedom Riders travel to Monroe, North Carolina August 1961

> "Williams believed in armed self-defense and was often quoted from his impassioned 'violence meets violence' speech. He was 'at odds' with the NAACP and CORE and had

[18] https://www.npr.org/2011/04/29/135815465/the-kissing-case-and-the-lives-it-shattered
[19] https://www.ncdcr.gov/blog/2019/01/09/battle-maxton-field

publicly debated (in print) Rev. Martin Luther King on 'Violence vs. Non-Violence.'" (The Liberation, September and October 1959)

Two fellow Civil Rights activists took notice of all of this: Paul Brooks, a Freedom Rider and divinity student who, for a time, became a field representative for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC, Martin Luther King's organization), and James Forman, who would rise as a leader within this era and was most noted as turning around the struggling organization, SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee).

Intrigued by Williams and after an initial visit here in early August, they wanted to form a group and show their method of demonstrating in a non-violent way."[20]

A 1.4 Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker Thrown from Union County Courthouse Steps August 1961

Later in the day, SCLC's executive director, Wyatt Tee Walker, also paid a visit to the jail, and he too confirmed the movement's desire to get the Riders out of Monroe as soon as possible. Walker had only been in town for a few hours, but any doubts he might have harbored about the poisonous nature of race relations in Monroe had disappeared earlier in the afternoon during a confrontation with an enraged white supremacist. When Walker and two black reporters tried to enter the county courthouse, Vann Wickery, a towering three-hundred-pound restaurant manager, picked the diminutive SCLC leader up and threw him down a flight of concrete steps into a bed of ivy surrounding a granite Civil War monument. Picking himself up, Walker reclimbed the steps only to be thrown down a second time, and moments later a third. Finally, the police intervened, placing Wickery in handcuffs and carting him off to jail, where he was charged with public drunkenness and resisting arrest. In the end, Walker escaped serious injury and entered the courthouse, but the incident— especially the symbolism of Walker's landing place—quickly became a staple of movement lore.[21]

[20] http://monroeunioncountynchistorystuff.blogspot.com/2011/07/freedom-riders-in-monroe.html

[21]

Appendix 2

Bible Study Survey

The Wednesday night Bible study group at Prospect agreed to be surveyed for the project. Twelve surveys were distributed, to six male and six females, and of the twelve, ten surveys were completed and turned in, from five male and five females. There were no reasons given for the two surveys not returned. All ten participants are white. Age distribution ranges reflect the make-up of the congregation: four in their seventies, four in their sixties, one in their fifties, and one in their forties. Education levels are slightly higher than the average congregation member: six college degrees, one business school degree, two high school diplomas, and one did not answer. Overall this group comprises an accurate and representative demographic reflection of the two churches.

When asked what word or words come to mind regarding the Bible, 80 percent stated the "Word of God" or "God's Word." When asked which version of the Bible they prefer, 70 percent identified the NIV. I expected the KJV to be more highly represented. When asked how often they read the bible, 55 percent responded daily, 36 percent a few times a week, and 9 percent not very often.

The participants received the surveys and were given one week to complete and return them. The survey consisted of five open-ended questions and five multiple choice questions with the option to provide alternate answers as necessary.

In addition to the survey, the participants received the scripture passages to be discussed and an explanation of the project. Before we started the discussion, I explained that I would be taking notes only to capture content, and that anonymity would be maintained. We focused on three questions.

- Do you think of these passages from Scripture as the word of God? What it is about these passages that makes you name them (or to refuse to name them) as such?
- Do you believe they are literally true/that they should be taken literally? Why or why not? What does "literally" mean for you?
- What meaning (if any) do these passages have for you as a Christian (i.e., how do they shape your sense of what Christians believe and how they should act)?

The following pages are copies of the survey and the bible discussion questions participants were given to complete.

I'M CURIOUS TO KNOW MORE

This is a confidential and anonymous survey for a classwork project I am working on.

1. When you hear the word, Bible, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

2. What version of the Bible do you prefer to read or to hear read aloud? (Please circle one)

American Standard Version (ASV)	Living Bible (TLB)
Amplified Bible (AMP)	The Message (MSG)
Common English Bible (CEB)	New American Standard Bible (NASB)
Contemporary English Version (CEV)	New International Version (NIV)
Good News Translation (GNT)	New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
King James Version (KJV)	Other_____

3. Do you have a family Bible that has been handed down through the generations, perhaps with names and dates of family events? Or do you have a special Bible that you were given? If so, would you share briefly what these Bible's mean to you?

4. How often do you read and/ or study the Bible?

Daily A few times a week During Worship Not very often

5. What challenges or obstacles hinder your reading the Bible?

The language is hard to understand	I don't like to read
I find it intimidating	Making the time a priority
Learning disability (i.e. dyslexia)	Vision problems
I do not own a Bible	Other_____

6. In what ways have you changed as a result of reading the Bible?

7. In what ways has your understanding of the Bible changed as a result of reading the Bible?

8. What has been the most important encouragement for you to read the Bible?

Growing up in a family that read the Bible

A pastor mentor or teacher who encouraged or inspired me

An invitation to Bible Study

Participation in a Bible Reading Program

Other_____

9. Do you attend a Bible Study, Sunday School, or a Small Group?

If yes, how often?

If not, would you like to participate and what challenges keep you from participating?

10. The following verses are from Genesis Chapter 1, verses 1-2. Each reading is from different version of the Bible. Circle the one you enjoy reading the most.

A. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

B. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

C. First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

D. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

E. When God began creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of God brooding over the dark vapors.

Thank you for your time and willingness to share!

Bible Study Discussion **6 February 2019**

Pair 1	Pair 2	Pair 3
Genesis 1-3	Exodus 20-21	Joshua 2, 6-7
Luke 1-2	Matthew 5-7	Revelation 17-20

Read each passage carefully before you gather. Think about the following questions as the basis for your conversation:

- Do you think of these passages from Scripture as the word of God? What it is about these passages that makes you name them (or to refuse to name them) as such?

- Do you believe they are literally true/that they should be taken literally? Why or why not? What does "literally" mean for you?

- What meaning (if any) do these passages have for you as a Christian (i.e., how do they shape your sense of what Christians believe and how they should act)?

Friends,

Thank you for agreeing to participate!

The questions below ask for your thoughts about the Bible. As such, these are opinion statements, so please do not be afraid to be wrong! This project asks that I gather the opinions of a small group of church members who represent the diversity of the church. We will undoubtedly see some things differently, which is not only okay, it's the point!

A word about how your responses will be used. Both what you say in this questionnaire as well as comments during our small group meeting could be utilized in materials I prepare for the class. Your responses and information remain confidential.

Thank you for taking the time to do this! The questions and readings are on the next page. Enjoy thinking about how you understand the Bible.

Pastor Mark

Appendix 3

Excerpts from Interview with Bill Caddell, John Deese, and Travis Deese on June 15, 2020:

Bill Caddell: “My family has deep roots in the South. Like many who share the Black American experience, they moved north because they determined ‘we refuse to raise our families in that context of domestic terrorism.’ When asked to define domestic terrorism Bill replied, “A little thing we all know called Jim Crow.”

John Deese: “I’ve seen a little racism, some, not a lot. I went to school here, when Parkwood was integrated in sixth grade. My family and I have really been accepted here.”

Travis Deese: “I graduated from Parkwood, went to college at NC Central. It was there I learned who I was. Growing up here, going to Parkwood, it was always about being accepted.” When asked accepted by whom, Travis replied, “accepted by white folks.” “I want my children to embrace who they are now, and not feel the need to be accepted because they look different.”

Bill Caddell: “As a black person you are constantly aware that you are black.”

Mark Curtis: “I’ve always had the privilege to not have to think about my race.”

Bill Caddell: “When you are black in America, it is something you think about because being black you do move in these spaces where you are one of the few in a lot of cases… There are two sets of rules when I’m hanging with my white friends, for obvious reasons. I’m carrying more melanin than they are.”

Travis Deese: “Being taught pride was not something we were taught, because we were still trying to be accepted…Being a teacher, a dad, having white people I love, there is a tight rope walk. I have to be accepted on both sides. And there is a certain way I have to conduct myself on both sides to be accepted.”

Mark Curtis: “How do you respond to people who say, ‘I’m colorblind. I don’t see color. I treat everybody the same’?”

Bill Caddell: “It’s kind of a silly thing to say unless you are literally colorblind…it would be kind of crazy to say, you know, ‘I don’t see that you’re [black]… I think the sentiment behind it [is]: I’m not prejudiced.”

Mark Curtis: “Why do you have to say you’re colorblind if you’re not prejudiced?”

Bill Caddell: “Exactly. I prefer the term color conscious. I love all of you [Mark]. Active love. I don’t ignore parts of Mark because it makes me uncomfortable.”

Appendix 4

Excerpts from Conversation with Couple in my Office June 24, 2020

Person 1: “Mark, listen to yourself. You try to be so intentional with your words and your message—you were so focused on what you wanted to say that you forget the offering and the prayer concerns. The offering was an afterthought. How do you do that? The worship of God is what should be most important. When I come I expect a full worship service. Order. Certain things make up the service. But you allowed your message, your agenda to get in the way.”

Person 1: “Why read this? This is not a sermon. It was written in 1961 to seven white pastors. It is not relevant to us today. And I take offense to you comparing us or saying we are like the “white moderates” he is writing to. It is not applicable to us and our community.”

Person 1: “In scripture, how did they know who was gentile, Greek, slave, free, Syro-Phoenician, Moabite?”

Person 2: “There is no such thing as white privilege. At least not around here. My family was not privileged. My parents were share-croppers. They worked beside the blacks. We didn’t have anything handed to us. We worked for it. We earned it. We didn’t have any advantages. Everybody has access to the same opportunities.”

Person 1: “I really took offense to the way you talked about colorblind[ness]. Mark, you are so wrong. We raise our daughter to be colorblind. To not see color. To see people for who they are regardless of their race. My daughter has friends of all kinds. In her friend group there is a girl from Asia, a little girl with beautiful red hair, another with blond hair, and another who is African American. It doesn’t matter who they are or what the color of their skin [is]. And to have her pastor stand there and say we shouldn’t be colorblind, that we should see color is just emphasizing the differences. And we don’t need that.”

Appendix 5

Example of American Flag and Confederate Flag flying together in my ministry context.