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## The "Essential" Witness of the Church in Times of Crisis

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

THE “ESSENTIAL” WITNESS OF THE CHURCH IN TIMES OF CRISIS



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## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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## DEDICATION

This Project is dedicated to the people of the First United Methodist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, the first church established in the town and a leader over the decades in Christian faith and action.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many who have contributed to this doctoral journey and made it the blessing that it has been. First, the Portland Seminary LGP team: Dr. Jason Swan Clark, and his thoughtful approach to pushing our leadership boundaries and buttons as Lead Mentor; Dr. Julie Dodge for her guidance and tough questions as Project Faculty; Dr. Loren Kerns, Dr. Clifford Berger, Heather Rainey, and Jen Macnab, for their availability and willingness to respond to questions and hear feedback. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my LGP “Top Tens” cohort. Our weekly Zoom calls and interactions on the blog were stimulating as we wrestled with leadership questions.

I am grateful to those who graciously agreed to participate in workshops, discovery sessions, and personal interviews as I sought to develop my project. Additionally, thanks to Dr. Margaret Brown Marsden at Midwestern State University for facilitating a connection with Bao Trang and Huy Ngo, student web developers, without whom there would be no artifact to present. I also humbly acknowledge the support and encouragement of Rev. Todd Harris and Rev. Johnny Irish.

My wife Jennifer was also a source of encouragement and support, listening to my complaints, and enduring those times when I needed to process my thoughts aloud.

Finally, I also offer my thanks to the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas. This church has been significant in my spiritual journey in more ways than I can describe here. The church has invested in this doctoral journey with the gifts of time and space, conversation partners, and even financially, in the hopes that we might achieve the goal of better connecting the church to the greater community.

## EPIGRAPH

“If you want to know how Christianity went from an obscure and marginal movement to representing around 6 million believers by AD 300, ... plagues were a huge factor.”

- Glen Scrivener

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## PREFACE

I never thought I would pursue another degree after completing my Master's of Divinity in 2000. For nineteen years, the practice of ministry had seemed to be sufficient. I even joked at times about having already earned a Ph.D. from "The School of Hard Knocks." But when I sensed God's call to go back to school, despite the fact that I was already paying for two of my children's college tuition, I investigated. I am glad I did.

This doctoral journey began under relatively normal circumstances as an opportunity to grow in my leadership while serving as a local church pastor. What was known only to God would be that the most significant disruption and leadership challenge of my lifetime so far would come to define this experience. I do not know if I would have begun a doctoral program after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. All I know is that I am grateful to have had the project and the cohort to help me stay focused, sometimes distracted, and always aware of how God is at work, even in the most challenging of times.

Like the moral of the old proverb, the gift of this experience was not just the destination of a completed project, the gift was also the journey. I was blessed to learn new things about my community and put new leadership tools in the toolbox. It was fun, and frustrating at times, to experiment and to explore different possibilities. In many ways, it feels like all of this work has been the "training camp" to the regular season that is only now about to begin. I am excited to see where this all goes from here.

This Project Portfolio tells the story of that journey.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD – Asset-Based Community Development

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

DHS – United States Department of Homeland Security

LGP – Doctor of Leadership in Global Perspectives

MSG – The Message Translation (of the Bible)

NIV – New Revised Version (of the Bible)

NPO – Need, Problem, or Opportunity

UMC – United Methodist Church

WF – Wichita Falls, Texas

## RESEARCH METHOD

This Project utilized a blended methodology that draws upon bibliographic resources, data derived from stakeholder collaboration, and human-centered design and iteration processes to create a heuristic-based, application-oriented Project.

## ABSTRACT

Faith leaders in Wichita Falls can help their congregations better serve the community when they are connected to each other and aware of needs and resources available to them. That is the Need, Problem, Opportunity (NPO) at the center of this research.

The Project began with a desire to help the church be a better community partner, especially in the way it served families on the financial margins. Some initial learnings were that many families did not know how to access services provided in the community and many resource providers were reluctant to collaborate with other organizations. As the focus of the Project shifted to the “essential” witness of churches, we learned that many faith leaders in the community did not know each other well, were not actively involved in any meaningful ministry collaborations, and were not aware of how other churches were working in the community.

As the Senior Pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, I was looking for ways to multiply the impact of my local church, as well as the Christian witness as a whole. Wichita Falls is a community of 102,000 people, with over 100 Christian churches in town, but there is no community-wide network of pastors or ministerial alliance. Any collaboration that happens among churches or pastors is done through smaller circles of personal relationships. I began exploring other ways that connections could be made.

My Project is an interactive website designed to connect faith leaders to each other by capturing service opportunities and resources in real time within the community of Wichita Falls, Texas. The goal is to help the church claim its “essential” witness in the community, connecting pastors and churches in collaborative work, in order to demonstrate God’s love and care for all.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Summary of the Journey: Discovery, Design, and Delivery**

This journey began with a desire to identify and address gaps in resources and services available to families on the financial margins in the north Texas community of Wichita Falls. My hope was to find ways of better aligning the church and resource providers with those in need of assistance. At the onset, I had been in the community for just two years, returning after having left seventeen years prior. I was trying to get reacquainted in order to help my local congregation be a good neighbor and community partner.

The Discovery Workshop, held in November 2019, was an attempt to get a better understanding of the services that were already available in my community. I wanted to explore what services the organizations provided, how services were communicated and delivered, as well as the organizations' desired impact on the community. One thought that emerged was that an asset map might be developed as a way of better connecting people to services and resources.

The people involved with this first phase included community leaders who were familiar with organizations in the community. These people had a keen understanding of the aspects of generational cycles of poverty, issues related to physical and mental health, transportation challenges in the community, as well as the inherent suspicion and distrust many families on the financial margins have toward community services. These challenges make it difficult for providers to accomplish their stated goals.

I had an opportunity to unpack some of these challenges with Larry James, CEO of a serving ministry in Dallas, Texas called CitySquare. In addition to talking about the various ways CitySquare serves people and its client-focused approach, we also discussed the different

approaches organizations take in order to communicate and connect with people they hope to reach. This is where the idea of a website with an asset map of services was more fully explored. This resource was already available in the Dallas area and it seemed like the community of Wichita Falls could also benefit from such a tool. I felt like everything was coming together toward addressing my NPO of connecting families on the financial margins with resource providers.

The following semester would be focused on academic research on the historical and Biblical aspects of the NPO. I was compiling information on Asset-Based Community Development and ways the Christian community had historically sought to fulfill its mission to care for the poor. It was during this work in the spring of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in the United States. My community, like many others, went into a period of lockdown in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus. The Department of Homeland Security's guidelines of "essential infrastructure" determined which businesses and services would remain open. Many pastors, myself included, were surprised to learn that churches were not included on this list, except for certain services such as food pantries and child care. Consequently, there was a perception that the ministry churches had to offer their community was not essential. I began to wonder what the "essential" witness of the Christian community has been throughout history, especially in times of crisis, as a way of maintaining the church's presence as a source of God's love and compassion.

I incorporated several of these questions into the academic essay. (See Appendix B.) There are many examples of how the historical Christian Church has cared for the poor. What was interesting was also how the Church has historically been on the front lines of caring for the sick and dying during times of plagues and diseases. During this period of research, I was



experiencing first-hand the complexity of leading a congregation through a season of global pandemic. Churches like mine moved quickly to build online communities for Bible study and spiritual growth. We also made the shift to remote worship services when in-person gatherings were either prohibited or not safe. What was slower to develop was how the church could continue to care for the needs of neighbors on the financial margins when lock-downs and social distancing were required.

By the fall of 2020, the NPO Statement had been redefined to explore how the church could offer an “essential” witness. Ideas began to emerge about how a local faith community could assist with the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people, especially in times of crisis, loss, and anxiety. A Design Workshop was held with some mission-minded leaders from my congregation. Through a series of activities, the workshop explored how churches and community leaders might better leverage their collective resources and networks of influence to create a more collaborative response to needs in the community.

Three big ideas emerged from this workshop. One idea was for churches and community leaders to collaborate on an “Emergency Action Plan” that could be developed and implemented in times of crisis which would intentionally include the ways churches could help. A second idea was to organize a network of church leaders in the community, specifically for the purpose of building relationships and strengthening collaboration. A third idea was to create a communications system that would help the church be more intentional about its message and witness in the broader community.

In discerning the three ideas from the workshop, I decided to move forward with the idea of addressing the need to organize a network of faith leaders in the community. I wanted to remain somewhat aligned with the work and research that I had done to this point, so I began to

explore the idea of a tool that could connect church leaders to needs and resources and each other. Over the course of the spring of 2021, two separate meetings were held with pastors in the community. The first meeting was a small group of faith leaders who were introduced to the concept and invited to share ideas for how it might work. The second meeting was a larger group of pastors who had the opportunity to interact with a working prototype of the concept, a website called “ServeWF.org” which would help connect a network of Wichita Falls faith leaders.

The initial response from these gatherings of faith leaders was very positive. Several pastors talked about the need for improved collaboration among the churches of the community. Some of the more tenured pastors in town mentioned the historical challenges of creating a more cooperative effort among the churches. Many expressed encouraging words that a resource like the website might serve as a starting point to getting churches and pastors to work together to serve the broader community. One of the participants even created a Facebook group during the meeting and invited others present to join the group. It felt like an encouraging start.

The Delivery phase of the project was to develop a working, interactive website that could connect faith leaders to needs, resources, and each other. Through a contact with the local university, I enlisted the services of two students who could take on the more technical challenges of building the site, in particular the asset map. There were three phases of development for the asset map. The first phase (the only phase included in this report) would be to create a map with names and addresses of existing resources in the community. These would be inputted manually by the website developers. The second phase would be for services and resources to be added to the map as faith leaders interacted with the website through the “resources” page. A third (and far more ambitious) phase would be to create a program that

would have the site explore the websites and social media pages of its members and automatically upload relevant content in real time.

The benchmarks for Phase One are as follows:

1. Develop and launch the website, including a static Asset Map of community resource providers in Wichita Falls, by November 2021.
2. During the soft launch phase from November 1 to December 31, 30 faith leaders in Wichita Falls will access the website.
3. Two-thirds (67%) of persons who access the site will register their contact information by December 31, 2021 through the “Join the Network” page.

The “soft launch” of the website happened in November 2021. The site had 41 visits and 37 unique visitors between November 1 and December 31, 2021. Four pastors sent feedback and suggestions back to me by way of personal calls and emails. Three pastors registered their contact information with the website.

Despite the success of having created a website with an asset map, it is fair to say that the initial response to the site was disappointing. As with many projects that take time to develop, the gap between the introduction of the prototype and the soft launch may have dulled the initial enthusiasm first shown for the website. In retrospect, it might have been helpful over those months to have continued to cultivate the relationships that were emerging from the prototype presentation through more personal interactions. That was a missed opportunity that could have helped to develop the network and improve the first-phase website. Ultimately, relationships and connections and a more “essential” presence among churches in the community need more than websites, apps, and social media pages to truly be effective.

## **Evaluation of the Experience**

Overall, the experience has been positive and fruitful as one the goals has been to better connect the local church to the broader community. However, there have been several challenges along the way. The idea at the beginning of the project was to identify ways to help families on the financial margins get information and access to resources and services within the community. One of the challenges that emerged near the beginning of the process was that while providers seemed interested in gaining a broader reach, there was some hesitancy about collaboration. Because of its location, organizations in Wichita Falls are sometimes territorial and protective of what they believe to be a limited amount of resources. Getting providers to the table to talk about a more comprehensive approach to serving the community might be a difficult task. This was a potential barrier, but at this early stage in the Discovery, Design, Deliver process, it was something I believed could be addressed later on.

The most significant challenge to the process was the COVID-19 Pandemic. This event set the project in a new direction as it exposed many of the issues being explored. It also demonstrated just how far away the churches were from being considered as contributors to the solution. As a local church pastor, I began asking more questions about how the church was perceived in the community and what the faith community needed to do in order to offer something that was recognized as essential. My focus shifted from connecting with resource providers to connecting with churches.

In seeking to develop a resource to better connect churches, I discovered that the same challenge that existed among resource providers in Wichita Falls also applied to churches and pastors. Many pastors and churches in Wichita Falls do not know each other well or work together very collaboratively. Similar to non-profit service providers, there is the perception that

the town operates with limited resources and churches must focus first on maintaining what they have. Coaxing pastors into conversation about a resource to be better connected was a challenge, especially for someone who was still relatively new to the community. Personal relationships were important, especially in terms of broadening the discussion. This concern was expressed in the first gathering of pastors in the spring of 2021, but even the more tenured pastors were optimistic that a resource to connect churches in their service to the community might be a good first step toward breaking down some of the existing barriers.

Finally, some technical challenges emerged with the website itself in terms of it reaching its full potential as an intuitive and interactive resource. Some of this is related to the amount of time the developers had to work on the project, but also with regard to limitations in their ability. There are also potentially higher costs associated with making the site as functional as first imagined.

These challenges reveal some gaps and areas for improvement, both in the resource itself and in the way relationship and community-building can happen among faith leaders in Wichita Falls. Improvements to the website might be addressed with more financial resources and increased ability among the developers and maintainers of the site. The site might also be improved and perfected through suggestions from those who interact with it on a more regular basis. The solution to stronger relationships lies in old-fashioned and time-honored practices of people intentionally and proactively getting to know each other and developing trust. This can happen temporarily in a time of crisis, but it also takes time and intentional work when things are calm.

Over the course of this research, I learned some important things about the work of the Christian Church throughout history as well as my own community's history. From a historical

perspective, it was interesting to explore and examine the work of the Christian community, especially in other times of human health crises. Christians throughout the centuries have put their own lives at risk for the sake of others, tending to the sick and dying. This speaks to caring nature of the historic Christian community and calls the Church to its command to love others. It is also revealing how challenging this work has been in today's divided culture. It seems even basic Christian principles like "love your neighbor as yourself" are now filtered and evaluated through political and cultural biases that have contributed significantly to the diminished impact of the Christian Church.

My own community has had moments where pastors and churches have come together in collaboration to serve in times of need. Most notably, when a tornado destroyed a large portion of Wichita Falls in 1979, churches were instrumental in the initial and ongoing relief response. Pastors and churches came together to create a central organization to coordinate efforts. Interfaith Disaster Services (now Interfaith Outreach) continues to be an ecumenical community partner. Churches have also worked together through the years in other times of crisis, including weather-related crises and economic challenges.

However, more recently, when a major winter storm brought the community to a standstill in February 2021, the response of the churches in town was not coordinated at all. Some churches focused solely on the well-being of their own church members while the churches that did seek to help the broader community did so individually and without any effort to find partners in their work. Regrettably, the "default setting" for most churches and pastors in Wichita Falls continues to function more individually than collaboratively. Without an organized ministerial alliance or pastor's network, relationships are challenging to form and maintain, especially when faith leaders are focused on the needs of their individual congregations and their

own interests. The ongoing work of building relationships and community continues to be a challenge, despite well-meaning efforts that are offered from time to time.

### **Next Steps**

At this point in the project, there are two important areas that need further development: continued improvement of the website's function as a tool for community engagement and addressing the deeper issues of community partnership and collaboration through relationship-building with local faith leaders. If the website is going to be a useful resource, it must meet the needs of its users. Improving its functionality might help to gain more traction with those who interact with the site. Additionally, it might be possible with more time, skill, and money, to shift from a website concept to an app for a smart phone. This may add a factor of convenience and ease that modern users might appreciate.

For now, the plans for the project as outlined in the Launch Plan, are to continue to invite faith leaders to interact with the site and to grow the network. The site has an analytics page that makes it easy to see how often the site is visited and how each page is being used. This will allow for helpful evaluation along the way. The most desirable outcome for the resource is in improved relationships and collaboration among Wichita Falls faith leaders. I am also keeping an open mind as to the future of the site and how best to plan for its long-term sustainability. This too is outlined in greater detail in the launch plan.

As far as community partnerships go, this will take more time as I look for opportunities to build relationships in more personal ways. This step is less about the website and more about the intentional ways I can cultivate relationships with other faith leaders and ways I can help my church be more intentional about the basics aspects of Christian life of loving and caring about our neighbors. I hope to take what I have learned about leadership to the next level as we think

about how we can be better prepared and equipped to offer an “essential” witness when the church is needed the most.

### **Summative Reflection**

In reflecting on this project, it is safe to say that it has been a labor of love. My initial desire in beginning this work was to better connect my local church to the greater community. I had hoped to help move the church back into the spheres of influence and service with the people of Wichita Falls. Over the past forty years, more of the help and support offered to the community has shifted from the churches to specialized resource providers. While much of this has a strategic benefit, it has also served to reduce the local church’s perceived role in helping to make life better for people.

COVID-19 reframed the question completely as we learned just how disconnected the church had become from the larger society, as well as from each other. It was disappointing to realize just how much work needs to be done to restore the church’s place in the community. When churches learned they were not considered part of the Department of Homeland Security’s “essential infrastructure,” it served as a wake-up call to consider what the role of the church in community is. Certainly the spiritual and moral influence aspect is one consideration, but what of the more practical? How could the church visibly demonstrate its necessity in helping to meet the needs of the people?

It was also disappointing to see on display just how fractured and disconnected the pastors and churches of Wichita Falls truly are. Collegiality and courtesy cannot be assumed, due in part to busy schedules, different interests and priorities, and a general unfamiliarity with one another. Many communication efforts were simply ignored, despite several attempts to connect.



At the same time, there was joy in seeing some of the work begin to bear fruit. A small network of faith leaders has emerged where there was not one before. Other attempts at collaboration have begun, even beyond the website. As relationships are developed, the churches may start to increase visibility as ministries are supported and encouraged beyond the walls of individual churches.

This Project has served as an exercise in leadership, even leadership in global perspectives. While the community of Wichita Falls itself is not very culturally diverse, there are differences in Christian practices and beliefs. In trying to bring faith leaders from across the theological spectrum together, this project sought to find common ground and bridge some gaps that have existed. From varying leadership styles and approaches, to mental models, and to cultures, what was learned about leadership in the classroom could be applied in a very practical way, even in the context of one local community.

The resulting Project was as much a website as it was learning how to lead in times of crisis, fear, and anxiety. As the larger society politicized the Pandemic and as churches have begun to reflect culture to an even larger degree, the nature of leadership has shifted. The work ahead is about reminding the Christian community about its “essential” witness of loving one’s neighbor, regardless of who that neighbor voted for, or whether or not that neighbor believes in the COVID vaccine, or how that neighbor understands issues such as race, gender-equality, sexual identity, immigration, abortion, socio-economics, and other topics people like to debate.

While the Christian community has divided itself over many issues many times since the days of the earliest apostles, it has still found a way to demonstrate the love and compassion of Jesus when people have needed it the most. Perhaps this current pandemic can be redeemed as a moment for the church to come together and demonstrate its Christian command to love and to

serve. Faith leaders can demonstrate how to do this in the ways we collaborate and cooperate for the sake of showing our communities the best of what the church is called to be.

One encouraging opportunity is happening in Wichita Falls in early 2022 as several churches are coming together in a city-wide prayer initiative. My church is participating and I am connecting with the other pastors involved in this effort. While this is not a result of my Project, it is an example of other efforts to bring faith leaders together and how the church can demonstrate its “essential” nature.

My dream for this project is that it helps move the community forward in collaboration to make life better for people who live here. Regardless of the ongoing success of the project, this journey has helped my understanding of leadership, the power of building relationships, and the realization that the essential witness of the church is and always will be in the way a church fulfills Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbor. Authentic expressions of love are essential and can always find a way through the chaos of crisis, fear, and anxiety. If Christian history teaches us nothing else, it teaches us that God often does God’s best work in the ways that the world has dismissed, overlooked, or deemed “non-essential.” This knowledge keeps me focused and motivated to keep the church at the table and in the conversation when it comes to helping people navigate challenging times.

## PROJECT

### **NPO Statement**

Faith leaders in Wichita Falls can help their congregations better serve the community when they are connected to each other and aware of needs and resources available to them. That is the Need, Problem, Opportunity (NPO) that has emerged as a result of this research. I have been exploring the “essential” presence of the church in times of crisis and ways for faith leaders and churches to collaborate and communicate with one another in order to help make life better for people, even in challenging times.

### **Project Description**

The Project began with a desire to serve families on the margins, to gather churches to address the needs of people living on the financial fringe. The Project shifted during the COVID-19 Pandemic when U.S. American churches learned that they were not considered “essential infrastructure.” That revelation unveiled deeper issues among faith leaders in the community of Wichita Falls, specifically a lack of connection, partnership, and leadership among the clergy. I began searching for a way to better connect people to resources and to one another, in order for the church to reclaim its place as “essential,” both in terms of the services it offers as well as the Christian witness of love and compassion. What ultimately emerged was a website for clergy and faith leaders. This website includes an asset map to help people know where certain resources are. The map also allows for authorized users to the site to upload information in real time. The goal is to help pastors work more closely in cooperation with each other, identifying needs and gaps in service, rather than duplicate services in the same area.

There were obstacles to this work. In describing the working relationship among the clergy of the town, one retired pastor said in an interview, “Pastors in this community may well die for one another, but they do not play well together.” There are over 100 Christian churches of varying denominations in Wichita Falls, but there is no organized clergy network or ministerial alliance among the pastors. Clergy tend to know each other only through personal friendships, denominational connections, geographical proximity, or out of necessity.

### **Project Scope**

The primary outcome for this Project is a fully functioning and interactive website with real-time information regarding community needs and resources. There are to be three phases of development. The first phase, the one phase completed for this Project, is for the site to be functioning with a static asset map of community resource providers. The second phase will be to populate the asset map with information provided by users of the site. The third phase will be to have the asset map programmed to populate itself through data sources provided by network members. Building off of the prototype which was initially developed in the spring of 2021, student web developers were contracted to help with the Project and prepare the site for a “soft launch” in the fall of 2021. Once the site was public, clergy and faith leaders were able to interact with the site and offer suggestions for improvement.

The costs of the Project included a site hosting subscription of approximately \$37/month and a stipend for two web developers who are students at the local university. This cost was shared by the university and me.

In addition to the time spent developing the site or in supervision of the developers, there was also time dedicated to communicating and following up with faith leaders, first to invite their interaction and engagement with the site, then to gather feedback and suggestions for

improvement. Finally, there was time spent on the analytics page of the site, getting information about site visits, page visits, and other aspects of interaction.

## Benchmarks

The following were the specific benchmarks in the Project’s development:

1. Develop and launch the website, including a static Asset Map of community resource providers in Wichita Falls, by November 2021.
2. During the soft launch phase from November 1 to December 31, 30 faith leaders in Wichita Falls will access the website.
3. Two-thirds (67%) of persons who access the site will register their contact information by December 31, 2021 through the “Join the Network” page.

## Documentation of the Project

The screenshots below are from the “www.ServeWF.org” website:

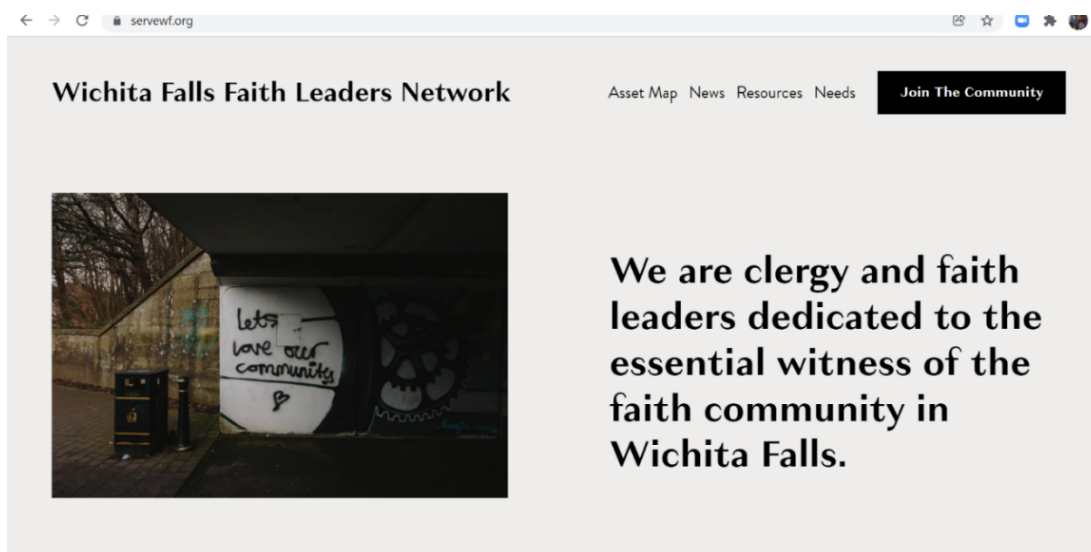


Figure 2.1. *ServeWF.org Home Page.*

The asset map shows resources and services, categorized by the type of service offered. While the map is currently static, the goal for future phases is for the map to be programmed to automatically search for relevant data through network participant's websites and social media feeds.

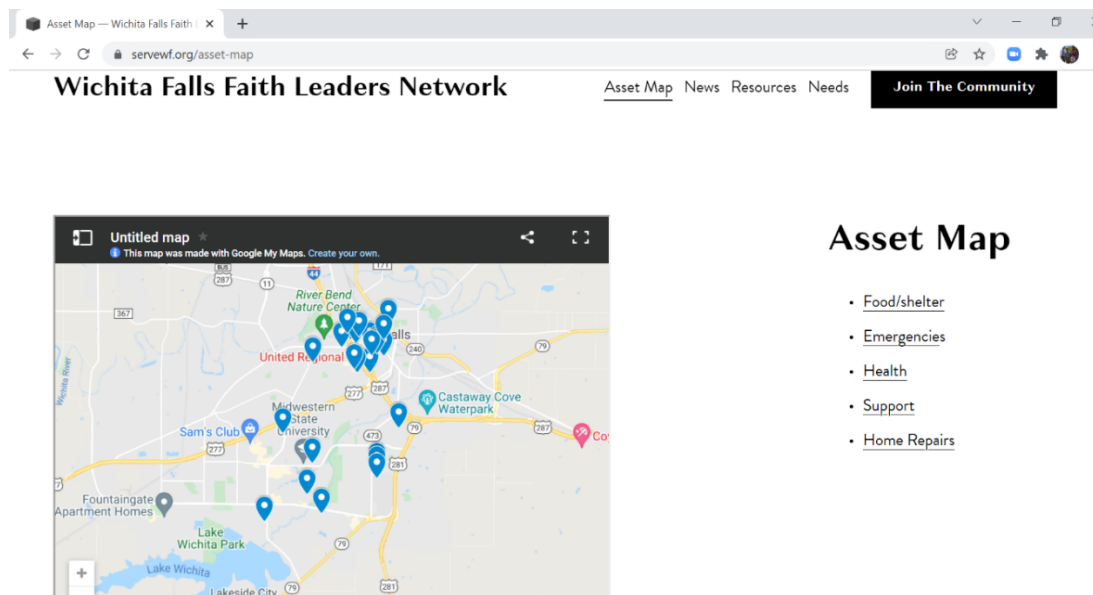


Figure 2.2. *Asset Map*.

Visitors to the site can register the location of their service. Different categories of service are identified and integrated into the asset map based on the kind of service provided.

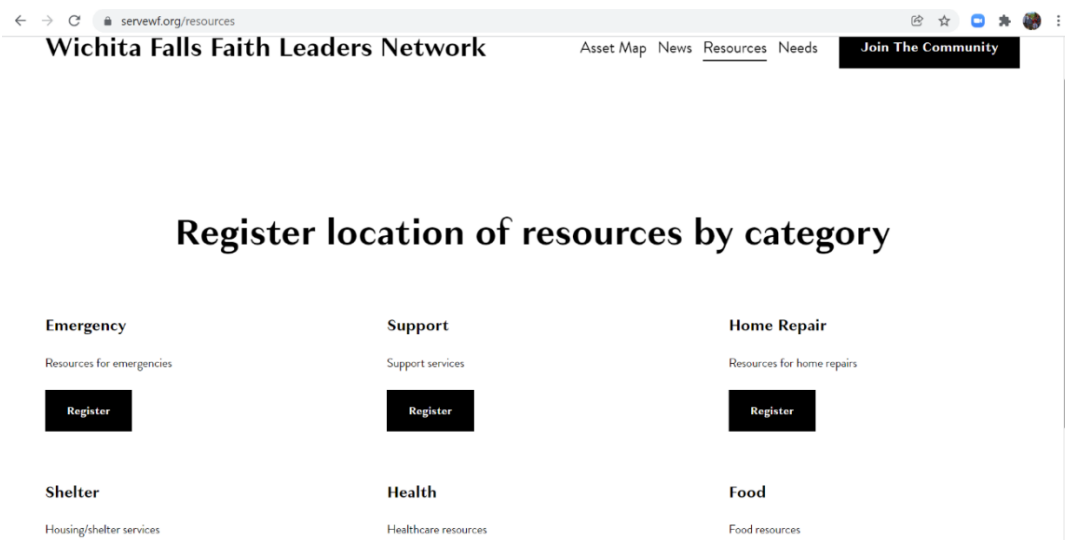


Figure 2.3. *Resources Page.*

The Needs Page allows users to make the network know of opportunities to serve. This information is sent via email to the website administrator for review and possible dissemination.

 The screenshot shows a web browser at the URL 'servewf.org/needs'. The page title is 'Wichita Falls Faith Leaders Network'. The navigation bar includes 'Asset Map', 'News', 'Resources', and 'Needs' (which is underlined). A black button labeled 'Join The Community' is in the top right. On the left, a large text block reads: 'Fill out this form to let the network know of needs you are aware of.' Below this text are social media icons for Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest. On the right, there is a registration form with the following fields:
 

- Name \***: Two input boxes labeled 'First Name' and 'Last Name'.
- Email \***: A single input box.
- Phone \***: Three input boxes with labels '(###)', '###', and '####' below them.
- Message \***: A single input box.

Figure 2.4. *Needs Page.*

The Quick Links page, which is still in development, is intended to connect visitors to the site to information provided in the local community. This includes local news media and the city government public information resources.

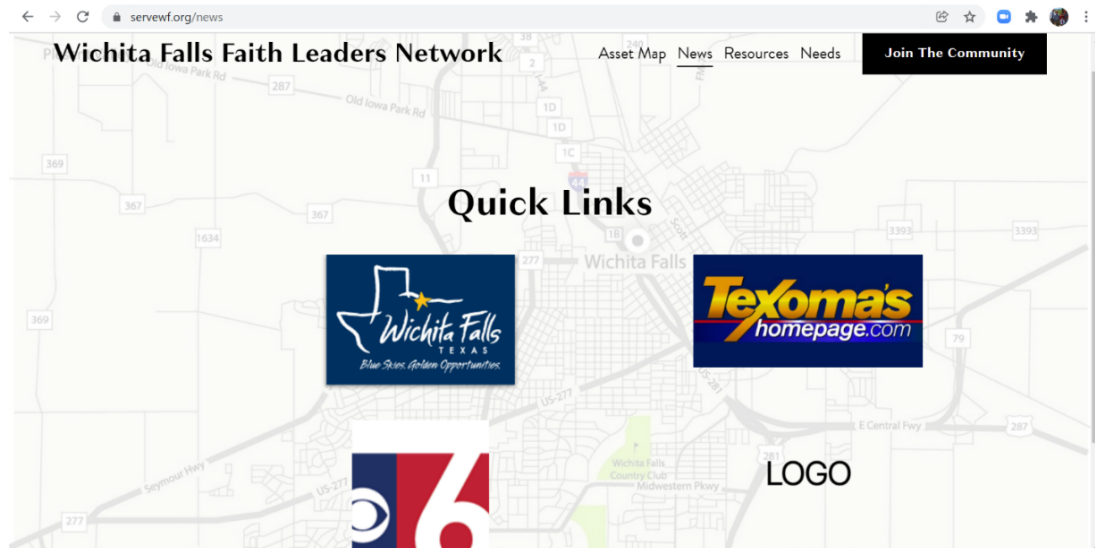


Figure 2.5. *Quick Links Page.*

There is a page, along with a form, for visitors to the site to register their names and contact information so that a database of faith leaders can be maintained.



Figure 2.6. *Join the Community Page.*



Figure 2.7. *Join the Community Form.*

### Assessment

My personal assessment of the Project is a mixture of success, failure, and results yet to be determined. The website was ready for a soft launch in November 2021. Using a contact list of Wichita Falls faith leaders, I sent an email in early November with a link to the site and a request for feedback. Over the course of three weeks, I received four responses with feedback. Some of the responses included suggestions for improvement and/or questions or issues they encountered as they were interacting with the site. Three additional colleagues “registered” on the site with their contact information. Ongoing edits and adjustments have been made to the site, with the goal of having the site fully functioning in the Spring of 2022.

The Project is a success in the sense that it is functional and can be utilized. One of the goals of the Project was a viable resource that was accessible for faith leaders in Wichita Falls. A website now exists where there was not one before. This resource can continue to be refined and perfected to suit the needs of the users. As users become more familiar with the site, and as specific needs arise where the site proves useful, it can increase in its effectiveness. According to

the website's analytics, from November 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021, there were 41 site visits, 184 page views, and 37 unique visitors. (See Appendix E.)

While the site did successfully function and exceeded the goal of 30 unique visitors during the soft launch period, the Project failed in that the number of pastors who registered with the site did not meet the goal of 20. Four people completed the "Join the Network" form. In addition, the site has not seen evidence so far of ongoing engagement. The low response rate can likely be attributed to several factors, including the availability and attention of the target audience. Many faith leaders have very busy schedules, both personal and professional, and an email request like the one sent can often find itself on the lower end of the priority list, even when the request is from a colleague. The time of year may have also been a factor as November's calendar is often very crowded. In addition, the lack of a specific "test case" may have contributed to the lack of urgency. Had the site been able to assist with a specific need in the community, even a minor one, it might have drawn more interest and interaction.

The Project's results are inconclusive to the degree that there has not been time or opportunity to fully use the site for its primary purpose. Over the course of time, the Project might prove to be helpful, either due to circumstances or becoming more familiar. If an opportunity arises for the site to prove useful, a better assessment of its effectiveness can be made. In addition, decisions will need to be made as to the site's ongoing maintenance and upkeep.

While the initial response rates were disappointing, those who viewed the site had favorable things to say about it and offered helpful feedback. The suggestions have been considered and implemented where appropriate. Additionally, the interactions with local clergy throughout this process have helped to build and improve relationships among faith leaders in the

community. Opportunities for more collaboration are emerging. For example, another church in town is leading an ecumenical effort to pray for every household in Wichita Falls in early 2022. Several churches are participating in this initiative, including First United Methodist Church. The pastors of these churches are meeting regularly and stronger relationships are forming. In addition, the lessons learned from a crippling winter storm in 2021 have helped pastors be more prepared for future weather-related events. There are some positive signs of movement and it is possible that in time, the clergy of Wichita Falls may become more connected and the collective witness of the Christian Church will be recognized as truly “essential” to the community.

## PROJECT LAUNCH PLAN

Faith leaders in Wichita Falls can help their congregations better serve the community when they are connected to each other and aware of needs and resources available to them. That is the Need, Problem, Opportunity (NPO) at the center of this research. I have built an interactive website designed to connect faith leaders to each other by capturing service opportunities and resources in real time within the community of Wichita Falls, Texas. The goal for this Project is to help the church reclaim its “essential” witness.

### **Audience**

The primary audience for this Project are clergy and faith leaders in the Wichita Falls, Texas community. The community features over 100 Christian churches of varying denominations served by pastors who range from full-time, bi-vocational, and even commuters who do not reside in the Wichita Falls area. Despite the number of churches and pastors in town, there is no organized ministerial alliance. Clergy tend to network through personal friendships, denominational connections, geographical proximity, or out of necessity. Engagement with this audience has been (and will continue to be) through email distributions, networking, and individual interactions.

### **Development Timeline**

The tasks that have been completed are as follow:

- November 2019- A small team consisting of community members gathered to generate ideas around an initial Need, Problem, Opportunity to better connect churches to serve families in the community, especially those on the financial margins.

- March 2020- The COVID-19 pandemic altered life in Wichita Falls (and across the world) in significant ways. Churches across the country learned they were not included on the Department of Homeland Security's list of "Essential Infrastructure" and therefore were not part of the community's Emergency Response Plans. Pastors and churches scrambled to keep their congregations connected and committed to serving its neighbors during times of lockdowns and social distancing.
- November 2020- A team of leaders from First United Methodist Church, Wichita Falls gathered to evaluate ideas of helping the local church offer an "essential" witness in times of crisis.
- March-April 2021- Groups of pastors in Wichita Falls were introduced to a prototype website geared at connecting pastors and churches to each other, as well as to needs and resources in the community.
- August-September 2021- A design team was recruited and a strategy was developed for completing the website.
- September-October 2021- The website design team completed the first phase of the site's development.
- November-December 2021- There was a "soft launch" of the website among faith leaders. Feedback was obtained and interaction with the site was monitored. Development into the phase two of the site begun.

### **Iteration Process**

Because the website is intended to be an interactive space which will become more useful as faith leaders add real time content, the site will continue to be evaluated, both for its

usefulness and effectiveness. As the network grows, so will the opportunities for connection and collaboration. It will likely become necessary to move this resource out of the hands of one person and entrust it to a larger team or organization. Shifting the resource from the pet project of an individual pastor, or even the ministry of an individual church, might help to create a shared sense of ownership among those who interact with the site. It also increases the potential reach of the website. It may be that a team from within the network will form to oversee responsibility for the site's upkeep. It might also be appropriate to find a resource provider partner in the community that can share or take over responsibility. This also addresses the issue of sustainability, especially as pastors itinerate, as the website can continue to be a source of connection for pastors who are both new and established in the community.

This work will be ongoing through 2022 and beyond. The following is a list of possible next steps:

- February 2022 and ongoing- The website's analytics page will be monitored to assess effectiveness.
- April 2022- A targeted marketing campaign to faith leaders will introduce the site and encourage interaction.
- May 2022 and ongoing- The website will continue to be updated and perfected based on learning from analytics assessments and feedback from users.
- Fall 2022- A meeting of those who seem to be most engaged with the site will be organized to determine a long-term sustainability plan.

In addition, despite the website begin functional, the lack of engagement from faith leaders reveals more work to be done in fostering meaningful relationships among pastors and churches in the community. If pastors and churches become motivated and willing to connect

and partner with one another, their increased presence may serve to better demonstrate their “essential” presence. We will explore opportunities to work with other pastors and churches in the months and years ahead in the hopes that stronger relationships may form over time.

## APPENDIX A—MILESTONE 1 THE NPO CHARTER

### **Personal Research Manifesto**

I will approach this research with open ears and an open mind, ready to go where it leads me. And I will seek collaboration and connection wherever possible.

### **NPO Statement**

Families on the financial margins are often unaware of services provided. Addressing this issue could help people acquire needed assistance and better align providers.

### **NPO Scope**

I am seeking to gain a better understanding of the services that are available for people in Wichita Falls, Texas. I will explore the organizations that currently exists, what these organizations provide, how services are communicated and delivered, and the organizations' desired impact on the community. The costs associated in the research phase will be negligible, however, the possible costs later could be extensive, depending on what I might create. An asset map that is printed or electronic (website and/or app) could cost between a few hundred and several thousand dollars to develop, depending on the size and scope.

### **NPO Context**

Wichita Falls, Texas is a small city of 102,000 residents 125 miles northwest of Dallas. The town's economy centers around agricultural, light industrial, oil and gas, education, and military. It is a predominantly politically conservative area. According to United States census



data, the poverty level in Wichita Falls was 20.9% in 2017. The demographics of the town are shifting with increasing percentages of Hispanic and African-American populations.

There are over 100 Christian churches in Wichita Falls, as well as dozens of government agencies and both local and national community service providers local and national. The town is spread out over several miles with many defined neighborhoods that have dominant socio-economic populations. Despite having a local newspaper, local television stations, and community websites and social media, information about community events and resources tends to be inconsistent.

### **Root Causes**

Based on the Discovery Session and interviews, there are multiple levels of root causes of the NPO that will need to be considered. Families on the financial margins are often caught in generational cycles of poverty, perpetuated by a lack of good financial management skills. Also, many families on the financial margins are challenged by some kind of medical issue, including but not limited to excessive medical debt, chronic medical issues, and mental health issues. In addition, transportation issues were identified as a reason why some families on the financial margins struggle to access services that are available. Finally, there is an inherent suspicion and distrust of “the system” among many families on the financial margins. Some families are not sure about the organizations offering help and what the potential consequences of receiving help (or sharing personal information) might be.

### **Discovery Session Stakeholders**

The Discovery Session stakeholders included two executive directors of community agencies, a former mayor, the director of a pre-school, an elementary school at-risk coordinator, and a retired pastor.

### **One-on-One Interviews**

I was able to interview the CEO of a large community agency and the Director of a Center for Non-Profit Management at a local university.

### **Academic Resources**

Based on the Discovery Session and interviews, there several potential areas of further investigation. One will be the intentional alignment of government agencies, non-profits, and churches. John McKnight and John Kretzman's work on building community will be helpful, as will John Kania and Mark Kania's work with Stanford University's "Collective Impact." Also, Jeremy Everett and the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University will be instructive as a way of better understanding community development. In addition, I am interested in Edward Canda's work in spirituality in social work as a way to bridge the work of the church with community service agencies.

### **Letter of Consent**

*Making Life Better in Wichita Falls:*

*Connecting Churches and Service Agencies for Greater Collaboration*

Dear Community Leader,

My name is John McLarty and I am a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am conducting research on the ways churches and community service agencies offer help to citizens in need. You are invited to engage in a focus group discussion (about ninety minutes) or a personal interview (about thirty minutes) regarding your perceptions on how community services are offered in our community and your thoughts on how our community could be more collaborative in addressing issues of poverty.

This study promises many social benefits. Community leaders like you are uniquely positioned to assess the factors stressing their communities, the morale of the residents, and the needs of our citizens. Moreover, you are frequently in visible roles in our community and have a finger on the pulse of our town. By engaging in honest, forthright conversation, this investigation will document the views, concerns, and vision across important sectors of our community.

The risks associated with this research are minimal. The personal interview questions are innocuous and should not create distress. Nevertheless, please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion.

The results of this study will only be used for research purposes may be used for presentations at a professional conference and/or academic publications. Personal interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Information will be analyzed and presented in an anonymous fashion and no individual will be personally identified. I affirm to keep any personal information and identities confidential.

All research materials (i.e., audio recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be kept in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only

individual who will have access to these materials. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

I thank you for your time in considering this project. If you choose to participate, please be aware that you are making a contribution to furthering educational research. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at [texasmcclarty5@gmail.com](mailto:texasmcclarty5@gmail.com). If you have any additional questions you may contact my project advisor, Dr. Julie Dodge at [juldodge64@gmail.com](mailto:juldodge64@gmail.com).

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Discovery Session Documents

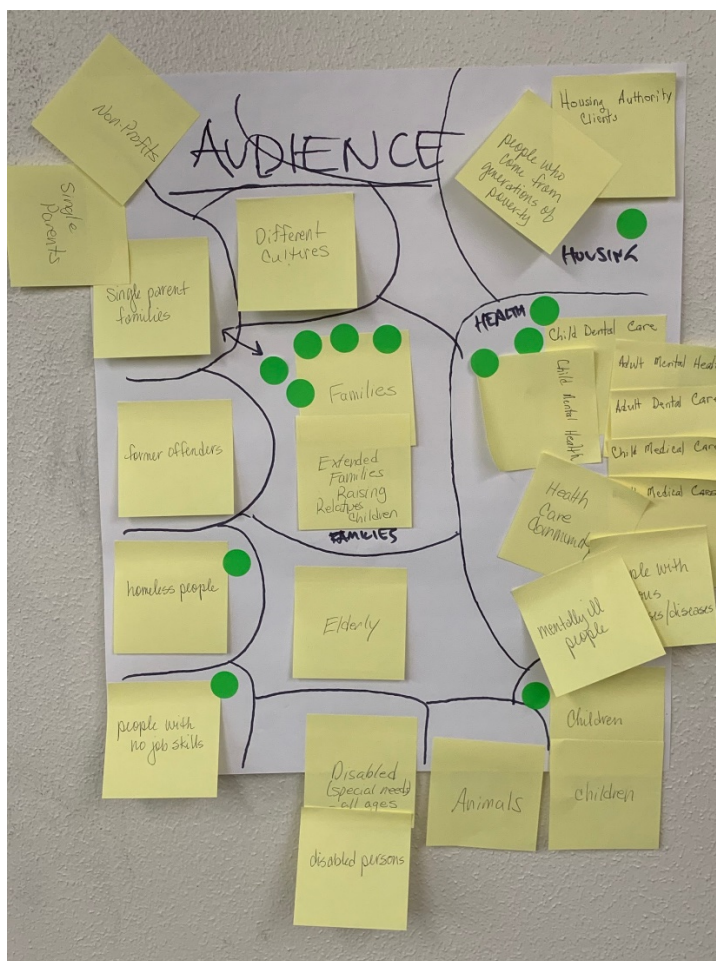


Figure A.1. Identifying Target Audience.

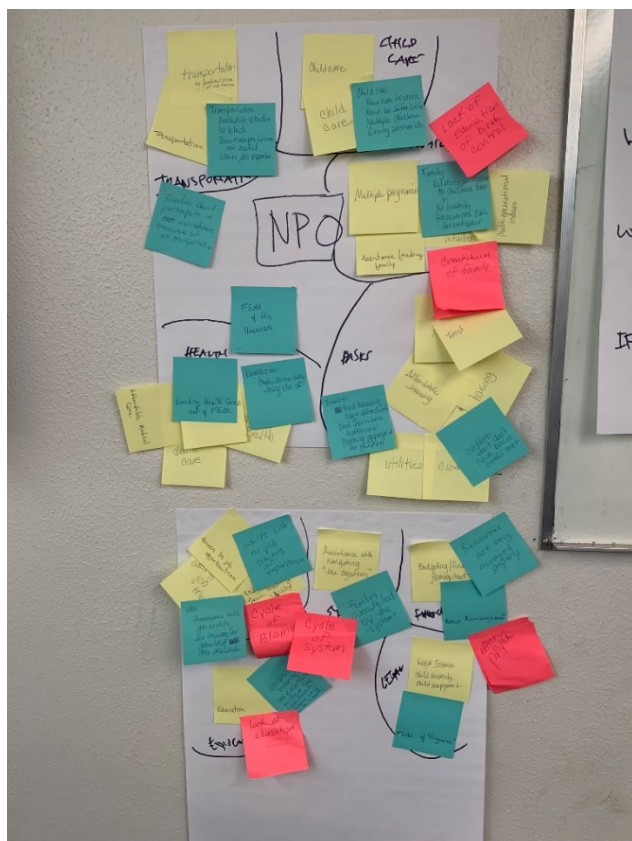


Figure A.2. Identifying NPO

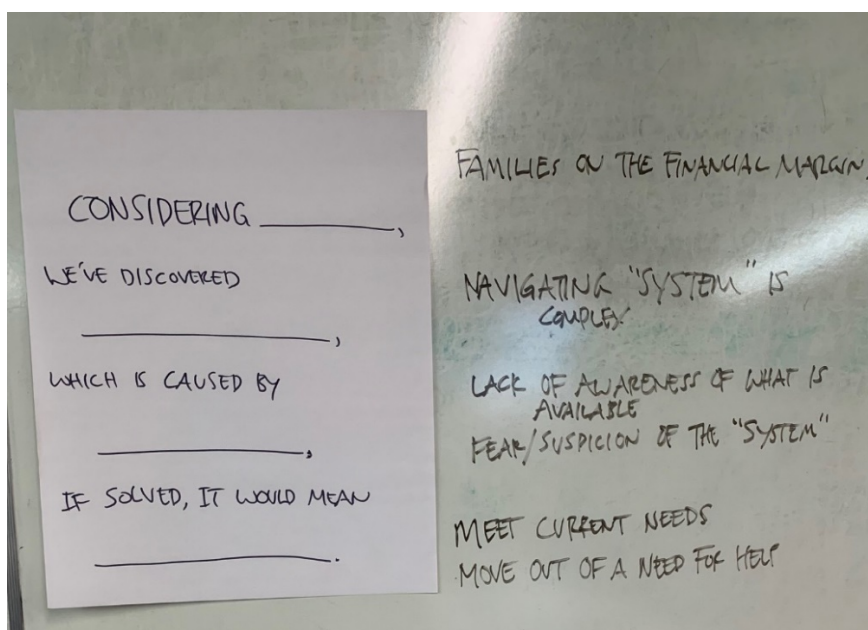


Figure A.3. Crafting NPO Statement.

## APPENDIX B—MILESTONE 2 NPO TOPIC EXPERTISE ESSAY

### **Introduction**

What is the central work of the Church? There are many possibilities: worship, discipleship, evangelism, and social justice start the conversation, and each of these aspects of the faith community are important as the church seeks to frame life in the context of spirituality and faith. Another component is how the Church exists and relates within its local context, serving as a partner to meet the spiritual, social, and basic needs of people. There are many non-church resources and organizations whose mission is to meet specific human needs. These providers are often better equipped than local churches. However, local congregations still have an important role to play, both within the framework of community service and its own core identity. While there have always been people who live on the financial and social margins of society, throughout history, God has explicitly directed God's people to care for them.

This research project began with the aspiration of exploring more effective means of collaboration between churches, non-profits, and government service agencies. The originally identified need, problem, or opportunity (NPO) centered on families on the financial margins and their access to providers. This is important, but further research revealed the need to include voices and perspectives of those who utilize these services to gain a deeper understanding of how better collaboration could be achieved. Now, with the number of COVID-19 cases rising in the United States and in my local context, the urgency has increased with regard to serving those who are food insecure, those at a higher medical risk due to age and/or health conditions, those who are already on the financial margins, as well as those who are likely to be economically impacted in the aftermath of the virus.

As municipalities, counties, and states enact temporary “stay at home” or “shelter in place” ordinances intended to slow community spread of the coronavirus, questions about “essential” and “non-essential” businesses and activities have emerged. Most ordinances begin with guidelines from the Department of Homeland Security, which do not include churches as “essential” infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Many communities, mine included, have allowed for religious institutions to provide online worship services, and churches with food pantries or shelters would also be included within the “essential” criteria.<sup>2</sup> Thankfully, resources for community members are still available, but I wonder if this crisis has inadvertently exposed the public perception that the church is “non-essential.”

I am curious about the long-term impact this crisis might have on the church’s witness in the world. This essay will begin by exploring the biblical and theological foundations for why the Church and the Christian community are called to engage in ministries that serve and connect its neighbors. It will also examine some of the history and key voices for how churches can be effective partners in creating “abundant communities.” However, because the overall framework is shifting in light of the possible implications for the church that may emerge from this global emergency, I will also examine how the church has responded in past pandemic events and how that might guide the church going forward.

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<sup>1</sup> “Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.cisa.gov/publication/guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workforce>.

<sup>2</sup> On April 1, 2020, the Texas Governor and Texas Attorney General both issued statements that added churches to the list of “essential” infrastructure. However, this addition was not meant to supersede a community’s shelter-in-place ordinance or go against social distancing recommendations.



## Section 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations

One core component for people who seek to live according to Scripture is a mandate to care for others. The Hebrew Scriptures address this early as the Israelites are instructed to take care of the foreigner, to forgive debts, to give money to the poor, and help each other economically. The overarching theme of the biblical narrative is that “God is always on the side of the powerless or marginalized.”<sup>3</sup> As the nation of Israel is established, there is a mandate from God to the people to care for the poor and needy.<sup>4</sup> The prophet Micah outlines this mandate in a different way, “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”<sup>5</sup>

The life of Jesus is an embodiment of caring for the poor. His first sermon in Luke’s Gospel makes his mission clear: Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus brought the Scriptures to life in his teaching and his actions and he brought those on the margins into the center of the Gospel. In addition, the parable of the sheep and goats defines for followers of Jesus the criteria of judgment based on whether or not one feeds someone who is hungry, gives a thirsty person something to drink, clothes the naked, welcomes the stranger, and visits those who are sick and imprisoned.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Linthicum, “Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community,” (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003,) 32.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. 15 (New International Version).

<sup>5</sup> Mic. 6:8 (NIV).

<sup>6</sup> Luke 4:18 (NIV).

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 25:31-46 (NIV).

The early Christian community was established during the time of the Roman occupation. Upward mobility was not a reality for most in this world, other than a slave gaining their freedom. “The rigid societal (sic) stratification at the time limited community empowerment and grassroots mobilization.”<sup>8</sup> Still, the Church was a surprisingly diverse collection of people. The Church’s ministry included people all along the spectrum of education and economic levels, those who had little to no social or political power as well as those who were well-connected. Churches were established. They grew and even developed a global reach.

One of the defining characteristics of these early churches was its care for the poor. While some were called to the work of apostles, preachers, and teachers, it was clear that the ministry of service and caring for the community was vital as well. This is first addressed in Acts 6 with the establishment of specific scope of responsibility for some to oversee food distribution to widows.<sup>9</sup> This would serve as a model for the church and its engagement with the poor that endures today.

One way to explore the Church’s ministry with people on the financial margins is to examine how the Triune God interacts with humanity. Human beings were created in God’s image and given special responsibility to care for God’s creation.<sup>10</sup> Part of that care is how humans care for each other. The Scriptures are filled with examples of how the poor are expected to be cared for, but also how the poor have gifts to offer as well. The story of the widow at

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<sup>8</sup> Fernando Rukshan, “The Core Values of Christian Community Development as Reflected in the Writings of the Apostle Paul.” *Social Work & Christianity* 33, no. 4 (2006): 357.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 6:1-6 (NIV).

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 1:27-28 (NIV).

Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, and the poor widow in the temple in Mark 12, both bear witness to this. The Biblical mandate is clear that the Church is to engage with all people.

John's Gospel begins with an understanding of God's activity in Jesus Christ. Eugene Peterson's translation of John 1:14 reads, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood."<sup>11</sup> This idea of location within the community is central to our Christian understanding of incarnation. It is also how we have an incarnational ministry with those around us. God in Christ lived among people, sharing their struggles and suffering, in order to build relationships and be reconciled to them.

The dual nature of Christ, fully human and fully divine, enabled Jesus to do the reconciling work he had been sent by God to do, yet also relate to people in a personal way. Jesus offers an example to the Church of how to be fully aligned with God and God's purpose, still fully embedded in the community which it serves. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "(Jesus,) being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!"<sup>12</sup>

The Pentecost story in Acts 2 is a description of God's Holy Spirit working in and through the Church for the sake of spreading from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and into all the world. Peter's sermon quotes the prophet Joel who said, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people."<sup>13</sup> Because God's Spirit is poured out on all people, all people have gifts and resources

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<sup>11</sup> John 1:14 (The Message).

<sup>12</sup> Phil. 2:5-8 (NIV).

<sup>13</sup> Acts 2:17 (NIV).

that can be deployed in tangible and significant ways. Engagement with the community begins with an understanding and appreciation that God's Spirit is not reserved for those who qualify based on income or socio-economic condition.

To believe that all people have gifts to offer is to see people as valuable, creative, resourceful, and whole. Paul uses the metaphor of a body to describe the church.<sup>14</sup> To understand the Church as the Body of Christ, means it has parts and functions that are necessary for life. One interpretation of this metaphor is to recognize how these gifts are designed to work together. It shifts the conversation and work from merely providing services in transactional ways, to collaborating in relational ways so that dignity is uplifted. Knowing that each person has gifts and resources to offer helps to build a community of neighbors rather than a mere client list of consumers. Paul writes, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it."<sup>15</sup> This understanding lifts up the value in all people. The gifts and resources may not be the same, nor may they be equally distributed, but the expectation is that all of the gifts and resources must work together for the body to function as it was intended.

Jay Van Groningen sees the Church standing in the midst of this community life, not in a condescending way, but collaborative. He writes, "Churches are the bearers of the values of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom places high value indeed on healthy, flourishing, inclusive communities. ... A church that wants to transform a community will position itself as the connector of individuals and associations to bring all their respective gifts to the visioning and

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor 12:12-31 (NIV).

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 12:21,27 (NIV).

activities for community transformation.”<sup>16</sup>

These relationships are fundamentally formed in the question Jesus in Luke 10.... “Who is my neighbor?” The CEO of Dallas’ CitySquare, Larry James argues, “the question must never be, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ Rather, the proper, the real question is ‘How can I be a neighbor to anyone in my world?’”<sup>17</sup> The parable of the Good Samaritan is often told from the angle of praise for the one who took action or of surprise that the help came from a Samaritan. The real point is that anyone can be a neighbor. James writes, “community development is all about people and how we regard them.”<sup>18</sup>

“The world proposed in Scripture is about a way of being in a world that attends to the concreteness of everyday life rather than the romanticized idealizations of what the church or a culture ought to be.”<sup>19</sup> Faithful engagement with the Hebrew Scriptures, along with the Gospels and epistles, is not merely a means to gain an understanding of the ancient world, but it is to guide believers today in how to interact more fully and faithfully with the world.

John Perkins, co-founder of the Christian Community Development Association, writes that Christians are called “to make their lives more meaningful and (be) living demonstrations of the gospel of Christ.”<sup>20</sup> The Scriptures bear witness to the work of the faithful in serving others and forming relationships with God and neighbor. When these relationships are based in

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<sup>16</sup> Jay Van Groningen, “An Introduction to Asset Based Community Development for Church Leaders.” Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and Communities First Workshop Materials presented in Durham, NC, January 23, 2010, <https://communitiesfirstassociation.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/introtoabcdforchurchleaders.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Larry James, “The Wealth of the Poor: How Valuing Every Neighbor Restores Hope in Our Cities,” (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013,) Kindle, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Roxburgh, “Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Allelon, 2011,) ProQuest Ebook Central, 45.

<sup>20</sup> John Perkins, “Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993,) 23.

collaboration, respect, and appreciation of the gifts that each person can offer, a healthier, and more Biblical, vision of community can be formed. Authors John McKnight and Peter Block describe the power of associations. Associations are usually formed around things that people care about so community life is strengthened by intentional investment as citizens come together to address issues, solve problems, advocate, and improve life.<sup>21</sup>

This expectation is the starting point for Asset Based Community Development which focuses first on the gifts of the community instead of starting with what is wrong or what a community does not have. Rather than focusing on how poor someone is or what they need, the first questions seek to uncover what an individual can do, what gifts they have. Even in the midst of struggles and crises, gifts are present. The bigger challenge for the church often is “how to make the gifts as widely known as the struggles.”<sup>22</sup> A Scriptural understanding of this aspiration could lead churches to a better understanding of how collaborative engagement is essential, even when a community is being asked to shelter in place.

The church’s witness to care for others is not an optional activity. It is command and an expectation that continues to be essential, even when some of the key practices of a church are limited by physical distancing ordinances. The Biblical mandate to tend to the needs of the poor, sick, stranger, widowed, and orphaned informs the “essential” nature of the church. In times of a global pandemic, the work and witness of the church is as important as ever, even if it requires some creative adaptation and adjustment to be accomplished.

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<sup>21</sup> John McKnight and Peter Block. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012,) 130.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Mather, *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything: Finding Abundant Community in Unexpected Places*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2018,) 36.

## Section 2: Topic History and Key Voices

The church in post-biblical history has an extensive record of caring for others. The witness of the church in the two millennia after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has included ministry to the poor, sick, lame, widowed, orphaned, and foreigner, to varying degrees at different times. This section will explore the history of the church's engagement in ministries with the poor, including how the church has collaborated in community development initiatives, as well as some critical influences that will help to guide this work going forward. It will also include historic responses of the church during times of natural disasters and global pandemics.

In the earliest years of the church, followers of Jesus expressed their love for God and neighbor through acts of mercy and compassion. They practiced a gospel of love and charity evidenced by the way they cared for others. In his article, "The Church as a Transformation and Change Agent," Jerry Pillay writes, "Generally speaking, the New Testament sees the ministry of mercy not only as an individual obligation, but also as a corporate endeavour of the church, to be carried out by the church itself."<sup>23</sup>

Strangely, it was the church's care for the sick in the early days of Christianity that contributed to its success. The church's response to plagues and global pandemics is part of its history.<sup>24</sup> From 249 C.E. to 262 C.E., the Roman Empire endured a plague that, at its height, caused as many as 5000 deaths per day in Rome. And yet, the Plague of Cyprian created an

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<sup>23</sup> Jerry Pillay, "The Church as a Transformation and Change Agent," *HTS Theological Studies*, 73(3), 4352, 2, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4352>.

<sup>24</sup> Glen Scrivener draws on Rodney Stark's "The Rise of Christianity" in his article "Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History," posted in *The Gospel Coalition* on March 16, 2020.

opportunity for members of the early Christian community to demonstrate faith and care for their neighbor. Scrivener quotes Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria who wrote of the church's response,

*"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them, departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead." These selfless acts of ministry were noticed and made an impression on others. Over the next several decades the Christian movement increased four-fold. Scrivener writes, "If you want to know how Christianity went from an obscure and marginal movement to representing around 6 million believers by AD 300, Rodney Stark will tell you: plagues were a huge factor."*<sup>25</sup>

The Christian witness during these times of sorrow and uncertainty, the hope and faith Christians displayed in the face of tragedy, the love and care they gave to each other and their neighbors, showed the Roman world the true nature of the way of Jesus Christ and millions would come to Christ in the years following. The church became known for its care. The church found increased credibility and a place in society because of its compassion. Pillay writes, "As the church spread through the Roman Empire its ministries of mercy underwent considerable development. Social relief became a monopoly of the church in Rome and Alexandria, where it was manifested in distributions to the poor and in the establishment and upkeep of hospitals, orphanages and homes for the aged. By the 4th century the church was also bringing relief to people whom inflation had plunged into distress."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Glen Scrivener, "Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History," *The Gospel Coalition*, March 16, 2020, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-lessons-church-history/>.

<sup>26</sup> Pillay, 2.



Over 1000 years later, during the devastating years of the Black Death, Martin Luther advocated a response very similar to that of the early Christians in Rome. Luther's personal decision was to remain in Wittenburg and tend to the sick as the plague struck. He based this on Jesus' words in Matthew 25 to care for those who are sick. He wrote, "According to this passage, we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress, but is obliged to assist and help as he himself would like to be helped."<sup>27</sup> Lyman Stone writes, "Luther provides a clear articulation of the Christian epidemic response: We die at our posts. Christian doctors cannot abandon hospitals, Christian governors cannot flee their districts, Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. The plague does not dissolve our duties: It turns them into crosses, on which we must be prepared to die."<sup>28</sup>

Luther's belief that the Christian's duty to provide help where possible underscores the essential nature of the church, even in times of crisis. However, the church also has a responsibility not to do more harm. Luther recognized this and provided an example and guidance for Christians to follow appropriate "social distancing" measures that would help prevent the spread of sickness. He wrote,

*"I will ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid the place or person*

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, "Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II," ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 124.

<sup>28</sup> Lyman Stone, "Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years," *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2020, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/13/christianity-epidemics-2000-years-should-i-still-go-to-church-coronavirus/>.

*but will go freely as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.”*<sup>29</sup>

Stone continues, “The Christian motive for hygiene and sanitation does not arise in self-preservation but in an ethic of service to our neighbor. We wish to care for the afflicted, which first and foremost means not infecting the healthy. Early Christians created the first hospitals in Europe as hygienic places to provide care during times of plague, on the understanding that negligence that spread disease further was, in fact, murder.”<sup>30</sup> Certainly one of the blessings to emerge from the Reformation was a remembering of God’s concern for the poor and the Biblical mandate for the Christian to bear witness to that.<sup>31</sup>

Through the rise of the industrial age, the church continued to develop systems to serve its community and care for the sick and the poor in varying ways. The emerging capitalist economy actually increased the urgency as the gap between those with wealth and those in poverty widened rapidly.<sup>32</sup> The response of the church was to create schools, medical clinics, hospitals, orphanages, and credit unions in an effort to provide assistance to the poor. Over time, many of these institutions have redefined their relationships with the church, with some merely keeping the church’s name with no significant church oversight.

The City of Wichita Falls, Texas has seen this develop over time. In April 1979, a tornado ripped through the community, killing 42 people and displacing nearly 20,000 people,

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<sup>29</sup> Luther, 129.

<sup>30</sup> Stone.

<sup>31</sup> Pillay, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Polanyi, “The Great Transformation: The Economic and Political Origins of Our Time,” (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944,) 108.

making it one of the most deadly and costly tornadoes on American soil.<sup>33</sup> Within days of the tornado, several pastors from the community came together and created an organization called Interfaith Disaster Services. Interfaith's purpose was to serve as a central point of contact for people needing help and people wanting to make donations. In the weeks and months following, Interfaith was able to help thousands of citizens as the community sought to rebuild.

As the town recovered, Interfaith Disaster Services remained, but with a different focus and a new name, Interfaith Ministries. Rather than be a disaster relief agency, Interfaith Ministries began to serve people on the financial margins with short-term assistance such as rent and utility payments, prescription medicines, baby formula and diapers, and non-perishable food items. Churches across town continued to support Interfaith Ministries in this work and referring much of their own benevolence requests to them. Today, Interfaith Ministries is known as Interfaith Outreach and is still a key partner for churches and the community. Interfaith operates with help from community members, grants, and gifts from churches, but is not affiliated with the church. Its mission today is to be a primary resource for citizens who have short-term financial needs related to housing, utilities, food, and the like.

The creation of Interfaith Disaster Services marked the first time the community of Wichita Falls had collaborated to create a centralized place for assistance. In the years since, many other organizations have been established to meet specific needs. Churches engaged in community service and ministries are now part of a broader coalition, not exclusively looked upon for help or leadership. Many churches want to be involved, though the most productive

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<sup>33</sup> Don Burgess, "Synopsis and Discussion of the 10 April 1979 Tornado Outbreak," *National Weather Service*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.weather.gov/oun/events-19790410-burgess>.

methods are not always clear. There are also non-profit community services and government agencies that provide various types of resources. During the spread of the coronavirus, more restrictive measures were placed on the movement of people, potentially limiting access to necessary aid for those who needed it. Fortunately, school districts were able to deploy their food and transportation services to provide meals to students and families in need. The food banks and shelters were able to continue to operate with certain precautions. Churches have attempted to help by recruiting volunteers and looking for other opportunities to serve.

In the aftermath of a natural disaster or in the midst of a pandemic, there are specific ways churches and church leaders can contribute. In many ways churches are uniquely organized to provide care and aid in times of crisis. The United Methodist Church specifically advises its clergy and leadership to take the following five steps: “Harness people’s desire to do something; Support civil authorities; Engage in a ministry of presence; Connect with others outside your church community; Commit for the long haul.”<sup>34</sup> Churches can and should be prepared to respond.

While a government agency may classify the church as “non-essential,” the church provides an essential service in its community. Adam Copenhaver argues for the continued necessity of churches, especially in the midst of crisis. He writes,

*“Our commission to love our neighbors ought to make the church the most essential organization in our community. The church feeds the poor and the food-insecure. The church comes to the aid of at-risk kids living in unstable homes. The church protects the abused. The church advocates for the marginalized. The church supports the unemployed. The church encourages the depressed. The church cares for the sick. The church watches over widows. The church takes in orphans. The church comforts the grieving. When there is a crisis, the church*

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<sup>34</sup> Clay Morgan, “Leading Your Community When Disaster Strikes,” *Resource UMC*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/leading-your-community-when-natural-disaster-strikes>.

*springs into action. Pity the community that does not have an active church during this season.*<sup>35</sup>

But beyond organization and practical assistance, churches also serve to help people see evidence of God's presence at work in a community, even during a crisis. Churches provide a "more thoroughly grounded apprehension of what it means to be fully human and to flourish as individuals and communities (and) can promote a better concept of the common good."<sup>36</sup> Edward Canda writes, "Spirituality is the heart of helping. It is the heart of empathy and care, the ... driving force of action for service."<sup>37</sup> Canda explores more deeply the spiritual dimension in social work practice, and, by extension, community engagement. As churches seek to bring that deeper element of faith into the conversation of community development, a holistic perspective of spirituality can help establish a framework for what the church has to offer.

A crisis can help clarify our priorities and refocus on our work on what is most important and necessary. Akilah Walker-Baker writes, "Crises take us back to our foundation. They expose our true moral imperatives, highlight the cracks in America's social contract, and force us to respond with serious change for the greater good. ... (We) can make the change that decides how

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<sup>35</sup> Adam Copenhaver, "Is the Church 'Essential': Responding to Government Authorities," *Center for Pastor Theologians*, March 27, 2020, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.pastortheologians.com/articles/2020/3/27/ykq5sn7omkhift2bbswrvlsrnw89u>.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Jones Rowland, "Contemplation and Action: Reflections on Christian Engagement in Community Organizing," *Practical Theology* 9, no. 2, 2016, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www-tandfonline-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/1756073X.2016.1157670>.

<sup>37</sup> Leola Dyrud Furman and Edward Canda, "Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009,) xv.

much better we will be when this crisis is over. This crisis has the power to show the best of us and what real collaboration looks like in the face of need.”<sup>38</sup>

Redefining our understanding of “essential infrastructure” could actually lead churches, service providers, and government agencies to greater collaboration, especially as communities witness the creativity and resourcefulness of individuals in identifying and solving problems. In the wake of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, institutions and businesses were forced to shift their methods of doing their work.<sup>39</sup> School districts shifted to online learning, many teachers were set free to develop content and new ways of interfacing with students. Local restaurants adjusted their business models and some began using their bulk purchasing power to offer discounted groceries. Neighbors stepped up to check in on and assist neighbors who were at higher risk of infection. Solutions were generated as much from the ground up as from the top down.

Some Christians question whether the church has any role in this work at all, preferring instead for the church to focus solely on the work of saving souls and leaving the temporal needs of this world to social service agencies.<sup>40</sup> While other well-meaning Christians and churches are quick to look at needs and problems and jump to quick solutions from a perspective of provider or resource, rather than collaborator, partner, neighbor, or friend. It is much easier to do the “feel

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<sup>38</sup> Akilah Watkins-Butler, “Community Development is Crucial in This Moment,” *Shelterforce*, March 27, 2020, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://shelterforce.org/2020/03/27/community-development-is-crucial-in-this-moment/>.

<sup>39</sup> Claire Kowalik, “City Adapts to Inform, Protect Staff, Public, During COVID-19 Situation,” *Times Record News*, March 17, 2020, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.timesrecordnews.com/story/news/local/2020/03/17/city-adapts-inform-protect-staff-public-during-covid-19-situation/5068012002/>.

<sup>40</sup> Darrell B. Harrison, “The Fault in Their (Social) Gospel,” *The Christian Post*, September 5, 2018, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/the-fault-in-their-social-gospel.html>.

good” work of collecting canned goods, filling backpacks, or gathering supplies in a disaster than it is to take a deeper look at the structural causes of poverty. Brazilian Bishop Dom Helder Camara once said, “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist.”<sup>41</sup>

This sort of community engagement has been studied and promoted extensively by pioneers like John Kretzman and John McKnight and their understanding of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD.). This model is crucial because it begins with the assumption that all people have assets, resources, and gifts to contribute. Kretzman offers two key components to Asset Based Community Development: first, to focus not on deficiencies and needs, but on the assets within a community, and second, to harness the power of associations.<sup>42</sup>

Building on that work, John McKnight and Peter Block are leading advocates for intentional relationship building between community resource providers and those who benefit from those services. They talk about a shift in mindset within communities from that of a consumer and client identity to that of citizen and neighbor. They make this distinction by defining a citizen as one who participates and helps to shape life, community and the world, while a consumer relies on others to provide the goods and services necessary for life. They write, “When we shift from citizen to consumer, we go to the professional to seek satisfaction, we lose our capacity to prosper and find peace of mind.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ron Sidor, “The Bible, Poverty, Justice, and Christian Obedience,” in *The End of Hunger: Renewed Hope for Feeding the World*, ed. Jenny Eaton Dyer and Cathleen Falsani, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019,) 31, Kindle.

<sup>42</sup> John Kretzmann, “Building Communities from the Inside Out,” *Shelterforce*, September 1, 1995, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://shelterforce.org/1995/09/01/building-communities-from-the-inside-out/>.

<sup>43</sup> John McKnight and Peter Block. “Abundant Community.” *Leadership Excellence* 27, no. 4 (2010): 5-6.

McKnight and Block argue that the price of consumerism is guaranteed dissatisfaction while the benefit of citizenship is hope. “Knowing we have the power to define our possibilities, decide what choices reside in our hands, and choose our future, we no longer require great leaders - not even a strong, developed economy, only each other, in association, coming together with our gifts in mind. We are, however, required to join together, share our gifts, and become the principal producers of our future.”<sup>44</sup> When people are regarded as capable of contributing to their own success, aid and assistance can be experienced more as a partnership shaped from a shared identity. Making life better can and should still be a goal, but a more faithful understanding of this aspiration could lead churches and organizations and communities to more collaborative engagement.

Over the past twenty-five years, ABCD has proven to be an effective means of social and community transformation. Ron Dwyer-Boss and Indigo Bishop offer this analysis: “The core of social justice is the combination of power and love. At the core of ABCD are the principles of inclusion, dignity, and democracy. Our experience is that the ABCD approach is more compatible with a social justice agenda than traditional community development and community organizing.”<sup>45</sup> Dwyer-Boss and Bishop highlight four key elements of ABCD that have contributed to its success as recognizing the value of every person and community, prioritizing inclusion, growing power locally, and seeing institutions as servants.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ron Dwyer-Boss and Indigo Bishop, “Let’s Get Explicit: Social Justice in Asset-Based Community Development,” *Shelterforce*, April 26, 2019, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://shelterforce.org/2019/04/26/lets-get-explicit-social-justice-in-asset-based-community-development/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



One place where this collaboration seems to be working well is at Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis. Broadway's pastor, Mike Mather has written about the church's journey from a resource provider to a partner in developing an abundant community in his context. Mather talks about how the church learned to see the giftedness in their neighbors first by changing its approach to how it gathered information from those who were utilizing its services. Rather than focus solely on needs, Broadway started asking questions about resources. Their intake questionnaire now includes the following three questions: "1) What three things do you do well enough that you could teach them to someone else? 2) What three things would you like to learn that you don't already know? 3) Who besides God and me (the interviewer) is going to go with you along the way?"<sup>47</sup>

Mather writes about how this one shift led to identifying people in the church's immediate neighborhood who had tremendous gifts and resources. The second shift was the creation of a staff position at the church called the "Roving Listener." A person was hired to walk the neighborhoods, looking for people and opportunities for connection.<sup>48</sup> Broadway UMC is still a metropolitan congregation made up of members from around the city of Indianapolis as well as people who live within walking distance of the church. Mather writes, "On Sundays and throughout the week, low-income, high-income, and middle-income people all gather at Broadway. It's a collection of folks that always makes me think, *This is what the realm of God looks like.*"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mather, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Mather, 23-27.

<sup>49</sup> Mather, 139.

This kind of engagement begins with respecting and uplifting the dignity in each person. CitySquare in Dallas is one such organization that seeks an approach that treats people as neighbors rather than clients. CitySquare CEO Larry James talks about his own journey to seeing people as gifted and capable when he tells the story of Josafina Ortiz. Josafina had just finished her grocery shopping in the CitySquare food pantry as Larry was trying to interview three Hispanic families through his limited Spanish and their limited English. On seeing Josafina, Larry asked for her help. He reflected later, “I now understand completely just how important that question is especially for *helpers* to learn to ask of those who are *helped*.”<sup>50</sup> Josafina was able to help translate for Larry and the families seeking CitySquare’s assistance. Josafina did more than translate. She took control of the conversation and was able to determine the extent of the need for each of the families. As Larry was thanking Josafina for her help, she offered to return the following day. Larry accepted her offer and Josafina returned each day for nine years. Larry would say that Josafina was instrumental in opening his eyes to the “wealth of the poor.”<sup>51</sup>

It was not CitySquare, but Unity Shoppe in Santa Barbara that inspired artists Brad and Kimberly Williams Paisley to create The Store in Nashville. Each of these operate essentially as a food pantry, but with the feel of a grocery store. Rather than merely receive a sack of preselected food, neighbors are given the opportunity to “shop” for what they want and need. Kimberly Williams Paisley describes the experience like this: “There can be so much anxiety and stress surrounding the idea of food, especially for people who are worried about where their next meal is coming from. And this is something that makes them feel normal. That’s why we decided

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<sup>50</sup> James, 49, Kindle.

<sup>51</sup> James, 50, Kindle.

to call it The Store, because we want it to be the most normal experience for them and for their children.”<sup>52</sup>

These examples serve to highlight how a more collaborative and respectful approach can transform relationships between social service providers and those who use them from a provider/client relationship to a shared citizenship relationship. If community members see themselves as interconnected and citizens together, they may begin to recognize the “essential” value in others.

On the other hand, a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic might actually begin to regress and undo efforts toward greater collaboration and shared citizenship. As needs are assumed, solutions are quickly generated, and services are provided. Many times this happens without much initial input because providers are simply reacting to an immediate need. It is important to continue to include all voices and perspectives in the conversation in order to uplift human dignity and work for justice for all people. This might be another place where the church could be a community partner and advocate, leveraging relationships for the sake of inclusion and collaboration.

The church’s history is filled with examples of successes and failures when it comes to establishing its essential presence in a community and during times of crisis. Perhaps the past can guide the future by the lessons learned through times of crisis and through improving methods of community development. In order to do this, the church must be seen as more than a building, more than a set of doctrinal statements, and more than a Sunday morning worship service. The

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<sup>52</sup> Kimberly Williams-Paisley and Brad Paisley, “Feeding the Hungry By Raising Dignity,” in *The End of Hunger: Renewed Hope for Feeding the World*, ed. Jenny Eaton Dyer and Cathleen Falsani, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019,) 196, Kindle.

church at its best is on the move, in relationship, and striving to make a positive impact in the world.

### **Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion**

What does it mean for the church to be considered “non-essential?” First, it is important to understand this is a designation in the Department of Homeland Security regarding infrastructure and the continuity of basic services. It is not intended as a statement of worth, impact, or necessity. Second, during times of crisis and uncertainty, situations are often very fluid and things can and do change. For example, the governor of Texas amended his initial order to include churches, including religious services assuming certain conditions are met, on the list of essential services. Some might wonder if this was based on the governor’s own personal religious convictions, his interpretation of constitutional law and First Amendment issues, or by the outcry of religious constituents accusing him of persecuting the church. Third, perhaps this is an opportunity for the church to come to a realization that it is not the center of society as it might have been in other eras and develop a better understanding of what it means to be a neighbor. The question about being essential is really about whether or not what the church does matters.

For many churches, worship has been the key element of engagement. With physical distancing restrictions limiting large group gatherings, in person weekend worship has become prohibited. Some churches and pastors have challenged, even defied these ordinances. Many others made the shift to online worship as a means of maintaining this component of church life. But worship is not the only aspect of what a church is called to do. Missional church leader Alan Hirsch said, “If you want to learn how to play chess, you should start by removing your own queen. Once you’ve mastered the game without the most powerful piece, then put the queen back

in and see how good you are! For the church, the Sunday service is our queen. We've been relying on it too much. Now that the queen has been taken off the board, it's time to rediscover what all the other pieces can do."<sup>53</sup>

The church's official designation from the government may be deemed "non-essential," but the essential work of the church continues. "The message has not changed, and the mission has not changed."<sup>54</sup> For all of its involvements and activities, the essential nature of the church is about how people of faith love God and their neighbor.<sup>55</sup> Love for God and neighbor is often expressed in service. Micah 6:8 is a reminder to value this above all else, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."<sup>56</sup> For the early Evangelical church, of which Methodism was virtually synonymous, there were four areas of focus that gave the church direction in how it practiced justice, mercy, and an authentic relationship with God. "The four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."<sup>57</sup>

What is the church about? Is any of it essential? And if so, can the work be done while people are in the midst of disaster or sheltering-in-place? The answer is yes. And much of the work can and should be done in collaboration with community partners and neighbors so that the

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<sup>53</sup> Ryan Sidhom, "How Churches Can Make the Most of Being 'Non-Essential Businesses,'" *Relevant Magazine*, April 22, 2020, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/church/how-churches-can-make-the-most-of-being-non-essential-businesses/>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Matt 22:24-40 (NIV).

<sup>56</sup> Mic 6:8 (NIV.)

<sup>57</sup> D.W. Bebbington, "Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s," (New York: Routledge, 2005,) 16.

dignity and worth of all people is lifted up and no harm is done, even in the well-intentioned service of others.

A Ninth Century hymn is translated, “Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found; brought here together by Christ’s love are we thus bound.”<sup>58</sup> The Christian witness in the world is still about revealing God’s presence in the midst of poverty and pandemic. And while the methods of the church’s work and engagement may have to shift as people shelter in place, the mission remains. The church is called to be a neighbor while we love our neighbors, to uplift human dignity and serve as a collaborative partner in working to build structures that allow people the opportunity to succeed. This is who we are.

Jeremy Everett adds this: “If the Bible is correct, we will be judged, as a nation and a world, not by how we improve the quality of life for those who already have much, but by how we treat the hungry and the poor, the sick and the homeless- the ‘least of these’ among us. Sacred Scripture and history repeat this claim over and over, and we must listen, not to the populist uprising, but what is underneath it. We must hear the desperation in the voices that cry out from the fringes and the margins here at home and all over our world, voices shouting for help... This is our task as people of faith”<sup>59</sup>

How is the church contributing something essential during this particular Covid-19 crisis? It is possible that the virus could significantly weaken the witness of the church. If the church lives into its designation of “non-essential,” potential community partners may move on

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<sup>58</sup> “Where Charity and Love Prevail,” 9th cent. Latin, translated by Omer Westendorf (1961,) in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989,) 549.

<sup>59</sup> Jeremy Everett, “Remember Us When You Come into Your Kingdom,” in *The End of Hunger: Renewed Hope for Feeding the World*, ed. Jenny Eaton Dyer and Cathleen Falsani, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019,) 82, Kindle.

and dismiss the church as an irrelevant relic. On the other hand, perhaps the church could emerge in this historic moment as an essential community asset, uniquely organized to provide leadership, perspective, and a point of connection both for those who are providing services as well as those who are needing them.

A primary function of religion in society is about helping people make meaning of this life and of this world. Math and science help us understand aspects of how the world functions. Humanities and the arts can help deepen our awareness and perspective of the world. Theology and religion help us piece it all together- answering the bigger question of “what is this all about?” As the church adapts many of its methods of ministry at this particular moment in history, the essential purpose remains the same. The church exists to reflect God’s presence in the world and offer hope to the hopeless and most vulnerable and to help all people know their worth as human beings created in Gods’ image. This is the essential nature of the church.

## APPENDIX C—MILESTONE 3 DESIGN WORKSHOP REPORT

### **Introduction**

A Design Workshop and One-on-One Interviews were conducted as part of a research project on how the local church can offer an “essential” presence during times of crisis. The workshop was completed on Saturday, November 7, 2020 with five key stakeholders. Interviews to further test the outcome of the workshop were completed the following week. This report will serve as a summary of those conversations.

### **NPO Statement**

The Church has an opportunity to rediscover what “essential” ministry looks like in the midst of a pandemic of sickness, economic uncertainty, political division, and systemic racism.

### **NPO Scope and Constraints**

The scope of this project is to examine and enhance the way the faith community is able to assist with the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people in order to help make life better both in times of calm and in times of crisis. The boundaries will be limited to the Wichita Falls, Texas community, exploring networks for collaboration, resources options already available, and communication systems needed to facilitate cooperative efforts. The initial costs associated with the NPO are minimal, though could potentially increase if the direction of the project goes into a more technical area like website or app design.



### **NPO Context**

The ministry setting for the NPO is Wichita Falls, Texas, a city of 102,000 people on the northern border, approximately 125 miles northwest of Dallas. The community is primarily politically and theologically conservative. The economy is a mixture of oil and gas industry, agriculture, light manufacturing, with the school district as the largest employer. The community is also bolstered by a public liberal arts university and an Air Force base that serves as a NATO training facility.

The project will originate from the First United Methodist Church which was the first congregation established in Wichita Falls and a community leader among the mainline churches. First United Methodist Church is positioned to facilitate conversations and networks of relationships due to its lasting presence. Even so, this work will be challenging due to the reality that much of the town operates in small, homogenous “bubbles” in which cultural groups do not frequently interact.

### **Root Causes**

The Discovery Workshop revealed that many families, especially those on the financial margins, struggle either with an awareness of resources that are available or with accessing those resources. Public transportation in Wichita Falls is offered, but not in a way that makes it easy to get from place to place. In addition, because of the size of the community, many organizations seem reluctant to form partnerships due to limited funding sources and volunteer support.

The Design Workshop explored these challenges in light of Covid-19 and the restrictions associated with that. The workshop participants wrestled with the question of why churches and

community leaders have not been able to leverage their collective resources and networks of influence to create a more collaborative response to the needs in the community.

The One-on-One interviews further explored some of the history within the Wichita Falls community, as well as some possible opportunities based on what other churches in other communities are doing.

### **Three Big Ideas**

The Design Workshop surfaced three ideas as means to address the NPO: 1) Create an “Emergency Action Plan” for churches and community leaders; 2) Organize a network of church leaders in the community; 3) Be more intentional about the church’s message and witness in the broader community.

### **Definition of “Done”**

The desired outcome for this NPO is a more collaborative system among faith leaders and with community leaders to facilitate a more holistic approach to needs in the community.

### **Three Napkin Pitches**

One idea was to create an “Emergency Action Plan” for churches and community leaders. The primary audience for this will be faith leaders, along with government officials. The need this addresses relates to better communication and coordination of assets and personnel. The community benefits by seeing its leadership working together to address challenges. I benefit by having a sense of connection and purpose in the larger community. The approach is to create a coalition of pastors and community leaders to develop a response plan that can be deployed

when necessary throughout the city. The primary risks are that a plan could be developed that does not actually work or is ignored by those in leadership. One assumption to test is that leaders truly desire to work together in a crisis. The hypothesis can be confirmed if a coalition is created, a plan is drafted, and the response effectively meets the next community challenge. At present, others are not addressing this NPO, at least not in an intentional or coordinated way. This approach is unique in that it specifically sets up a cooperative effort between local government and local churches to deploy their resources in times of need in coordination with one another.

A second idea was to organize a network of church leaders in the community. The primary audience for this will be local church pastors across the town. The need this will address is to improve the relationships among pastors, building trust and collegiality. The community benefits by seeing pastors and churches working together for the sake of others. I benefit in that the perception of pastors and churches improves as we are seen more as partners than competitors. The approach is to develop a working database of pastors and then create opportunities for relationships to form among pastors. The primary risk is that pastors will not engage with one another beyond just exchanging pleasantries and that no real foundation will be laid for sustainable collaboration. The assumption that will be tested is that faith leaders of different backgrounds and theological perspectives will put aside their differences in order to work together. The hypothesis can be confirmed as pastors invest their time and energy in the network, as they begin to collaborate and help each other, and as needs in the community are met. Others are currently addressing this NPO in smaller, affinity-based networks of pastors. What makes this approach unique is how it reaches across the entire community.

A third idea was simply to be more intentional about the church's message and witness in the broader community. The primary audience for this will be community members at large,

both those who currently affiliate with a church and those who do not. The need this will address is to help people develop a broader perspective of the events of life in the grand scheme of God's activity in the world. The community benefits by achieving a sense of peace and a trust in God's presence. I benefit in that a calmer community is one less prone to violence or overreaction. The approach is to work intentionally to resource community members with solid teaching materials, organize prayer teams, and develop lay leaders who can facilitate learning groups and intentional conversations. The risks include breakdowns in organization, not achieving "buy-in" from key stakeholders, or failure to launch due to mistrust or lack of cooperation. The assumption that will be tested is that people really have a desire to make sense of God's presence in the world, especially in times of crisis. The hypothesis can be confirmed as increasing numbers of people participate in opportunities for learning and conversation and as the general disposition of the city in a crisis remains calm and peaceful. Certainly others are addressing this NPO in their own local church contexts. What makes this unique would be in its community-focused approach.

### **Design Workshop Stakeholders**

Design Workshop stakeholders: 1) missions coordinator; 2) leader in the denomination; 3) member of the church's Trustees; 4) volunteer in community and church outreach; 5) leader at the university.

### **One-on-One Interviews**

One on one interviews: 1) denominational leader who oversees missional outreach in a geographic region; 2) retired pastor in the community known for his community engagement; 3) CEO of a large resourcing agency (not able to complete due to circumstances.)

### Annotated Bibliography

Brueggemann, Walter. *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Anxiety*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020.

Walter Brueggemann is a leading authority on the Old Testament. This book was developed from an essay published in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States. It is a useful resource for pastors and religious leaders who are looking for a Biblical framework for teaching and leading people through these unusual times. Using the Hebrew Scriptures, Brueggemann makes the comparison of the Covid-19 virus to some of the same catastrophes and challenges of the ancient Israelites. It is ultimately a call to trusting God and living with faithfulness, even in uncertain and difficult times, remembering and restoring a covenant relationship. The book situates the current challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Biblical languages of lament and prophecy and concludes with the hope for the “new thing” God may be doing in the world.

Jennings, Willie James. *Acts. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

Willie James Jennings teaches theology at Yale Divinity School. This commentary from the Belief series examines the Acts of the Apostles in light of challenges faced in modern society. The book reframes the issues of the early church and sets them in a context of social unrest, racial tension, and the church’s apparently declining power and influence in culture. Jennings’ primary thesis is that both the content and context of Acts is struggle. This book is helpful in that it gives perspective and history to modern challenges of leading and being the church through stories and situations faced in the earliest days of the Christian faith.

Wright, N.T. *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020.

N.T. Wright is a respected authority on the New Testament and early Christian Church. This short book is the expansion of a Time Magazine article written early in 2020 and examines the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of the Christian faith and witness. Wright offers perspective and insight for churches who might be wrestling with questions about God, faith, and the appropriate Christian response. Wright also outlines how the Christian community has historically taken a leading role in dealing with challenges in society and how the Covid-19 crisis could prove to be another opportunity for the church to make a positive difference in the world.

### **Design Workshop Description**

A Design Workshop was conducted Saturday, November 7, 2020 with five key stakeholders present. We met in the front room of my home around a large table that can seat a dozen people. This allowed for adequate physical distancing. The meeting began at 9:00am with hot beverages and breakfast snacks. Other snacks were made available throughout the day, as was lunch. After a brief description of my NPO, I led the group through a series of four exercises to gain clarity around the project prototype that will be developed around the NPO. The final result was three “Napkin Pitches” that will be used as a starting point next semester in the generation of a project prototype.

The exercises were progressive in nature as the group sought to hone in on possible ways to address the NPO. The first exercise was a Context Map as a way of discerning the areas of focus and how they fit into the larger work. The second exercise was the 3-12-3 Brainstorm in which participants were to develop concepts for different areas of focus. For this exercise, the

group worked in pairs. The third exercise was a creative writing assignment, the Cover Story. In this exercise, each person wrote a news story to communicate the success of some aspect of our project. Each took turns reading their story to the group. Finally, using an Impact/Effort Matrix, the group positioned elements of the project based on the effort required to implement and potential impact.

After these exercises were completed, the group participated in a round-table discussion to create three “Napkin Pitches,” one for each big idea. A template was used to maintain as much consistency with the responses as possible. The Napkin Pitches described the idea, assessed the risks and benefits, considered how success will be measured, among other things. These ideas would be used to guide the one-on-one interviews. After that, the meeting concluded with a debriefing of key concepts and ideas, along with a conversation about questions that still needed to be explored in the one-on-one interviews.

In all, the workshop felt productive and the participants seemed engaged and eager to assist. The results were not as thorough as I had hoped, but were products of the participants’ limited amounts of personal research and expertise in the overall scope of the work. There are some ideas that can be further developed, but will need to be more substantive. I might rate the overall experience with 3.5 stars out of five.

# Design Workshop Documentation

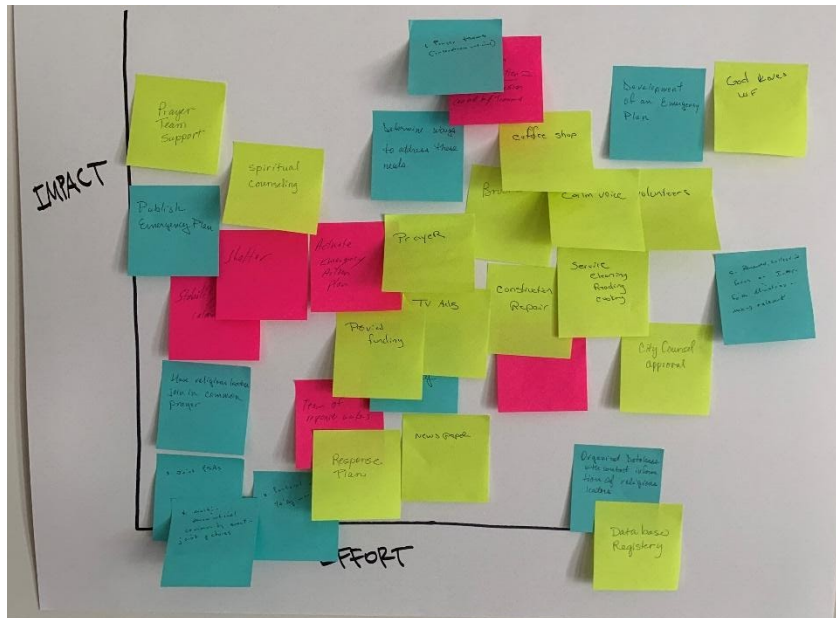
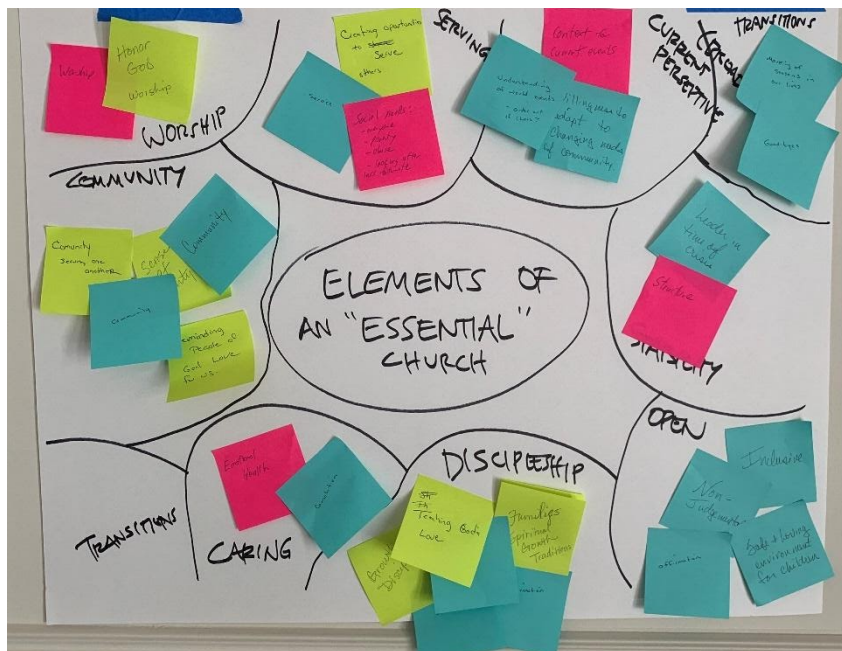


Figure C.1. *Impact/Effort Exercise.*

Figure C.2 *Context Map.*



| NPO         | No representation of spiritual effects                                 | Design religious approach to help of others                            | Community with full response   | To do nothing but respond to what is asked                             | Lack of representation of what many churches are doing to care           |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| APPROACH    | very different approach cannot call other churches                     | Design solution  | Join 1200 to other people's help, mostly together                      | Community with people, all groups, some doing by themselves            | Church with budget plan, but not response to many churches               |
| BENEFIT     | Noted spiritual impact through prayer, counseling, guidance            | perspective - community - full community caring together to others     | Change, group, diversity of beliefs, & the spirit of our leaders       | Build a case, if possible, that will be successful                     | Church with "discovery" that really community with us, not just a church |
| OTHERS      | not sure   | leadership, not a model that is proven                                 | ?  | not much really happening, it is a long-term, sustained way            | Openness, shared dialogue  |
| RISK        | Lack of interest, not spiritual, financial support - budget to do      | multigenerational to help together, complete action                    | not shared, open, shared ideas, & resources, shared vision             | Lack of representation, help, budget, support                          | Not to be shared   |
| ASSUMPTIONS | community support, financial, resources                                | people of shared background, with shared vision, but not together      | people not like this, church is not a person                           | people not like this, church is not a person                           | people not like this, church is not a person                             |
| BENCHMARKS  | Admission, membership, to 10 years, - budget, - budget plan, - support | Admission, membership, to 10 years, - budget, - budget plan, - support | Admission, membership, to 10 years, - budget, - budget plan, - support | Admission, membership, to 10 years, - budget, - budget plan, - support | Admission, membership, to 10 years, - budget, - budget plan, - support   |

Figure C.3. *Evaluating Options.*

### Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your willingness to visit with me about my doctoral work. I am grateful for your time and your input. Your input will help me develop a prototype for the project I will submit for my Doctor of Ministry. I am also hopeful that the result of this work will be something that will benefit our church and community. Some of the ideas I would like to test with you have to do with facilitating an Emergency Action Plan in our community, or developing a network of faith leaders, or helping to resource our city so that crises might actually help us see God at work in a broader way. My ultimate goal is to rediscover the “essential” witness of the church in times of crisis. With your help, I am certain we can find a way to make life better for our neighbors.

I look forward to our conversation on \_\_\_\_\_. In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like more information in preparation for our conversation, please do not hesitate to ask. I would love for our time to be as productive as possible as we talk about ideas that might help the church be seen as “essential,” even while we are being asked to shelter-in-place. Thanks again for your help.

Blessings,

John McLarty

### **One-on-One Interview Documentation**

#### **Interview 1- Denominational Leader:**

I asked about what other churches were doing in the midst of the pandemic. I was given a short list of churches finding creative solutions to problems in their local context. Many of these churches had found ways to deliver resources to people even when they could not gather in person. For example, one church had set up a remote learning center for students trying to attend school remotely but lacked supervision or internet access at home. Another church was working with city leaders and businesses to get internet services to the more remote parts of their area. Some churches were collaborating as Covid-19 testing centers. One church started a partnership with the American Red Cross and became a satellite facility for regular blood drives.

I was also told about an organization that exists exclusively as a resource network where like-minded people can rally around an issue that needs attention. Many churches and service providers affiliate with this organization and respond at various times and in various ways to particular challenges as they arise.

I was finally encouraged to facilitate individual conversations with community leaders and government officials about problems that we might be able to solve together or whether or

not those individuals saw any need that could be addressed by churches mobilizing and working together.

#### Interview 2- Retired Pastor:

I asked about their ministry and engagement with the community and other pastors. They spoke of a few specific large-scale events in which many pastors were able to come together to address a short-term crisis. They talked about how pastors might also occasionally get together for a specific project or a free meal, but otherwise, the pattern the community had not been very intentionally collegial. They spoke of individualism and a spirit of competition that often hindered efforts at more permanent connections.

They referenced the Book of Acts and the “situational ecumenism” that has been pervasive in the Church from the beginning. Our community certainly suffers from tenuous relationships among pastors, even if we are all united in the ultimate goal. A powerful quote was, “We are willing to die together, but we won’t necessarily play together.”

They suggested initiating conversations with community leadership in a spirit of “how can we help?” They also suggested starting small with just a handful of pastors who might be willing and interested in investing in something that might develop into a broader network later. They talked of forming a sort of “Spiritual SWAT Team” that could be utilized in a time of crisis to tend to particular community needs.

#### Interview 3- Resource Agency CEO (not completed)

This individual was unavailable to meet with me due to unforeseen circumstances requiring all of their attention within their organization. I hope to connect with this person at another time.

## APPENDIX D—MILESTONE 4 PROTOTYPE ITERATION REPORT

### Introduction

The Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) at the center of this research relates to the “essential” presence of the church in times of crisis. The goal of the project is to find ways for the church to offer and be known as an essential presence to help make life better for people, even in challenging times. This Prototype Iteration Report describes the process of testing the viability of prototypes based from the Napkin Pitch ideas that emerged from the Design Workshop in the fall 2020 and outlines possible “next steps” for this project.

### **Prototype #1: Elements of the Essential Church: Developing Disciples in Times of Crisis**

- Prototype description: The project is a resource for group leaders within the church to utilize to help deepen people’s discipleship, especially in times of crisis.
- Research question: Would a discipleship development tool such as this be a helpful resource for a group leader during a time of crisis?
- Assessment Benchmark(s): 1) The participant recognizes the usefulness of the resource; 2) the participant is able to access the resource; 3) the participant is able to interact with the resource without instruction or coaching; 4) the participant sees value and practical application for the resource with their constituency.
- Prototype participant demographic description: Participants were chosen from the leaders of discipleship development ministries (small groups, Sunday school classes, etc.) from First United Methodist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas. These were adults representing a variety of ages. All were white.

- Summary of what was learned: After an initial conversation with these leaders, it was apparent that the prototype, while potentially useful, was too limited to one local church's context and would not accomplish the larger goal of offering an "essential witness" in the larger community. The participants agreed that much of what the prototype would offer could be shared within the church's established communication structures. Therefore, this prototype was shelved as unnecessary and inadequate to the scope of work.

## **Prototype #2: Elements of the Essential Church: Coordinating and Mobilizing Faith**

### **Leaders**

- Prototype description: The prototype is a website for faith leaders in Wichita Falls to access in order to coordinate response efforts in a time of crisis.
- Research question: Would a resource such as this be helpful for pastors during a time of crisis?
- Assessment Benchmark(s): 1) The participant recognizes the usefulness of the resource; 2) the participant is able to access the resource; 3) the participant is able to interact with the resource without instruction or coaching; 4) the participant sees value and practical application for the resource with their constituency.
- Prototype Participant Demographic Description: The prototype was introduced in two phases. Phase one was a focus group of four area pastors- two women, two men, all white, from a variety of Christian faith traditions. This group interacted with a conceptual description of the prototype and responded to questions. Phase two was a larger gathering of pastors which was more diverse across racial demographics. This group accesses and interacted with the resource in real time, offering feedback and constructive ideas.

- Summary of what was learned: In both tests, the overall response from participants was supportive of the resource as a tool for connection and engagement. It appears to have accomplished the goal of bringing faith leaders together. Suggestions for improvement were mainly centered around functionality, sustainability, and how the resource would function in an actual emergency.
- What matters to the participants? The most important aspect of this project to the participants was how the resource might foster on-going relationships among the faith leaders in our community. Both gatherings exposed a need for more meaningful connection.
- What was your important discovery? This resource could be the catalyst for the development of a much more substantial network of faith leaders in Wichita Falls. The community has not had a functioning “ministerial alliance” for many years, nor any demonstrated desire for greater collaboration. However, when presented with the possibility of a more coordinated response in a time of crisis, along with the opportunity to offer an “essential presence” in the community, the participants seemed open to take the next steps.

### **Most Viable Prototype**

The “Most Viable Prototype” is the resource designed to help pastors connect and collaborate in times of crisis. There will be some technical challenges in improving the function of the website, along with practical aspects of maintenance, upkeep, and oversight. The “next steps” mentioned above will include the formation of a team of seven pastors from the participants, meetings with city, county, and school district leaders, and a larger gathering for pastors to officially “launch” the resource for public use.

The use of this resource may develop beyond times of crisis to serve as a point of connection and networking among Wichita Falls faith leaders. Two encouraging outcomes from the presentation were one pastor who formed a closed Facebook group for community pastors and another who discovered an app that could be integrated into the website. This kind of energy and collaboration was further evidence of the necessity for a resource such as this to better connect faith leaders in this community.

### Storyboard for Prototype 1

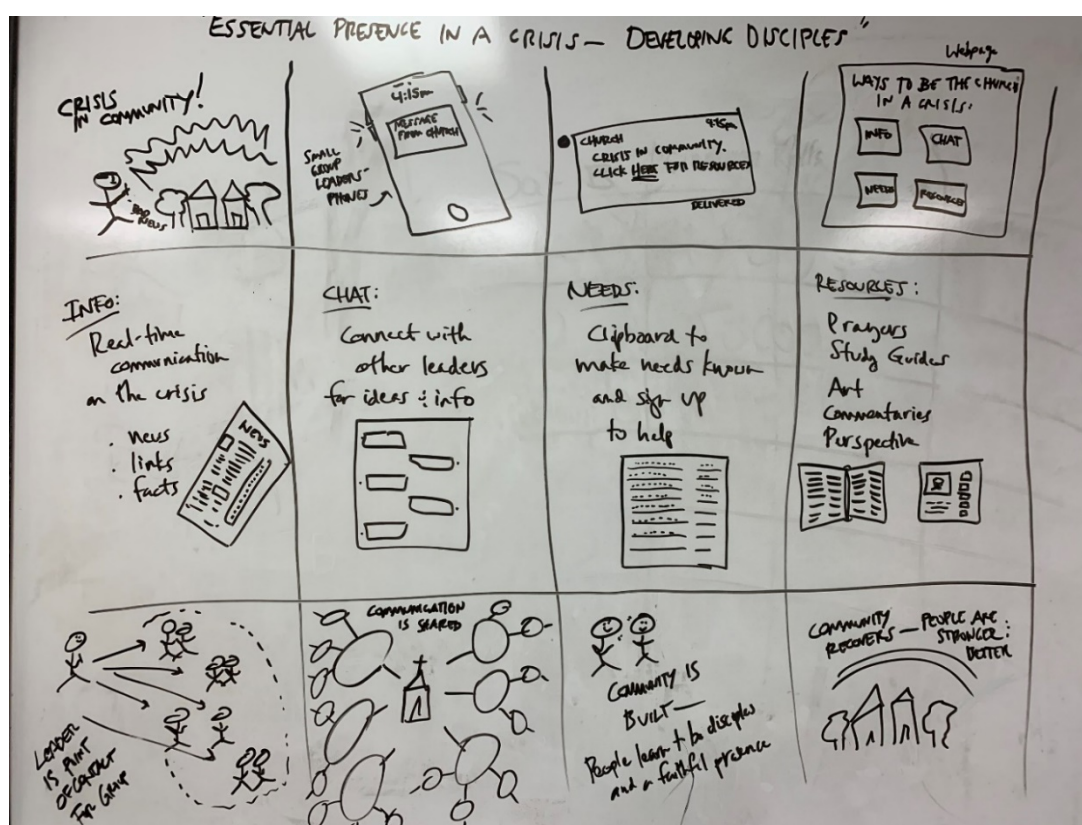


Figure D.1. *Prototype 1 Storyboard.*

### Recruiting Screener for Prototype 1

| <b>Who do you want to talk to?</b>                   | <b>What exact criteria will identify the people you want to talk to?</b>   | <b>What screening questions will you ask?</b>                                |
|--|--|--|
| Small group leaders in the congregation.             | Current group meets at least 2x per month.                                 | How often does the group you lead meet?                                      |
| People who can navigate technology.                  | Has interacted with a website at least 3x in last week.                    | In the past week, which devices have you used to interact with the internet? |
| Range of ages from 25 to 70+.                        | Quota: 1 aged 25-40; 1 aged 40-50; 1 aged 50-60; 1 aged 60-70, 1 aged 70+. | How old are you?   |
| Mix of women and men.                                | Quota- 2 or 3 women; 2 or 3 men.   | What is your gender?   |
| <b>Who do you want to exclude?</b>                   | <b>What exact criteria will identify the people you want to exclude?</b>   | <b>What screening questions will you use?</b>                                |
| Leaders who are disconnected from the larger church. | Not engaged in broader ministry of the church.                             | How often do you attend worship in-person or online?                         |
| Minors.  | Under 18 years old.  | How old are you?   |
| Conspiracy theorists.                                | Only trusts extremist news sources or openly mocks traditional media.      | Where you do usually get information about current events?                   |
| Spiritually immature.                                | Not engaged in regular spiritual practices for personal growth.            | What are your regular spiritual practices?                                   |

Figure D.2. *Prototype 1 Recruiting Screener.*

### Interview Questions

What do you like about this idea?

What can be improved?

What application(s) might this concept have?

Would this resource be helpful to you?



## Storyboard for Prototype 2

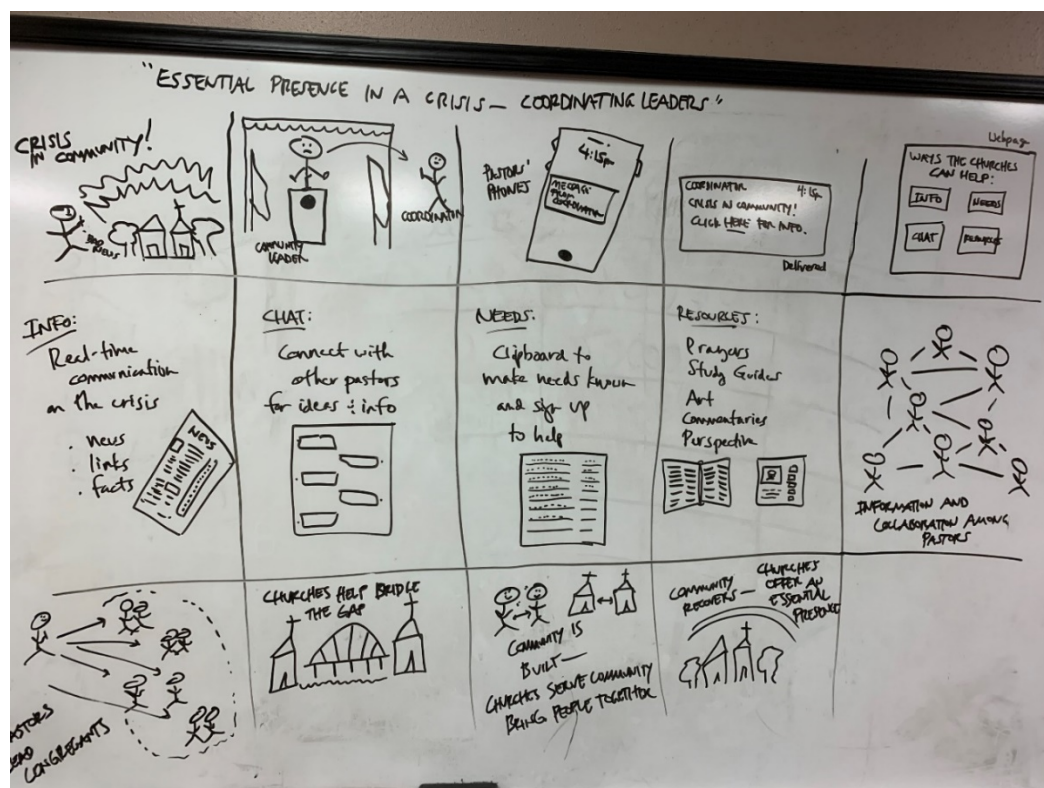


Figure D.3. *Prototype 2 Storyboard.*

## Recruiting Screener for Prototype 2

| Who do you want to talk to?                                   | What exact criteria will identify the people you want to talk to?  | What screening questions will you ask?                                       |
|---|--|--|
| Pastoral leaders of local congregations.                      | Currently serving as the pastor of a local church.   | What congregation are you the pastor of?                                     |
| People who can navigate technology.                           | Has interacted with a website at least 3x in last week.  | In the past week, which devices have you used to interact with the internet? |
| Pastors of different denominations and cultural demographics. | Quota: 1 United Methodist; 1 mainline Protestant; 1 Evangelical; 1 Historically African-American; 1 Catholic | What is your church's denominational affiliation?                            |
| Mix of women and men.   | Quota- at least one woman.   | What is your gender?   |
| Who do you want to exclude?                                   | What exact criteria will identify the people you want to exclude?  | What screening questions will you use?                                       |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Pastors who do not live in the context of their congregation. | Do not reside in the county.  | In what city do you live?                                  |
| Bi-vocational pastors.  | Work more than 20 hours a week outside the church.                    | Are you employed outside of your local church?             |
| Conspiracy theorists.   | Only trusts extremist news sources or openly mocks traditional media. | Where you do usually get information about current events? |
| Those who only use “analog” forms of communication.           | Does not have means to send or receive text messages?                 | Are you able to send and receive texts from your phone?    |

Figure D.4. *Prototype 2 Recruiting Screener.*

### Interview Questions:

What do you like about this idea?

What can be improved?

What application(s) might this concept have?

Would this resource be helpful to you?

### Documents from Phase 1 Test



Figure D.5. *Concept Presentation.*

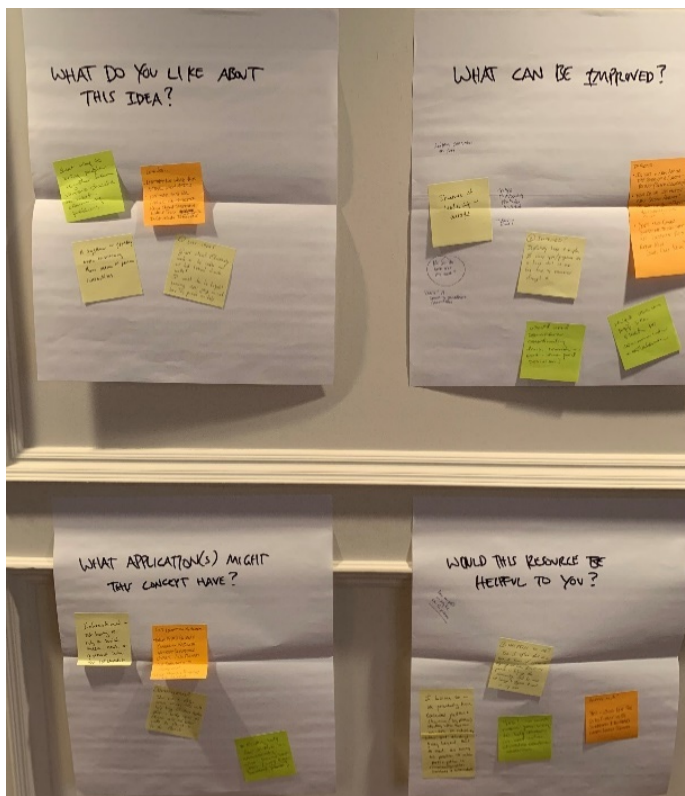


Figure D.6. *Concept Presentation Feedback.*

## Documents from Phase 2 Test

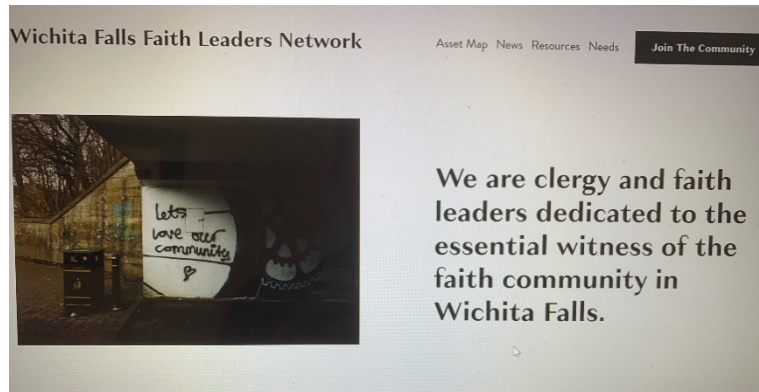


Figure D.7. *Prototype Home Page.*

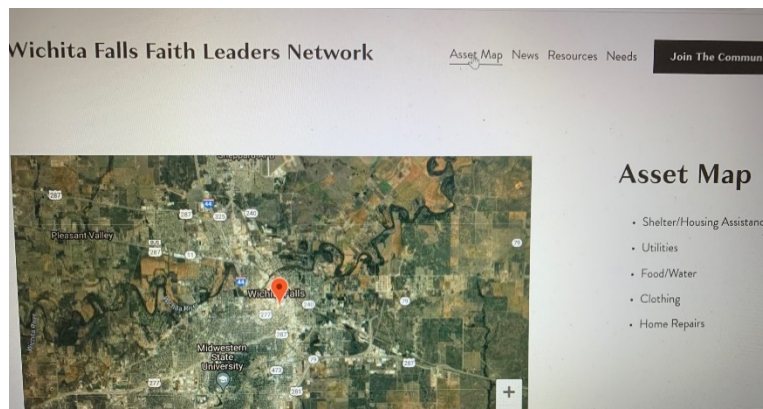


Figure D.8. *Prototype Asset Map Placeholder.*

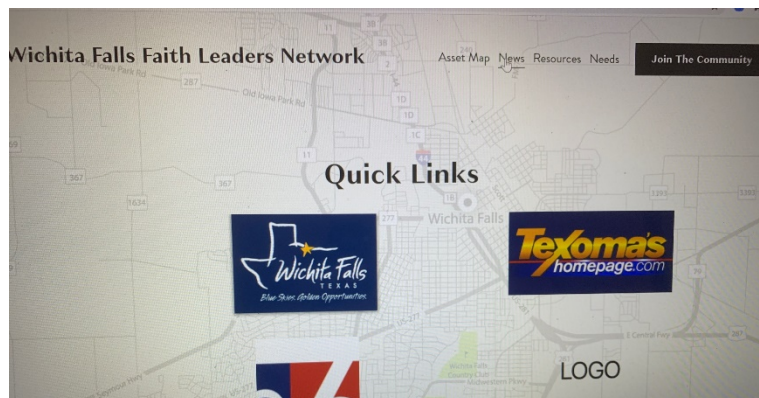


Figure D.9. *Prototype Quick Links Page.*



Wichita Falls Faith Leaders Network

Asset Map News Resources Needs Join The Community

Fill out this form to let the network know of helpful resources.

Instagram Facebook Pinterest

Name \*  
   
 First Name Last Name

Email \*

Phone \*  
    
 (###) ### ####

Figure D.10. *Prototype Resources Form.*

Wichita Falls Faith Leaders Network

Asset Map News Resources Needs Join The Community

Fill out this form to let the network know of needs you are aware of.

Instagram Facebook Pinterest

Name \*  
   
 First Name Last Name

Email \*

Phone \*  
    
 (###) ### ####

Figure D.11. *Prototype Needs Form.*

Wichita Falls Faith Leaders Network

Asset Map News Resources Needs Join The Community

Join the Network

Name \*  
   
 First Name Last Name

Email \*

Phone \*  
    
 (###) ### ####

Church \*

Church Role \*

Join Now

Figure D.12. *Prototype Join Form.*

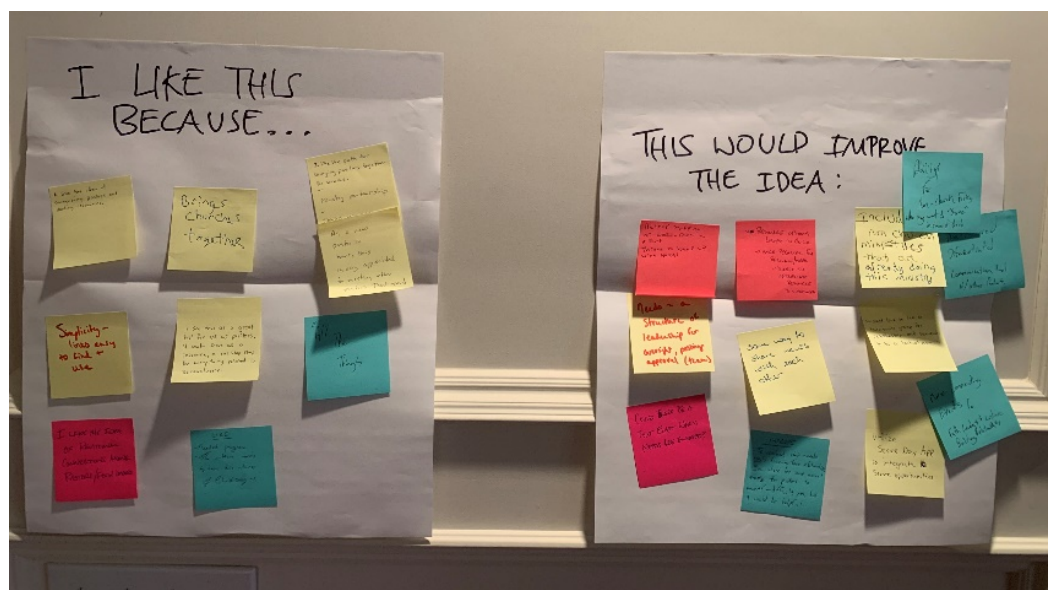


Figure D.13. *Prototype Presentation Feedback.*

## APPENDIX E- SUPPLEMENTAL PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

The following are screenshots from the analytics page of “ServeWF.org” showing the traffic on the site from November 1 to December 31, 2021. The number of total visits was 41, with 37 unique visitors and 184 total page views. The timeline illustrates how most of the engagement with the site occurred immediately after the invitation email was sent and tapering off in the days following.

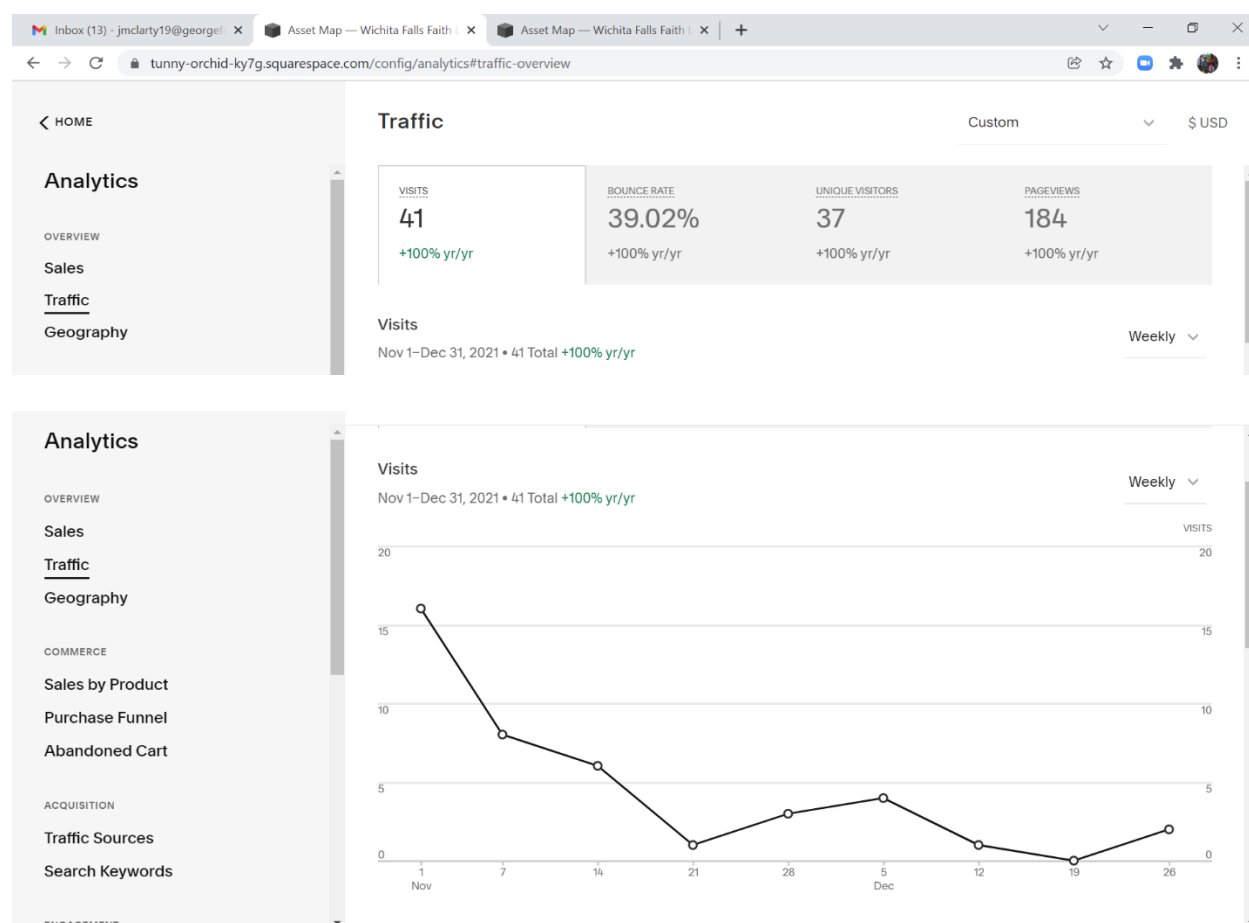


Figure E.1. Analytics Page from www.ServeWF.org (November 1-December 31, 2021.)

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