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Ryan A. Starr Date

Halibut for the Homeless:
How the Gift of Wasted Food Fostered Friendships in a Local Congregation

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Abstract

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Ryan A. Starr

Friendship and partnership language are not new to the church. They are also not new to the practice of ministry within most congregations. What is uncommon is the deliberate partnership of a church with a corporation. The thrust of my project represents an effort to lead the congregation to find a new mode of ministry that partners with our corporate neighbors by finding shared purpose in our community. A church and a grocery store collaborated to feed the homeless population in Memphis, TN. During a three-year process of systematizing, transporting, cooking, and serving unsold food, Kingsway Christian Church discovered the value of corporate partnerships. The church also discovered a unique problem: the gift of more donated food than could cook themselves. To best steward the leftover food, the local congregation chose to partner with local schools and non-profits, until nearly all the food was distributed. Through employing a sociological model known as participatory action research, the church discovered practical lessons for ministry. Namely, that they did not need to manufacture ministry somewhere else in Memphis, but only needed to recalibrate their thinking to see their immediate neighbors as partners in ministry. The paper finds that a similar model of ministry occurs as the early church started in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Acts scholars refer to this ministry expansion as “geographic centering.” Karl Barth notices a similar model of expansion between neighbors. He suggests establishing partnerships with those (biologically and geographically) closest before working outwards towards more civic and distant relationships. Lastly, the paper proposes that using vectors can more faithfully measure success than traditional forms of gathering and evaluating data. Measuring the direction of a ministry (e.g. towards or away from God) provides the wider church with an alternative, and often more theological mode, of measuring success.

Halibut for the Homeless:
How the Gift of Wasted Food Fostered Friendships in a Local Congregation

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Introduction

Just in time, the table was set. The flowers were arranged. The halibut was on the grill. With snowflakes falling outside, fourteen homeless guests filed into our church where an unanticipated feast awaited. Eight men and six women were prepared to eat a warm meal; instead, a three-course dinner was served. The appetizer consisted of a spinach salad mixed with fresh pomegranate seeds. The main course offered a choice of freshly-caught halibut or swordfish with asparagus and roasted potatoes. Organic blackberries and bananas comprised dessert. It was the first night that Kingsway Christian Church used unsold food from a neighboring grocery store to feed our homeless guests. As we were counting hands for seconds, I stepped back from the table, and thought, "There's more to this than '*just* feeding the homeless.'"[1]

The feast was made possible by an arrangement between a corporate grocery store and Kingsway Christian Church. During a parking lot negotiation, a creative solution was discovered together. The church would lower the parking fees, and the grocery store would donate their unsold food for Kingsway to cook more nutritious meals for the homeless guests staying at the church. The process of collecting, cooking, and distributing the donated food became a fluid and fruitful ministry in the life of our church.

The thrust of my project represents an effort to lead the congregation to find a new mode of ministry that partners with our corporate neighbors by finding shared purpose in our community. After discussing the history and development of my project, I will share the findings of the work and research in three sections: geography, friendship, and *epectasy*.

[1] Wendell Berry makes a similar observation that practitioners (and farmers) must fight against the notion that we are "only feeding people's bodies." See Wendell Berry, "Health is Membership," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), 146.

The geography section traces the project's journey from its simplistic beginning to its meaningful end. In this section, I will discuss the implementation of my project, which begins on a small scale with a single church and expands to multiple schools and nonprofits. Initially, I hoped for 25 other churches to join us in our efforts. Ultimately, we discovered the need to establish a working ecclesial-corporate model at Kingsway before scaling the idea to other non-profits. In the end, the expansion of the project moved geographically outwards – from our closest neighbors to those farthest away. Scholars refer to "geographic centering" and "geographic sequencing" in an effort to describe the outward trajectory of the early church as it moves from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.[2]

The friendship section addresses a shift from food to relationships. In the friendship part of the paper, I will engage Karl Barth's treatment of "Near and Distant Neighbors."[3] In a less familiar part of *Church Dogmatics,* Barth uses a tripartite structure of human relationships to highlight the unique and invaluable importance of friendships both in the church and in the world. Although intricate and involved, Barth's insistence that friendship begins at "home" with those nearest us and progresses geographically to those most distant gives theological grounding to the practical discoveries of section one. I will place Barth's "Near and Distant Neighbors" in conversation with the geographical and theological lessons discussed previously.

The third section engages patristic theology. More specifically, I will use the Cappadocian understanding of *epectasy* to measure the success of the project.[4] Utilizing the

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[2] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles,* Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 13-14.

[3] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation,* vol. 3 of *Church Dogmatics,* ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley et al. (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 54.3: 275-313.

[4] Warren Smith, a leading Cappadocian scholar, defines *epectasy* as "the soul's eternal movement into God's infinite being." See Warren J. Smith. *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 2004), 202.

writings of Gregory of Nyssa, I will make the case that the Cappadocian pursuit of perfection is dynamic in nature, and vectored. This provides a timely and needed corrective to western churches that can find themselves satisfied and satiated with the present state of the church. I hope my decision to measure more in vectors/direction than in numbers encourages a healthier model to study and evaluate success in the modern church. The appendix contains a practical exercise I have designed to help congregations move from the well-intentioned work of charity to life-giving work of cultivating friendship.

History and Development of the Project

Located in Germantown, TN, Kingsway Christian Church is a white, suburban congregation with a membership of 150 congregants. Twelve years ago, the church moved from the city of Memphis to a commercial district, with virtually no traditional neighbors or neighborhoods. Since that time, Kingsway has struggled to find its identity in a new location.

I knew when I began as the senior minister in 2012 that our church needed to expand its mission efforts in the community. Propitiously, a program called Room in the Inn (RITI) was just beginning in Memphis. Room in the Inn organizes local churches to feed and shelter homeless guests each night of the week. When I called Lisa Anderson, the RITI director, she told me they needed a congregation to host on Monday nights. For the first two years we cobbled together enough food and volunteers to provide adequate hospitality. However, the volunteers wanted to be more than adequate. We just did not know how.

The change we desired began in a seemingly unrelated meeting – a parking lot negotiation meeting between Whole Foods management and Kingsway Christian Church pastors. Whole Foods's lawyers notified our church that they would be building a grocery store adjacent

to our property. They expressed a need for more parking and requested a meeting to negotiate an equitable agreement.

As a pastor, I was rather bored by the whole proceeding but attempted to act professional and concerned. The grocery store manager, Lucy, felt the same way. In that final negotiation, Lucy and I wandered into the adjacent parlor and shared in an epiphany. A confluence of timing, opportunity, and the willingness to work together made this new endeavor possible. Or perhaps, in more theological terms, a theophany occurred: rather than argue about parking spots and money we suddenly realized we should work together the help our city.

"Lucy," I asked, "what happens to the unsold food?"

"We do our best not to waste unsold food. But I would love for us to do more for the environment."

I followed up: "Clearly, much of the produce, meats, and fish get thrown away though?"

"Yes, of course," she confirmed.

That's when I took a risk and made a nascent proposal to birth a corporate-ecclesial partnership:

"You know every Monday night we work with a homeless ministry called Room in the Inn to house homeless guests at Kingsway. We feed them a hot meal, then offer them showers, and a safe, warm place to sleep. What if we cook and serve them the food you all can't sell?"

"Of course, we can do that," she responded. "We'd be happy to."

In this exchange, our problem became our partner when we began thinking of Whole Foods as an asset to our ministry instead a deficit.[5]

[5] John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Skokie, IL: ACTA Publications, 1993), 6.

John McKnight has spent his life thinking about asset-based ministry. As the forerunner to Asset Based Community Development models, McKnight transformed the non-profit world. "First and foremost, [McKnight] asserts that community is built on focusing on people's gifts rather than their deficiencies."[6] McKnight's subversive approach to community development is instructive to ecclesial development as well. He offers imaginative ways to "turn local liabilities into community building material."[7] Kretzmann and McKnight ask a question of community organizers that probes at the heart of my ministry at Kingsway: "if maintenance and survival are the best we can provide, what sense can it make to invest in the future?"[8]

During the implementation of my project I employed an emerging social science technique known as participatory action research. Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson contest, "Whereas some research approaches have suggested that researchers keep their passions and themselves out of the process, we are suggesting that the questions we pursue in action research are often related to our own quandaries and passions."[9] Through action research, I discovered the beauty of working *with* people instead of studying them. Valsa Koshy adds: "there are opportunities [in action research] for theory to emerge from research rather than always follow a previously formulated theory."[10]

Stepping back from the negotiating table, I could now see that Kingsway was no longer in search of a way to help "out there." Instead, we were positioned to minister "right here."

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[6] Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 12.

[7] Kretzmann and McKnight, *Building Communities*, 311.

[8] Ibid., 5.

[9] Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 69.

[10] Valsa Koshy, *Action Research for Improving Practice: A Practical Guide* (London: Paul Chapman Pub., 2005), 21.

Frequently, we would complain about our lack of neighbors, and the lack of a traditional neighborhood in which to do ministry. Focusing on the deficit prevented us from seeing the unique qualities the property offered. The community development field refers to this concept as "physical capital."[11] More specifically, Green and Haines' insights on physical and human capital flipped the narrative from "negotiating against" a corporation to "negotiating with" our neighbors.[12] Our greatest asset, for the time being, was literally across our own parking lot.

I underestimated how much food Whole Foods would donate to us. I also underestimated how difficult it would be to cook and use *all* of it responsibly. Shortly after the agreement was made, I trained several of our Room in the Inn volunteers to collect the food on Sundays after church and invent recipes overnight to cook on Monday evenings. The simple act of gathering and cooking groceries helped our church see "others as brothers" and strangers as sisters.[13] Christine Pohl contends, "when the larger society disregards or dishonors certain persons, small acts of respect and welcome are potent far beyond themselves. They point to a different system of valuing and an alternate model of relationships."[14] An unexpected relationship with a corporation helped Kingsway embody an alternate "model of relationship" with our corporate neighbor and homeless community alike.

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[11] Gary Paul Green and Anna Haines, *Asset Building and Community Development*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., 2012), 6. Other scholars refer to physical capital as "physical capacities" and "physical assets." Cf: Kretzmann and McKnight, *Building Communities*, 349.

[12] For a fuller treatment of "physical and human capital," see Green and Haines, *Asset Building*, 159-188.

[13] Emmanuel Katangole, "Beyond Racial Reconciliation," in *The Blackwell Companion for Christian Ethics*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 78.

[14] Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 61.

Geography

Before Kingsway could spread the idea of partnering with a corporation to other churches, we first had to implement it at Kingsway. This meant we needed to do the blue-collar work of building trust one person at a time – both at the grocery store and among the church volunteers. Secondly, we had to systematize a weekly schedule to collect, transport, and cook the food. Perhaps the greatest lesson we learned was the need to implement the program first at Kingsway. Then, when we had our feet under us, we started working with other organizations to feed more people and waste less food. Kingsway had become, albeit unintentionally, the geographic center of a corporate-ecclesial relationship that would eventually move from the suburbs to the city.

Luke Timothy Johnson notices a similar paradigm for ministry: "The geographical centering of Luke's story in Jerusalem and the literary pattern of the acceptance or rejection of God's prophet converge in the account of the founding of the Christian community."[15] The book of Acts serves as a continuation of Luke's gospel as it traces the geographic unfolding of the early church from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth.

The "geographic sequencing is a rough outline of the book [of Acts]," and also provides a geographic mapping for my project.[16] Applying Johnson's understanding of geographic mapping, I will now offer a brief narrative tracing the movements of my project. The discussion will start at home in Jerusalem, then work out to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The literary and structural movements of Acts mirrors that of my project.

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[15] Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 13-14.

[16] Ibid., 26-27.

The first month of implementation taught us that we could only reasonably use a couple heaping shopping carts of food. The rest we had to throw away – as was the agreement – to assure that no one would consume unsafe food. Shortly thereafter, a Kingsway member who had also been a chef in the Navy said:

"Pastor Ryan, why do our guests leave without a hot breakfast in the mornings?"

"Honestly, Jerry, I should have thought of it, but I didn't. Do you think we can do it?"

Jerry said, "We already have all we need for tomorrow morning in these groceries we're about to throw away after dinner. You can put anything in an omelet."

Kingsway quickly became a favorite Room in the Inn destination solely based on Jerry's willingness to rise at 4:15 am and start cooking a full breakfast every Tuesday, every week. Furthermore, he helped us create what he called a "navy style kitchen" to efficiently make sack lunches from the deli meats, peanut butter, jellies, fruit, and about anything else we could cram into a large brown paper bag for them to take for the day. Jerry's efforts helped the pastor to understand the need to be the best host right where we were. It took about five months to systematize Kingsway's lone use of the groceries for the homeless. As Jerusalem is the geographic center for the early church, Kingsway represents the geographic center for this project.

As time continued, I realized the project was becoming larger than myself. I could not accomplish the goal alone. Success required getting church members, non-church volunteers, and grocery store employees to work together. To respect their privacy, I will not use their names in this paper, but without the help of a store manager, two backroom workers, a brilliant butcher, and a fishmonger willing to fillet fish any way we needed, none of this was possible.

Room in the Inn runs in the winter months from the beginning of November to the end of March. During the summer of 2015, the project moved from Jerusalem to Judea. I met Kathleen Kruczek, the founder of Manna House, in mid-town Memphis. In 2011 she quit her job, divorced her husband, and bought a home that she turned into a homeless hospitality center. At first it served as a place for homeless guests to take showers and drink coffee on the front porch. Eventually, it became the genesis for donating food to other non-profits. Kathleen and Manna House were happy recipients of all the leftover coffee, sugar, and creamer I could garner for them. That summer, two private schools that help children with disabilities also started receiving fresh fruit and groceries to improve the quality of the lunches they could serve.[17] Manna House and the two schools represent the first geographical movement away from the church. Thus, they became the project's metaphorical Judea.

While at a running group on a frigid December night in 2016, I shared my project idea with a couple of running partners. Billie said, "You know every Wednesday night some of us combine with some seminary students [at Memphis Theological Seminary] to deliver warm burritos on our bikes to every homeless person we can find downtown."

The seminary group calls their work "The Urban Bicycle Ministry." The logistics proved complicated. Yet, we formed a network of concerned mothers to pick up the food in the suburbs. After school, they would cook burritos with their children and deliver it to Manna House for the bike-riders to hand out that evening. The lesson I learned from Jerry proved helpful again: just as "anything can go in an omelet," anything can also go in a burrito. The Urban Burrito Ministry, with its further geographic movement, began to look a lot like Samaria.

[17] Memphis Oral School for the Deaf, which is adjacent to Kingsway, started a community garden with leftover seeds and plants. Whereas, another learning center, a few miles west of Kingsway, supplemented their student's lunches with fresh produce.

Then, in the winter of 2016, Lisa was given an abandoned building downtown by the adjacent United Methodist Church. The building is being renovated to serve as a hospitality center during the day for the homeless. The center will have bathrooms, showers, and a clothes closet. The building that used to be a carpenter's union building is now called "The Carpenter House." Although the distance is a bit far to receive regular produce, the Carpenter House represents a fifth ministry partner to use the unsold food to feed homeless people. Although still in progress, the Carpenter House is beginning to look a lot like "the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8, NRSV)

Noticeably missing in this litany of participants is another church. In the first year of the project I shared my vision with seven other churches. I had hoped, originally, to connect all 25 churches participating in Room in the Inn with a nearby or neighborhood grocery store. I discovered that, while segments of Memphis contain some of our country's largest food deserts, none of the churches hosting Room in the Inn do.[18] Thereby, logically, each participating church should be able to set up a similar system to use discarded groceries in the same way Kingsway does. The reality was that no church replicated Kingsway's model, or my vision. I was discouraged it didn't work. The reasons were valid but too numerous to list here.

Trey Hall suggests that preachers, practitioners, and professors are called to guide the church away from a ubiquitous position of avoiding failure at all cost. He argues that "in spite of that divine offer and animation, the worship life of many churches across the theological and denomination spectrum seems quite failure-avoidant, consciously or unconsciously constructed

[18] "Kenneth Reardon, a professor and director of the graduate program of City and Regional Planning at the University of Memphis, discovered that only seven out of 77 low-income census tracks in urban Memphis have access to a full-service supermarket." Cited in Jennifer Johnson Backer, "Food Desert Oasis" *Memphis Daily News*, July 8, 2014, accessed December 12, 2017, https://www.memphisdailynews.com/news/2013/jul/8/food-desert-oasis.

to abstain [from taking risks]."[19] The willingness to try, re-evaluate, and try again is at the heart of the research action model. From these realizations, I recalibrated my thinking to begin seeing the value in fostering friendships right where I was.

Adam Clayton Powell, a champion of civil rights in the 1920-1930's, once preached: "Every New Testament church must find the real needs of the people in the community in which it is located and do its utmost to supply needs in the name and in the spirit of the Lord Jesus."[20] Jennifer Ayers promotes a language of "groundedness" in ministry that similarly informed my project. [21] Local needs, local resources, and local awareness mattered at Pentecost and matter today.

The project that set out to better steward donated food moved beyond the walls of Kingsway Christian Church. While it's both tempting and expected at this point in the discussion to declare precisely how many homeless people were fed how many pounds of food on how many nights, there is no realistic manner in which to measure those numbers. Before I address methods of measurement, I will now turn to Karl Barth's treatment of fellowship which gives theological grounding to my project and proposal.

Barth's Near and Distant Neighbors

Karl Barth's massive work, *Church Dogmatics,* is divided into four volumes. He begins with the doctrine of the word of God, then shifts to the doctrine of God. In the third volume,

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[19] Trey Hall, "Failure Makes Worship Good," *Liturgy* 29, no. 2 (Jan 2014): 21.

[20] Adam Clayton Powell quoted in Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Wace, TX: Baylor UP, 2014), 98.

[21] Jennifer R. Ayers. *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology* (Wace, TX: Baylor UP, 2013). Ayers treatment of "grounded practical theology" maintains that "food requires knowing, touching, and caring about real people, the earth, and its wondrously diverse cultures." See p. 10.

Barth addresses the doctrine of creation and concludes with his doctrine of reconciliation. Contained within the doctrine of creation is a rarely used section entitled "Near and Distant Neighbors." Barth's writing in this section encourages the church to not be content with only the proximate relationships (near neighbor) that come easily. The church should also seek to develop relationships beyond its own church grounds (distant neighbor).

In this section, Barth gives a theological voice to the practical lessons I learned while implementing my project. He calls his approach an exercise in "theological anthropology."[22] Perhaps the majority of ecclesial endeavors amount to theological anthropology; this project certainly does. As the chapter unfolds, it reads like a companion volume, or perhaps a theological commentary to my real-world work.

As prologue to our academic and ecclesial work, Barth reminds us: "Implicitly, dogmatics must always be ethics as well. If we had not come to realise and see this in all those elements of a Christian knowledge of creation, we should have been indulging in empty speculation and therefore engaged in futile labour."[23] In the midst of a rather complex and lengthy argument about freedom found in God, Barth pauses to remind us all we are engaged in more than a rhetorical or intellectual exercise. It can be easy in this work to get lost in theoretical concepts.

Barth warns pastors and theologians that theology is meant for more than scholarship. He urges us not to forget the whole reason we became ministers in the first place. I was touched to learn that, prior to his work as a professor, Barth spent nearly ten years serving as a parish priest in a working-class town in Germany. This section also serves as a corrective to pastors engaged

[22] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, 54.3: 109.

[23] Ibid., 28.

in the academy. Barth reminds us that the divine telos is not ultimately written in books but written onto souls. Thus, as we engage Barth's 54th proposition, might we hear the echo of practical and not simply intellectual theology.

The writings to which we now turn in "Near and Distant Neighbor" are predicated on his proposition that reads:

> As God the Creator calls man to Himself, He also directs him to his fellow-man. The divine command affirms in particular that in the encounter of man and woman, in the relationship between parents and children and *outwards from near to distant neighbours*, man may affirm, honour and enjoy the other with himself and himself with the other.[24]

This paragraph follows a compelling argument for Christians to begin the work of their faith within their own souls. Confession and prayer are the beginning points for freedom in God.

Once Christians have tended to the proper state of their own spiritual life, they are prepared to move outwards to help others. Barth understands our work to become "covenant-partner[s] of God" as that which prepares us "for being in encounter with his fellow-man."[25] The outward movement from the self to others is laid out in three concentric circles, or spheres. The first sphere of fellowship is "man and woman," referring to husband and wife. The second is "parents and children" and the third is "near and distant neighbor." Just as the "freedom before God" section moves from the inner to outer parts of prayer, human relationships move from the most biologically "fundamental" relationship (i.e. male/female) towards the next sphere of parent/child. Lastly, relationships press towards the outermost level of "near then far neighbors."[26] This movement from "freedom before God" which constitutes the inner work of one's own soul is a necessary precursor to "freedom in fellowship."

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[24] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, 54.3: 109. Emphasis mine.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 110.

Barth never uses the word friendship in this section. He does, however, define fellowship with others: "[God] calls him [humanity] to find himself by affirming the other, to know joy by comforting the other, and self-expression by honouring the other."[27] Partnership language commonly occurs in Barth's discussion of neighbors. Some of the more common phrases include: "covenant partner,"[28] "fellowship with others,"[29] "in company,"[30] "Christian community,"[31] and "being in relationship with near and distant neighbours."[32] I contest that the mélange of partnership language could easily be called "friendship" in the modern day. The Barthian fellowship and partnership language evoked an experience of "friendship" that I encountered while implementing my project. During my project, relationships often started to accomplish a task, and eventually moved beyond pragmatism to genuine friendship.

The story of Jimmy is an apt example. At the beginning of the project, I would go alone to the backroom of Whole Foods to fill up three shopping carts with groceries. Then, I would push them to my car in the Whole Foods parking lot and put them in my trunk. Then, I would drive 30 seconds to Kingsway's parking lot and reverse the process—unloading the groceries bag-by-bag. The process was tedious. It took probably an hour each week. A homeless guest named Jimmy thought there was a better way.

Jimmy yelled across the church parking lot, "Hey, preacher man, come here. I've got something for you."

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[27] Ibid., 109.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 293.

[31] Ibid. 137.

[32] Ibid., 277.

"What's that, Jimmy?"

"You know all those groceries you haul into your car from the grocer and drive over to the church and carry in forever?"

"Yes. It's great, isn't it?"

"Of course, we love the food. But listen; it doesn't need to be that hard … just do what we all [homeless guests] do."

"What's that, Jimmy?"

"Go steal a shopping cart and push it over to the church, right down the road, into the church kitchen, and unload it all at once."

Of course, as a preacher, I could not just go steal a shopping cart, but I could ask for one. So, I asked the manager, and she said, "Why don't you take three and just bring them back each week to get more food?"

When Jimmy said, "Steal a shopping cart" and the manager said, "Sure, take three," I realized not only was a problem solved, but a friendship had progressed through mutual trust. Jimmy's idea was helpful and something I never would have considered. Although unorthodox, Jimmy's story represents a fitting example of participatory action research.[33] Jimmy ceased being the deficit and became the asset. Instead, by working with and listening to Jimmy, an idea that germinated on the streets of downtown Memphis transformed a ministry in suburban Germantown.

Eventually, Jimmy came back to me and said, "Hey preacher man."

"Yes, Jimmy?"

[33] Koshy, *Action Research for Improving Practice*, 21.

"You know how the real nice church ladies wash all the sheets and blankets for us and then you carry them up the stairs load-by-load in laundry baskets?"

I smiled, and said, "Ah-ha, I should put them in the shopping carts after we unload the groceries and use the elevator."

Jimmy brimmed with endearing joy, and replied, "You're learning, preacher-man. You're learning to think like us."

At some point during these ostensibly pragmatic endeavors, the "work" together turned into "friendship" together. We forgot that I was the preacher and he was the homeless man. Instead, there was a mutuality that I doubt either of us set out to make happen; it just did. The theological question is how?

Rollin Ramsaran's writing resonated with my experience with Jimmy and the shopping cart. Ramsaran maintains that both reciprocity and equality form the bedrock of ancient friendship. He posits:

> Friendship as a Greco-Roman social convention found its greatest expression among landed, wealthy, aristocratic patrons. Friendship was built on reciprocity, whether in the form of gift-giving, hospitality, or political support … Friendship was viewed as that which took place among equals.[34]

Barth also affirms that Christian partnership/fellowship requires honoring the other—a belief that there is worth in the other is necessary, be it a far or near neighbor. When we fail to value the "other," distant neighbors stay distant.

"The problem of near and distant neighbors is … the problem of language."[35] For Barth, language is a key barrier to friendship. But the problem does not begin with how we speak, the

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[34] Rollin Ramsaran, "Who Is the True Friend? Lukan Friendship as Paradigm for the Church," *Leaven* 5, no. 2 (Jan 1999): 25.

[35] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, 54.3: 289.

origin instead lies in the desires of our hearts. Barth's purpose for each of us is to see ourselves as irrevocably bound to all of humanity. Otherwise, we are acting in a form of inhumanity. Stephanie Mar Brettman maintains, "By distant neighbors, Barth means the wider humanity to which he and his people are also bound."[36] We have to cultivate and see the constructed "other" as equal in the eyes of God – regardless of their relative distance from ourselves or our home.[37]

The second step in helping to see the distant neighbor as a near neighbor is sincerely listening to them. Barth implores Christians to stop approaching people different from them in an *a priori* state of negativity.[38] Instead of approaching someone with a different dialect, language, or country with suspicion, start from a place of genuine hope and curiosity. When we fail to start from a place of openness towards what might be possible with another person, Barth calls this the entering of "a prison for ourselves."[39] I might call it, in concert with Barth, sin. And where there is willful sin, humans cannot experience "freedom in fellowship."

When our inner posture is one of openness, we can hear the other. In a great and needed line, Barth reminds the modern world there is nothing "sacrosanct" about our motherlands and mother tongue.[40] Starting with a transformed desire and moving to a posture of non-judgmental listening prepares one to speak. But when we speak, Barth advocates that we speak to others,

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[36] Stephanie Mar Brettman, *Theories of Justice: A Dialogue with Karol Wojtyla and Karl Barth* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2014), 147.

[37] Katangole, *Beyond Racial Reconciliation,* 78-79.

[38] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation,* 54.3: 279.

[39] Ibid., 281.

[40] Ibid., 279.

"Only the best, and not therefore random and shapeless chatter but cultivated speech, will suffice in relation to what is required."[41]

We cannot let differences master our lives together. Barth avers, "The command of God must be master, and all historical interpretations and notions, all other considerations, all economic, political, social, cultural and even religious evaluations of the situation must be mastered and not try to play the master."[42] When the far is brought near, friendship makes the possibility of a new creation possible. The intended expression of the "image of God" is what Barth quite beautifully calls, "the deepest and final basis on the form of the divine command" to be in fellowship one with another.[43] Our calling as humans (and especially as ministers) is to overcome self-imposed barriers that deter friendship.

Similar to the geographic mapping in Acts, Barth sees the doctrine of creation as unfolding in concentric circles. He suggests starting at "home" and moving to the "outermost parts of the world."[44] Barth advocates first figuring out who we are before God and being at home in our own skin. Once peace is established in our own "homes," we can move to other locations. This movement, according to Barth, "is rightly understood as a teleological divine purpose, and how it is recognized in the form of the corresponding orientation *from the near to the distant, the narrow sphere to the wider*."[45] Further, Barth points out that Christian fellowship begins at creation and runs through the manger, cross, and resurrection towards the giving of the

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[41] Ibid., 280.

[42] Ibid., 286.

[43] Ibid., 110.

[44] Ibid., 281.

[45] Ibid., 313. Emphasis mine.

Spirit at Pentecost.[46] Barth comments that "this is possible only as we execute the movement" from those nearest to those furthest. "The movement leads us relentlessly, however, from the narrower sphere to the wider, from our own people to other human peoples."[47]

God's created order beckons us to be at home within our own souls before perfecting the souls of another. This is demonstrated in his insistence that near and distant neighbors can never be separate spheres, but only one in which our teleological and even eschatological aim is to obscure the line between near and distant. The effort to bring God's people together is the work and fulfillment of creation through Christian fellowship, which I have described also as friendship. It is unlikely that Barth thought this line could ever be completely erased. Yet, the effort to move creation into a closer relationship with God and one another is a worthwhile endeavor.

Barth revealed the mistake in my original plan to convince 25 other churches to implement the same system at their home that worked so well at Kingsway (our home). My desire was correct, but I was not listening. I tried to impose a theoretical model of ministry onto other churches before building relationships with their leaders and stakeholders.

Another hurdle was my effort to "measure" the amount of food saved. This did not work either. The Whole Foods workers and management had no reason and no motivation to help me track these numbers. Furthermore, there was a risk that collecting these measurements could even jeopardize corporate profits if the amount of waste was somehow published or made public. Once I understood the corporate goal to make profits is intrinsically different than my goal to

[46] Ibid., 312.

[47] Ibid., 283.

save food, my project started to take shape. It did not happen by working harder, but through listening more closely. John Paul Lederach advocates: "Watch carefully right where you are."[48]

Green and Haines trace the development of the hub and spoke corporate model in the early 1980s and propose it as an effective organizing principle for non-profits. Indeliberately, I formed a hub-and-spoke model for which I became the hub that connected schools, churches, and non-profits to fresh produce. [49] Unwittingly, I became more of a coach and connecter than the one doing all the work. As more non-profits used the unsold food, there became far less for Kingsway to select from. This created an unexpected problem for Kingsway – in that sometimes we have far less food for Room in the Inn because it has already been cooked and served in other parts of Memphis.[50] A problem, albeit an enviable one, was created.

The interconnectedness of my project started to draw people together in organic ways I had not anticipated. During the span of this project, Kingsway added three additional congregations to worship on our campus. The extra people created enough extra trash that we could no longer fit it in the one dumpster. When I shared this with a backroom worker at Whole Foods, she commented, "Just break down all the cardboard from your campus, bring it to us in a shopping cart, and we'll smash it and recycle it for you." Listening to underrepresented voices helped not only the environment, but Kingsway's budget as well.

The church saved $1400 a year, and the cardboard from two schools and four congregations is no longer wasted.[51] Herr and Anderson maintain that these "participatory

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[48] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 104.

[49]Green and Haines, *Asset Building,* 128-131.

[50] Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*, 116.

[51] Number generated in March of 2017 by Diane Laird, financial secretary of Kingsway Christian Church. $1400 was estimated to be the approximate cost per year of adding an additional dumpster on the campus.

structures" promote imaginative solutions from the "bottom-up."[52] If pressed, Barth might distill Christian friendship as humanity moving relentlessly closer to God by moving continuously closer to one another. Barth concludes:

> [W]e do not have here a constant determination of man whether in terms of creation, salvation or eschatology. That a man is in this place rather than that by language, locality and history, that he belongs to one people and not another, that *this way leads from this proximity to that distance*, is a disposition which he may regard, honour and accept as a work of God.[53]

Unlike the first two spheres of fellowship, the third sphere of near and distant neighbor operates with fluidity. The movement of friendship seems limitless. No two friendships are the same – there are endless pathways for those far away to find one another in Christian fellowship.

Cappadocian Understanding of *Epectasy*

Traditional forms of measurement proved inadequate for this project. In his book on the intersection of food and faith, Norman Wirzba warns the church against forcing corporate models of measurement onto spiritual matters. He calls the practice, "the degradations of utilitarian calculations."[54] I want to explore the possibility of measuring with a mathematical *concept* rather than mathematical *integers*. To capture the spiritual nature of movement, I propose using the concept of vectors. Given that my homiletical training far outweighs my mathematical abilities, I am merely borrowing the *idea* of vectors – not proclaiming any precise mathematical parallels. Thus, my working definition for vector will be that which has a fixed starting point and moves continually in an infinite direction. Using the directionality of vectors

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[52] Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*, 116-118.

[53] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, 54.3: 293. Emphasis mine.

[54] Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011), 182.

instead of the concreteness of integers shifts the church away from a corporate model of measuring success in favor of a more ecclesial model.[55]

Measuring friendship is harder than measuring food. Kathleen Cahalan clarifies, "Results (or outputs) are products produced by or events that take place from project activities; impact (or outcomes) describe what happens to people by virtue of their participation in project activities and results."[56] Cahalan's definitions helped me delineate my project into two distinct fields for measurement: food and friendship. Food was simple to measure – at first, it was all wasted; in the end, almost none is wasted. But how does one measure friendship?

Herr and Anderson notice this pattern in other research action projects.[57] They encourage researchers to ask the question, "successful for whom?"[58] In projects like this one, success depends on the grocery store, the church, and the homeless guests all mutually benefitting. Herr and Anderson maintain that "outcome validity also acknowledges the fact that rigorous action research, rather than simply solving a problem, forces the researcher to reframe the problem in a more complex way, often leading to a new set of questions or problems."[59] Instead of seeing my initial hypothesis and proposals as failure, research action theories gave me permission to re-envision what success looks like.

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[55] I am unaware of any scholars writing about the similarities of Karl Barth and Gregory of Nyssa on this topic. However, I want to submit that they are (perhaps unwittingly) similar in their language of movement that drives humanity closer to one another and to God.

[56] Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Projects that Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 16.

[57] Herr and Anderson recommend that "not only the participants, but the researchers/practitioners themselves must be open to reorienting their view of reality as well as their view of their roll." See Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*, 69.

[58] Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*, 68.

[59] Ibid., 68.

Instead of forcing a round peg in a square hole, I realized the need to re-evaluate my strategy to accomplish my goal of being the best possible stewards of the food. The answer to my problem had already begun to take root. I needed to focus more on friendships and assets, rather than the frustration of barriers out of my control. In short, only Kingsway could be Kingsway. Barth consistently reminds us all, individually and corporately, "we must begin where we are."[60] We could not artificially force our model onto other ministries. We could, however, inspire others.

Embedded in the field of Cappadocian theology, is a narrow yet provocative study of *epectasy*. The word is used only once in scripture in Phil. 3:13: "I press on (ἐπέκτασις) toward the goal of the prize in Christ."[61] Smith credits Jean Daniélou as being the theologian to first derive the term from "the verb *epekteinomai*."[62] Scholars struggle with how best to translate this distinctly Pauline word. Some options include: striving towards, pressing on, moving in the direction of, and straining towards that which lies ahead.[63]

Gregory of Nyssa, in his classic work, *The Life of Moses,* explores a large number of Biblical images and metaphors related to *epectasy*. In a key section entitled "Eternal Progress," Nyssa comments that "the soul rises ever higher and will always make its flight yet higher—by its desire of the heavenly things straining ahead for what is still to come, as the Apostle says."[64] The Cappadocian teaching is based on the concept of perpetual movement. The human pursuit of

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[60] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation,* 54.3: 279.

[61] Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 105.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 103-106; 124-138.

[64] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses,* trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 113.

God is steadily straining and striving towards the perfect image of God, but none of us ever fully arrives because God is infinite.

Nyssa continues annotating the account of Jacob's ladder: "Once having set foot on the ladder which God set up, he continually climbed to the step above and never ceased to rise higher, because he always found a step higher than the one he had attained."[65] We can always move closer to God, for we never fully arrive.

Paul Blowers, in his book on the development of creation theology, remarks: "Indeed nature is fulfilled precisely by the infinite '*epectasy*,' the self-transcending progress of the person" towards the mystery of the divine.[66] Although it seems unlikely that Barth used Nyssa's works directly in *Dogmatics,* he does invoke a Cappadocian-like metaphor fitting to any conversation about *epectasy*. Barth writes that any language pertaining to the nature of God "involves a *centripetal motion*. In it we are always on the way from one point to another."[67] Barth's centripetal, or literally "center-seeking" concept is reflective of Cappadocian and Barthian theology.

The Cappadocian teachings and Barth's notions have wide-reaching implications for the church. I want to propose combining the *epectasy* and vectors into a single concept. In such that, *epectasy* encourages continual movement and vectors emphasize a constant direction. When the church works together continually in the same direction, that which has never been becomes that which is possible.

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[65] Ibid., 113-114.

[66] Paul Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creation and Creator in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 66.

[67] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, 54.3: 281. While Barth's focus in this section on the individual and collective movement of language towards the center (centripetal) is apt, its reversal movement (centrifugal) lends itself to the outward-moving nature of *epectasy*. In either case, the focus on movement into God's image and towards one another in Christian community is consistent with Barth, Nyssa, and the project alike.

Taken together, I think *epectasy* and vectors might be a better way to measure the most lasting and significant outcomes of my project. Time and again, when I allow vectored thinking to guide my leadership, I end up asking well-constructed questions. In his lifelong work as a community organizer, Peter Block discovered the power of asking questions. He asserts, "Questions are more transformative than answers and are the essential tools of engagement. They are the means by which we are all confronted with our freedom. In this sense, if you want to change the context, find powerful questions."[68] Block also contends that "Questions themselves are an art form worthy of a lifetime of study. They are what transform the hour."[69] Merging the theological implications of *epectasy* with Block's guidance in constructing questions, I found an alternative to measuring with numbers. Instead, I want to propose the power of measuring with (directional) questions. Near the end of my project I asked participants the following questions:

1. Are we moving the right direction? Do you think our guests are eating healthier meals than they used to?
2. Are we moving closer to one another, thus closer to God in our collective work of the gospel?
3. Are we creating friendships that were not possible before Room in the Inn?

Equally valuable is my professor's recommendation that we consider how our actions could also move us the wrong direction: both away from our neighbor and away from God. Ellen Ott Marshall suggested asking participants: "How has our behavior prevented the development of friendships?"[70]

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[68] Block, *Community*, 103.

[69] Ibid., 106.

[70] Ellen Ott Marshall, email message to author, Nov. 24, 2017.

To the academy, I might frame the vectored questions this way:

"Does this new initiative draw us closer into Christian community and further away from congregational competitiveness?"

Or, "How do these new friendships between corporations and churches better benefit the 'least of these' better together than we could apart?"

Or, "in light of being better stewards of leftover food, are we moving towards the image of God? Are we moving towards the possibility of resurrection or perhaps, realized eschatology?"

Although not scientific, my anecdotal conversations have been overwhelmingly positive. What surprised me most was the similarity in answers between the volunteers, the grocery store workers, and the homeless guests. In their own way, they resoundingly expressed movement in the right direction.

Vectors, by mere definition, have a determinable beginning with an indeterminable end. All we can evaluate is the direction we are collectively moving. If we apply the principles of *epectasy* and vector theology, we are less tempted to impose artificial measurements where they simply do not fit. Instead, we will begin to ask more theologically grounded questions. Thus, giving the church permission to take risks.[71]

Conclusion

The project asked an ostensibly simple question: how can Kingsway Christian Church best steward the gift of donated food? My initial answer was not necessarily wrong as much as it was short-sighted. It lacked theological depth. I initially laid out a plan that Kingsway Christian

[71]Trey Hall's formative article warns the modern church against what he calls "mistake-avoidance" culture. Instead he presses church leaders to create healthy platforms for change, innovation, and new ideas. See Trey Hall, "Failure Makes Worship Good," 21.

Church would spend the first year developing a model to use all the donated food on Monday nights. The second step was to scale the idea. My eagerness was quickly dampened when I realized that working with a corporation was more complex than I had anticipated. In the end, I discovered that the fostering of friendship in church-corporate relationships is difficult, but worth the work.

If measured in terms of movement in the right direction, the project was successful. At the beginning of the project, which coincided with the opening of the grocery store, the majority of unsold food was wasted. At the time of writing, virtually no food gets wasted. After three years of implementation, we sometimes go to collect food on Sunday nights and find that nearly all the food has already been collected by other groups. It is unlikely all this food gets cooked and served to homeless people. Without question, food in a kitchen has a better chance of getting cooked than food in a dumpster. For this, we are grateful to our ministry partners.

Though I did not set out to evaluate the number of church volunteers, their faithfulness and engagement with the project provided another numerical suggestion that pointed towards success. Of the twenty-four church volunteers who have helped cook, serve, clean, make beds, and sleep overnight with our guests, no one has helped only once. This serves as a testament to the power of practicing hospitality to transform entire congregations.

The thrust of my project was more about churches working with (instead of against) corporate neighbors. This is not easily measured in numbers. Far more helpful is a discussion of lessons learned, friendships made, and pathways forward for churches and corporations to work together for the greater good.

Over the course of three years the project narrowed in scope and focus. I learned a great principle for the modern church: *pastors and churches do not have to manufacture ministry*.

There is no need to endlessly search for a calling. For Kingsway Christian Church, at least, we needed to stay put and pay attention to the immediate needs, assets, and untapped resources of our own neighborhood. Of course, this lesson is not new in the life of the church. The scholarship of Johnson and Bruce reveals that "geographic centering" has been with the church since its beginning. Ministry begins at home and is never intended to end at home.

The success of the project depended more on developing friendships than following the precise steps laid out in the proposal. Friendships developed organically. At first, friendships were fostered with those geographically close to the church. As the project grew in scope, the friendships expanded in number and distance from Kingsway. Barth's "Near and Distant Neighbors" helped me to realize that corporations and churches can exists as more than mere acquaintances. If our nearest neighbor is a grocery store, our nearest friend should be a grocery store as well. Further, Barth gave theological language to my project in helping me further define "friendship."

Lastly, I used the Cappadocian understanding of *epectasy* to help redefine traditional means of measurement. I suggested that there is a better way to measure both friendship and spirituality than quantitative measurements. The question, "are we moving in a more faithful direction?" provides a fuller understanding of spiritual. Rarely in the church is stasis possible. Instead, we are moving in a discernable direction. I want to propose that the more significant question is, "What direction are we headed? Towards God or away? Towards our neighbor of further away?" When we formulate these questions, vectors emerge that help us determine if we should continue the current path.

To conclude my project, I will tell an unexpected story of friendship that brings together its key elements:

The week before Christmas, an inner-city choir needed a place to host their Christmas choral concert. The high school choir director, Miss Lake, called my office and asked to use Kingsway's sanctuary. I said, "Of course, you're welcome to have it here." Before we hung up, I requested that we have the concert on Monday night at 6:30pm. At first, it seemed a strange request to her, but when I explained that's the night we welcome homeless guests for Room in the Inn at Kingsway, she was happy to agree.

The guests arrived. On the menu for dinner was meatloaf made from grass-fed beef and macaroni mixed with four kinds of cheese I'd never heard of. After dinner, I invited them all to the concert in the sanctuary. Only two women, Anna and Giselle, agreed.

"If we can sit with you," they said, "we'd love to go."

"Of course you can," I responded, "but you know, I'm the preacher, and I sit up front?"

The concert was beautiful. For an inner-city school that almost cut the music program two years ago, this evening seemed like a resurrection. Unbeknownst to the students, they helped also resurrect a preacher and two homeless women to a place not possible two years ago.

During a rendition of "O Holy Night" by two seniors, the music stopped playing. Their iPhone that was playing the music quit, and they began to sing a capella. Anna (a homeless guest) decided to join in, and shortly thereafter 250 people joined in – without any instruments or technology – singing as one. We were not distinguished by anything; not by "language, locality, or history."[72] Instead, in that propitious moment, we were one. The far were brought near; the near brought far.

After the concert, Miss Lake and I were cleaning up the sanctuary with the high school students.

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[72] Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, 54.3: 293.

"Pastor," she said and motioned to me.

I came up on the chancel, hugged her, and said, "You know the preacher was in tears at the end of 'O Holy Night?'"

She smiled and said, "the teacher was too."

"Did any of your homeless friends join us?" Miss Lake asked.

I nodded: "Yes, and they loved it."

Miss Lake politely inquired, "Where were they sitting? I didn't see them anywhere?"

I smiled and replied, "With me."

Miss Lake looked at me surprised and said, "I couldn't tell which ones they were."

I picked up another chair and kept helping the students, thinking that's the first time anyone has ever said "your homeless friends." In the work of saving food, I found myself savoring friendship.

Appendix: "Merchants No More"

This appendix provides a practical exercise to help churches engaged in homeless ministry develop mutual friendship with one another. For Kingsway, I will be implementing this curriculum with our Wednesday Night Fellowship gathering. Each Wednesday night, we eat a meal together, then pray and learn about a topic important in the Memphis community. The main goal of this study is to help see our homeless guests as mutual partners in the body of Christ.

Amy-Jill Levine's rich chapter on "The Parable of Great Price" offers the theological grounding to this idea.[73] She claims that one of the forgotten teachings of this Matthean parable is that it encourages us to see one another "as something other than we've seen before."[74] Through a ten-week series, I hope to set forth a classroom environment that levels the playing field. After I the leader teaches the first, somewhat exegetical lesson, we will invite homeless guests to lead the other Wednesday night sessions.[75]

Now, I will lay out the concrete steps for the curriculum. In the end, I hope the Wednesday night series enables us to see one another as a gift to the community – rather than deficits needing to be fixed and helped.[76]

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[73] Amy Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 127-150.

[74] Ibid., 146.

[75] Jay McDaniel's article about hospitality and listening also guided the creation of this curriculum. His article includes this formative discourse: "'When I was hungry you gave me food, and when I was in prison you visited me,' say Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. 'And when I needed someone to talk to,' the Benedictines add, 'you listened to me.'" See, Jay McDaniel, "In the Beginning Is the Listening" in *Theology that Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God*, ed. Darby Kathleen Ray (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 31.

[76] For helpful examples of ways to utilize the gifts and give voice to the disenfranchised, see Kretzmann and McKnight, *Building Communities*, 32-65.

Concrete Steps

1. Ask church members and homeless guests (where appropriate) to read Amy Jill Levine's chapter entitled, "The Pearl of Great Price" found in her book, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*.
2. I, or the clergy person, would lead the first Bible study lesson. Tact should be used by clergy in assigning this reading that is slightly technical in parts. It might also be appropriate to summarize Levine's chapter into simpler and more concise language.
3. The following weeks I would ask homeless guests to be our speakers and teachers – one per week. (This is made simpler at Kingsway from an ongoing four-year relationship and the reality that several of the men have already expressed an interest in participating).
4. Also, built in, is a shared meal before the Bible Study that encourages church members and homeless guests to sit together and talk together during dinner. These conversations will facilitate trust and a greater ease of sharing as the sessions continue.
5. Following dinner and prayer, I would ask our guests to address five questions as they lead our conversation together. The five leading/prompting questions would be:
    a. Tell us about your childhood, parents, and general life story.
    b. Tell us about the best and worst day of your life.
    c. Tell us about what you're really good at. What skills, gifts, and talents do you possess?
    d. Tell us about what you hear Jesus saying in the parable of the pearl.
    e. Tell us how this parable and/or your gifts can be used at Kingsway and Room in the Inn.

6. Throw a party.
    a. On the last Wednesday Night Fellowship/lesson, throw a party in place of having a lesson. During the party take time to tell each other what you learned about them and the gift they have now become to you.

Concluding Remarks

I encourage pastors *not* to spell out the point of the exercise too early in the exercise. The beauty of the listening practice will be the ten weeks of collective discovery. This model will also flip the power structure in our church. I am confident that, in the end, we will hear and see our guests not as homeless folks but as "our teachers," "our friends," and "our brothers and sisters in Christ." And hopefully, when we see Amos come in the church doors on a snowy January night, we will see a "talented electrician" and a "devoted father to his sixteen-year-old daughter." I do not know what we'll hear. But, I suppose, that is the point: to suspend what we know in the hope that with a well-told gospel story, what we thought we knew becomes replaced by that which we know now. We will all become, either on earth or in heaven, "merchants no more."

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