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**Preach Freedom: The Praxis of Social Justice Advocacy as
Effective Holistic Ministry in Pentecostal Churches in the South
Florida Area of the United States**

Alexander Umole

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PREACH FREEDOM:

THE PRAXIS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY AS EFFECTIVE HOLISTIC
MINISTRY IN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN THE SOUTH FLORIDA AREA OF
THE UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the almighty God without whom my existence would be impossible.

*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made –
John 1:3*

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I am at a loss for words in expressing my gratitude for the sincere devotion of my family and friends throughout my postgraduate study, particularly in writing this dissertation. My deepest appreciation goes to my loving wife, Sola Umole. To my incredible children, Zoe, Adora, and Tienna-Joy Umole, thank you for your patience and encouragement. To my parents, Dr. Jerry and Comfort Umole, my siblings, and Mama Darlene Ahlberg, thank you for your support. I love you all more than words can say.

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I cannot but finally extend my gratitude and praise to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for your sacrifice for my sins and the sins of those of all humanity.

EPIGRAPH

“With patient and firm determination we will press on until every valley of despair is exalted to new peaks of hope, until every mountain of pride and irrationality is made low by the levelling process of humility and compassion; until the rough places of injustice are transformed into a smooth plane of equality of opportunity; and until the crooked places of prejudice are transformed by the straightening process of bright-eyed wisdom.”

– **Martin Luther King Jr.**

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PREFACE

Viewpoints on Pentecostal churches' involvement in social justice advocacy is complicated. Many believe that Bible schools, seminaries, and denominations with Pentecostal roots did not emphasize social action and community engagement in the past, while others disagree. Critics are quick to point out that Pentecostal churches traditionally emphasize "spirit-inspired" services, speaking in tongues, spiritual gifts, and preaching as the hallmarks of active ministry, while leaving out social ministries that directly impact communities. Growing up as a Pentecostal adherent, local Pentecostal churches emphasized worship experiences, divine healing, and spirit baptism, yet rarely advocated for justice in the community or engaged in social action. Most times, the local Pentecostal church was silent on societal issues. At most, the local pastor would call for brief prayers about these issues.

Curiosity about the importance of social justice for the church began due to an educational background in legal studies. This curiosity deepened further after reading Apostle John's writing, where he states, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."¹ John communicated a desire that the individual believer is healthy in the whole person, body, soul, and spirit, beyond divine healing. Consequently, it appeared that beyond regular worship services, the church had a responsibility to holistically address the problems facing individuals in the body of Christ and in the communities in which they live. This responsibility captures the essence of what it means to live in love, both loving God and loving one's neighbor.

¹ 3 John 2.

This research substantiates the position that social justice is a vital aspect of the local church's ministry. Correspondingly, it will establish that Pentecostal churches in South Florida proclaim the gospel best by providing holistic ministry in social justice advocacy. Many writers and theologians agree that this is a necessary extension of the church's mission. While some writers disagree, this research will synthesize the issues, present a review of existing literature on the subject, and offer solutions.

This research will establish that Pentecostal churches in South Florida have a clear call to seek effective holistic ministry methods and adopt ministry opportunities in social justice to help the communities in which they reside. In a nutshell, social justice advocacy must become a regular part of church life, doctrine, and strategy for growth and impact. The local church is encouraged to genuinely work to be the salt and light of its community.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Assemblies of God
AGWM	Assemblies of God World Missions
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COGIC	Church of God in Christ
CSGC	Center for the Study of Global Christianity
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
LHM	Lutheran Hour Ministries
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
US	United States

GLOSSARY

Advocacy. The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating.²

Black Lives Matter. A political movement to address systemic and state violence against African Americans.³

Catholic Church. Refers to the Roman Catholic denomination.

Christian Ministry. The activity and responsibility of the local Church in the fulfillment of its biblically defined mandate in the world.⁴

Classism. Prejudice or discrimination based on class.⁵

Compassion. Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress, together with a desire to alleviate it⁶

Denomination. A religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices.⁷

Egalitarianism. Refers to a belief in human equality, especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs, and advocating the removal of inequalities among people.⁸

² Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Advocacy," accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocacy>.

³ "Racial Equity Tools Glossary," accessed September 7, 2020. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>.

⁴ "What is Church Ministry," Bible.org, last modified December 30, 2010, <https://bible.org/what-church-ministry>.

⁵ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Classism," accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/classism>.

⁶ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Compassion," accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compassion>.

⁷ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Denomination," accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/denomination>.

⁸ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Egalitarianism," accessed September 6, 2020, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/egalitarianism.

Holistic. “Relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts.”⁹ “*Holism*” and “*Holistic*” come from “*ὅλος-holos*” a Greek word meaning all, whole, entire, total.¹⁰

#MeToo. A movement calling attention to the frequency with which primarily women and girls experience sexual assault and harassment.¹¹

Oppression. The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic, and political benefit of the more powerful social group.¹²

Pentecostal. Of, relating to, or constituting any of various Christian religious bodies that emphasize individual experiences of grace, spiritual gifts (such as glossolalia and faith healing), expressive worship, and evangelism.¹³

Protestant. Is a member of any of several church denominations denying the universal authority of the Pope and affirming the Reformation principles of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the primacy of the Bible as the only source of revealed truth. *Broadly:* a Christian not of a Catholic or Eastern church.¹⁴

Preach. To urge acceptance or abandonment of an idea or course of action. *Specifically:* to exhort in an officious or tiresome manner. Also, to advocate earnestly.¹⁵

Sexual orientation. A person's sexual identity or self-identification as bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, etc.: the state of being bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, etc.¹⁶

⁹ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Holistic,” accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holistic>.

¹⁰ “What is Holism,” Environment & Ecology, last modified November 3, 2019, <http://environment-ecology.com/holistic-view/111-what-is-holism.html>.

¹¹ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “#MeToo,” accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/me%20too>.

¹² “Racial Equity Tools Glossary,” accessed September 7, 2020, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>.

¹³ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Pentecostal,” accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Pentecostal>.

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Protestant,” accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/protestant>.

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Preach,” accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preach>.

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Sexual Orientation,” accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexual%20orientation>.

Social justice. Refers to a state or doctrine of egalitarianism.¹⁷

Spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are “the effort to create some space in which God can act. Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you’re not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn’t planned or counted on.”¹⁸

Spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is our continuing response to the reality of God’s grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world.¹⁹

South Florida. South Florida (SF) is the southern part of the State of Florida in the United States. It is known for its tropical climate.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Social Justice,” accessed September 6, 2020, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/socialjustice.

¹⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen, “From Solitude to Community to Ministry,” *Leadership Journal* 16, no. 2 (1995): 97, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1995/spring/51280.html>.

¹⁹ Nouwen, “From Solitude to Community to Ministry,” 97.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation centers on the praxis of social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry in Pentecostal churches in the South Florida area of the United States. The ministry problem addressed is that Pentecostal churches in the South Florida area of the United States have not adopted effective methods or utilized ministry opportunities in social justice advocacy to help and impact the communities in which they reside.

In Section One, this problem's complexity will be explored from different yet significant perspectives, first, by considering and identifying the problem using stories and studying the historical background surrounding this problem. Second, assessing the South Florida area's cultural realities, which enables us to gain a deeper understanding of the issues. Third, by taking into account the effects of history, demographics, ideologies, and viewpoints, which have created a disconnect towards social justice advocacy.

Section Two will introduce proposed solutions by defining social justice, then exploring practical programs and approaches in different areas. This section will also review literature from relevant authors to highlight critical perspectives and opinions. The thesis will be developed in Section Three, exploring the praxis of social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy, the biblical mandate of Jesus, the Apostle Paul's views on social justice, Acts 6 and the church today. This section will examine the critical issues of this research and address the proposed outcome.

Finally, Sections Four through Six describes and outline the dissertation artifact. The accompanying artifact is a podcast, a website, and a blog. The purpose of the artifact is to provoke engagement and be used by individuals and small groups. It aims to enrich

predominantly Christian ministry practitioners in their work; however, the artifact's content can be applied effectively in other relevant contexts.

SECTION 1:

THE PROBLEM

“Until our world decides that every human matters, that everyone has a right to food and safety and freedom and healthcare and equality, it is the obligation of those privileged to have food and safety and freedom and healthcare and equality to fight tirelessly for those who do not.”²⁰ — **L.R. Knost**

The Stories

The stories below underscore the need for social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy. John Joseph left the hospital and visited the nearby church to seek help and prayer, but the building was locked. John seemed to be confused. A staff member named Jennifer greeted him, but she did not allow him into the building. John complained to Jennifer that no one visited him when he called the church earlier and requested a visit. She apologized but stated that the pastor was not available as they were away on a cruise in the Bahamas. She assured him; the pastor would reach out to him when they returned.

John then asked for a transport fare. However, Jennifer responded that he would need to apply for benevolence from the church board and she was not used to giving money from her funds. John then asked Jennifer for prayer and advice. Jennifer suggested that he schedule an appointment to talk about the issues because she was doing office

²⁰ “Verse & Voice,” Sojourners, February 3, 2020, <https://sojo.net/daily-wisdom/monday-verse-and-voice-0332020-3>.

work. John left angrily, but he still expected to get a response to his request. A few weeks passed; John never received any response.

Jafari Jabulani was driving his car down the freeway. He was signaled by the local community police to stop, which he obeyed immediately, pulling his vehicle over to the side of the road. The policeman dragged him out of his car and immediately handcuffed him. He stated that Jafari looked suspicious because he was not wearing a shirt and, according to the police, “young men that look like him are always criminals.” Jafari was placed forcefully on the ground face-down. Eventually, Jafari was cleared of any wrongdoing because he had no criminal record.

Nonetheless, he felt unjustly treated and told his pastor about it. The pastor confirmed that many young men in their church had experienced similar incidents. However, his pastor believes that confronting social injustice is the job of politicians, and there is nothing their church can do about it apart from pray. The church did not offer any further counseling or a safe space for healing. Jafari's mom attends the same church, and she met with the pastor about the issue. She is troubled by this situation and its effect on young men in the community; she is also upset by the church's response and feels the church is obligated to solve it.

Latifa and Latoya came early to their local church one day and stood in the lobby, talking to each other, waiting for the service to start. The ushers informed them that they were causing a disturbance because they seemed incoherent in their words and laughed loudly. It was not their first time attending this church, as they had participated in numerous services, and the parishioners knew them as they always dressed shabbily and asked for monetary assistance. Without warning, the ushers asked them to move out of

the church property. As a further reaction, the church's management got a court order against the women and notified church staff and volunteers not to allow either woman onto the church property or to call law enforcement if they showed up.

The Problem

This dissertation centers on social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy. The ministry problem addressed is that Pentecostal churches in South Florida have not adopted effective methods or utilized ministry opportunities in social justice advocacy to help the communities in which they reside. Throughout history, the Christian church has provided ministry in social justice and has impacted society. Historically, Catholics and various sects of Protestant denominations, such as Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, and African American Baptists, have taken proactive advancement in addressing societal needs in poverty, health care, and civil rights. These denominations are historically associated with what has been called the social gospel.²¹

However, Pentecostal churches lag in providing ministries connected to social justice issues and often have shown inconsistent behaviors on related topics. While it is arguable that Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God have been proactive in different contexts (such as in world missions, education, aide, and poverty) nevertheless, there has been little work done by Pentecostals within the context of social justice in the United States and in particular in South Florida. In a nutshell, other denominations within the United States have more extensive social justice advocacy

²¹ Stacey U. Tucker, "Unto the Least of These: The Pentecostal Church and Social Ministry," (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2011), https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/1034, 1.

involvement than Pentecostal churches, although alternative views on the subject trace the Pentecostal movement's rich social works history.

In recent decades, Pentecostalism has become a global movement, particularly within Latin America and the Caribbean regions.²² With the large influx of migrants from these regions to South Florida, the large number of Pentecostals in South Florida compared to other parts of the state is no surprise. That said, South Florida is increasingly becoming more interracial and intercultural. As a result, this mixture of Caribbean and Latino migrants makes the challenge of equality and social injustice more compelling, with considerable nuances when juxtaposed to other parts of the state and the nation.

This research has seen firsthand that Pentecostal churches in America and South Florida have shown insufficient interest in social justice issues. Regretfully, even when they show concern, they are ill-equipped to address the issues in an impactful way. For instance, during the racial tension of early 2020, most South Florida Pentecostal churches did not achieve any impactful social justice advocacy work. Upon research into three Pentecostal churches in South Florida, it became evident that while these churches have made a significant impact within their congregations, they have not engaged social justice opportunities to impact the communities in which they reside.

These churches lack social justice advocacy because most of their ministry programs are within their congregation. Furthermore, they have no staff assigned or budget explicitly allotted to address social justice issues and therefore have no significant track record in social justice advocacy. Therefore is the need for South Florida

²² "Pentecostalism in Latin America," Pew Research Center, October 5, 2006, <https://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/overview-pentecostalism-in-latin-america/>.

Pentecostals to recognize biblical models, understand the spiritual mandate for social justice, mobilize laity as true messengers of hope, and find ways to be a catalyst for social transformation.

Christ calls His church into social impact. Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Therefore, the church is called upon to answer pertinent questions: Are churches in the Pentecostal tradition oblivious to social justice requirements in the Bible? Does the Bible provide a path forward to pursue social justice advocacy? How can we best execute the mission of Christ? Are there practical ways to cater to the community, the poor, and seek justice for the oppressed? When Pentecostal churches in South Florida begin to examine the issues raised by the preceding questions, they can forge a path forward in being a bright light in a very dark world.

Historical Considerations

A systematic theoretical analysis is required to understand Pentecostal churches and their relation to social justice. Therefore, it is critical, to begin with understanding the nature of Pentecostal churches. Generally, Pentecostal churches emphasize experiencing God through the Holy Spirit baptism. A sizable number of Christians worldwide consider themselves to be Pentecostal adherents. "According to a Pew Forum analysis of estimates from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are about 279 million Pentecostal Christians in the world."²³

²³ "Denominations of Protestants," Pew Research Center, December 19, 2011, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/>.

Furthermore, “the Pew Forum’s analysis of CSGC data estimates that about eight-in-ten of the world’s Pentecostals reside either in sub-Saharan Africa (44%) or in the Americas (37%).”²⁴

The data shows us that many Pentecostals reside in the Americas, which includes the United States. Historically, Pentecostals have traditionally pursued expressive worship experiences and Holy Spirit baptism rather than ministry in social works and community engagement. Therefore, one view holds that most Pentecostal churches in America have generally not pursued holistic ministry opportunities in social justice or have not done so effectively.

Stacey Tucker argues, “To date, the extent to which Pentecostals engage in serving the less fortunate vis-à-vis mainline congregations has yet to be sorted.”²⁵ To put it another way, she believes that, in areas of social justice among Pentecostal churches in the U.S., limited studies exist, and there are few traces of extensive work. Pentecostal churches like the Assemblies of God have addressed social justice issues like racial equality, with statements such as the 1989 Assemblies of God Resolution on Racism.²⁶ More recently, the Executive Presbytery of the General Council of the Assemblies of God made a statement condemning racism and injustice.²⁷ Statements on social justice issues are not enough. Major Pentecostal denominations do not have consistent advocacy or

²⁴ “Denominations of Protestants,” Pew Research Center.

²⁵ Tucker, “Unto the Least of These,” 2.

²⁶ “Resolution on Racism,” accessed August 29, 2020, <https://news.ag.org/en/News/Resolution-on-Racism>.

²⁷ “Ep Statement on George Floyd, Racism, and Racial Reconciliation,” accessed August 29, 2020, <https://news.ag.org/News/EP-Statement-on-George-Floyd-Racism-and-Racial-Reconciliation>.

strategy on holistic ministry, specifically in social justice. Therefore, studies suggest that although Pentecostal churches have historically been active in missions, they fall short in social justice advocacy.

Limited expression of social action has been present, but not to the same degree as foreign missions. Author Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen argues that even though Pentecostals are known for their foreign mission work, it appears from various viewpoints that they are indifferent towards the social needs of people living amongst them. However, he concludes that “even though Pentecostals have not had a viable theology of social concern until recently, their mission work has always included care of physical and social needs.”²⁸

However, Pentecostals are vertically focused, by and large, emphasizing expressive worship and spiritual empowerment than social works and societal engagement. Therefore, it is not surprising that studies reveal that the Pentecostal movement historically emphasized spiritual revivals and de-emphasized social transformation.

²⁸ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice? Theological and Ecumenical Perspectives,” *Missiology: An International Review* 29, no. 4 (2001): 417-31.

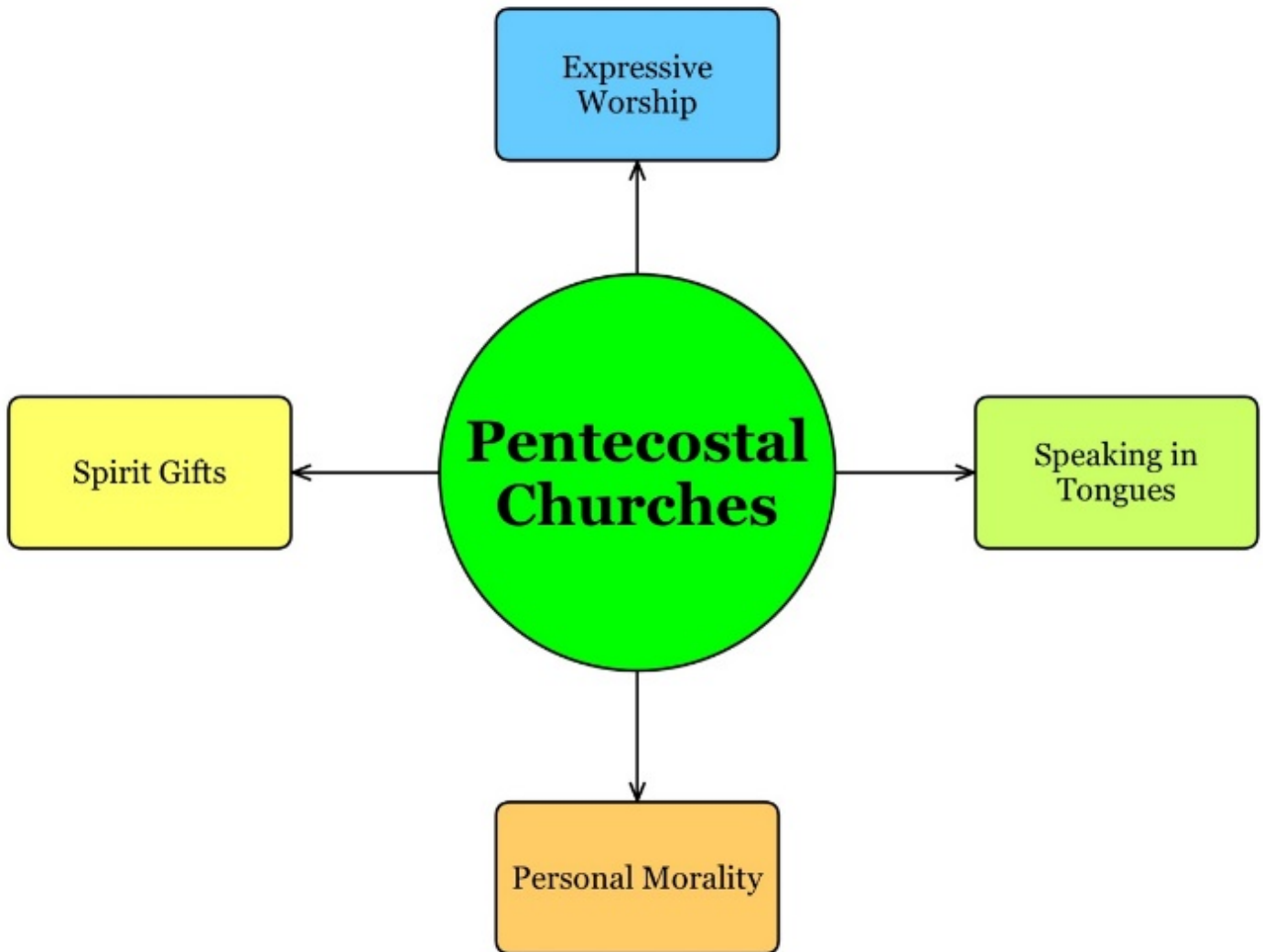


Figure 1—What Pentecostal Churches Are Commonly Known For.

In 1897 the Church of God in Christ, the very first Black Pentecostal denomination, was formed by Charles H. Mason in Mississippi.²⁹ This organization began with an emphasis on personal holiness. In a similar vein, the Church of God, another Pentecostal Church, was formed in 1902.³⁰ However, Pentecostalism only began to expose and highlight discrimination and social injustice in 1906; this was when William Seymour started his Azusa street services.³¹ Accordingly, he wanted to design a multiracial movement.³² His efforts led to what is known as the Golden Age of Pentecostalism, beginning from 1910. In this season, numerous Pentecostal denominations were formed, such as the Assemblies of God, Apostolic Faith Mission in Portland, Oregon, Foursquare Gospel Church, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and others.³³

Individual churches aside, all Pentecostals trace Pentecostalism's origin to the day of Pentecost and the biblical apostles of Jesus Christ. Although, the more recent Pentecostal denominations attribute their existence to the Azusa Street revival. This spread saw an awakening to issues of social justice. Harvey Cox, who is a professor of Religion at Harvard, states:

The second turn-of-the-century harbinger was the Azusa Street revival. After two decades of preliminary stirrings, what is now called the "Pentecostal movement" burst forth in 1906 amid unpromising circumstances in a run-down section of Los Angeles. Led by an African American preacher with no theological education, its

²⁹ Arlene M. Sánchez-Walsh, *Pentecostals in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 30.

³⁰ Sánchez-Walsh, *Pentecostals in America*.

³¹ Sánchez-Walsh, *Pentecostals in America*.

³² Sánchez-Walsh, *Pentecostals in America*.

³³ Sánchez-Walsh, *Pentecostals in America*.

first adherents were poor domestic servants, janitors, and day workers—black and white—who had the audacity to claim that a new Pentecost was happening.³⁴

While the Azusa Street revival did not infuse Pentecostalism with a new desire for social justice per se, it awakened the consciousness to the needs of the downtrodden in society because most of its initial adherents were the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. However, despite this initial jumpstart, Pentecostals continued with less emphasis on social works, instead favoring Spirit baptism and expressive worship experiences, as these services were most impactful. They also documented claims of divine healing, which fueled its rapid growth.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth D. Rios asserts that,

While it may be true that some Pentecostals fall into the stereotype that they are ‘so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good,’ others have been actively engaged in social justice. In New York, evangelical men and women established faith-based nonprofit agencies or holistically minded churches that have and continue to address some of the social ills in their communities.³⁵

Gastón Espinosa’s View on Pentecostals in America

Gastón Espinosa’s book *Latino Pentecostals in America* offers an engaging summary of the Pentecostal movement’s social justice activity. Since Azusa Street, the Pentecostal movement had witnessed a mix of gospel proclamation, revival service, and some social justice consciousness. It later gave rise to individuals who furthered a gospel of social action. Espinosa writes that Susie Villa Valdez was one of those who carried a

³⁴ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 35.

³⁵ Elizabeth D. Rios, *“The Ladies Are Warriors”*: *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (New York: Oxford Press, 2005), 197, <http://www.cityvision.edu/courses/coursefiles/301/ElizabethRios-12-Ladies-are-Warriors.pdf>.

gospel of social action to Los Angeles and immigrant communities. According to Espinosa, Susie and her partners “would play worship music on their guitars; pass out tracts; engage in acts of service and mercy; pray for and minister to ex-cons, prostitutes, and alcoholics; and then offer a short evangelistic message about God’s ability to heal their broken spirits and bodies through conversion and divine healing.”³⁶

Espinosa believes that, against generally accepted beliefs and particularly in South Florida, Pentecostals around the United States have participated in social justice decades before the twenty-first century. Pentecostal churches have blended social action and acts of mercy to express the love of God. He cites many examples, such as when refugee centers were opened during the Cuban Revolution to cater to over 14,000 fleeing migrant children. When the AG refugee center was opened, it emphasized the need to welcome strangers.³⁷

Espinosa joins authors who have suggested that Pentecostals, primarily Latino Pentecostals, are engaged actively in social justice. He believes a blending of righteousness and justice brings about a faith-based change in any community and further compares this hybrid of faith and justice to Billy Graham’s vertical reconciling message of salvation and Martin Luther King’s horizontal focus on civil rights. He notes that the gospel is “...both vertical and horizontal. It is both redemption and relationship, sanctification and service, orthodoxy and orthopraxy, righteousness and justice.”³⁸

³⁶ Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 324.

³⁷ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 326.

³⁸ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 326.

There are many themes considered in Espinosa's book. However, the comparison of righteousness and justice to orthodoxy and orthopraxy is an important one. He suggests that orthodoxy centers on belief, while orthopraxy centers on practice and recommends that believers practice the kind of faith that resonates with justice. Pentecostals believe that the practice of the Christian faith generally reflects Christian belief, while this is true. It is also true that an expression of righteousness is the establishment of justice.

Espinosa explains that historically Latino Pentecostals in the area of holistic ministry seemed to have taken an approach that sought justice and the community's welfare. For instance, they have engaged in programs for individuals that addressed the body, mind, and spirit. He believes that one explanation for Latino Pentecostals' close involvement with social action stems from the fact that close to 50% of Latinos in the United States live below or at the poverty threshold. Consequently, this reality compels them to resolve critical difficulties confronting members of their congregation.³⁹

However, over time, churches in South Florida seem to have become generally passive on social justice. Based on field research and interviews conducted, this indifference is attributable to a lack of intentionality, strategy, and interest in the issues that confront society. Therefore, many Pentecostal churches in South Florida are comfortable within their current core emphasis: passionate spirituality, spiritual disciplines, and the gospel's proclamation only within their congregation.

³⁹ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 327.

Cultural Realities and South Florida Pentecostals

South Florida is in the southern part of the State of Florida in the United States. It is known for its tropical climate. South Florida is multicultural and has a high influx of immigrants from nearby countries in the Americas. Lonely Planet states:

South Florida is an intersection of Middle America, Latin America and the Caribbean, a clash of idiosyncratic types who decided miles of marshland, beach, mangroves and islets were a place where the American dream could be realized to subtropical perfection. It's also a place often misunderstood by outsiders, though the region's burgeoning arts scene—music, film, literature and the plastic art—helps shed a light on its multilayered complexity.⁴⁰

Yes, South Florida is richly diverse. “One in five residents in the state was born in another country.”⁴¹ However, despite the multicultural climate of South Florida, it is highly racially and culturally segregated, with Miami, the largest city in South Florida, ranked as one of the most segregated cities in the country.⁴² Many writers have offered their perspectives on the impact of systematic exclusion and legally enforced Jim Crow segregation in South Florida and how the effects of these disparities and racial realities endure.⁴³ The diverse cultural and racial identities, and the large body of immigrants, have a significant impact on South Florida's culture; this is particularly true as it relates

⁴⁰ “Multicultural South Florida,” Lonely Planet, accessed July 4, 2020, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/usa/south-florida-the-keys/background/other-features/27b9052b-9fb1-4e33-9c22-70c51a7a5ace/a/nar/27b9052b-9fb1-4e33-9c22-70c51a7a5ace/1338357>.

⁴¹ “Immigrants in Florida,” American Immigration Council, August 6, 2020, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-florida>.

⁴² “Residential Segregation Data for U.S. Metro Areas,” Governing, accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.governing.com/gov-data/education-data/residential-racial-segregation-metro-areas.html>.

⁴³ Andres Viglucci, C. Isaiah Smalls II, Rob Wile, and Yadira Lopez, “A History of Broken Promises,” *Miami Herald*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article244524772.html>.

to the immigrant population's influence, both politically and in social justice, as South Florida holds more liberal views than the rest of the state.

In addition, it is without a doubt that the religious composition of Pentecostals in South Florida is high. This is due to many factors, including that many Latinos, who comprise a high number of South Florida residents, embrace Pentecostalism. Professor Andrew Chesnut states that "Pentecostalism has very successfully absorbed Latin American culture. For example, the music that you hear in Pentecostal churches has the same rhythms that people enjoy outside of the church. In fact, in only a century, Pentecostalism has become indigenous, or "Latin Americanized," to a greater extent than Roman Catholicism has in its four centuries in Latin America."⁴⁴

He also goes further to state that, "...some Latin Americans who grow up Catholic convert to Pentecostalism at a time of a health crisis, because Pentecostalism puts such a great emphasis on faith healing. This healing ministry is one of the propelling motors of the Pentecostal boom."⁴⁵

Furthermore, Pentecostalism's focus on the prosperity gospel causes significant attraction amongst the immigrant population. An emphasis on the power of prayer to secure personal needs has given many the hope needed in situations where they find themselves discouraged.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Why Has Pentecostalism Grown so Dramatically in Latin America," Pew Research Center, November 14, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/14/why-has-pentecostalism-grown-so-dramatically-in-latin-america/>.

⁴⁵ Pew Research Center, "Why Has Pentecostalism Grown so Dramatically in Latin America."

⁴⁶ Pew Research Center, "Why Has Pentecostalism Grown so Dramatically in Latin America."

Florida is about 70% Christian, and out of these numbers, the Pentecostal Family of Evangelical tradition forms about 4%, while the Pentecostal Family of Black Protestant tradition forms about 2%. See graphics below.

Adults in Florida

Religious composition of adults in Florida



Figure 2—Religious Composition of Adults in Florida (Evangelical Protestant).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Pew Research Center, “Religious Composition of Adults in Florida.”

Adults in Florida

Religious composition of adults in Florida

70%

Christian

24% Evangelical Protestant

14% Mainline Protestant

8% Historically Black Protestant

4% Baptist Family (Historically Black Protestant Trad.)

<1% Methodist (Historically Black Protestant Trad.)

2% Pentecostal Family (Historically Black Protestant Trad.)

<1% Holiness Family (Historically Black Protestant Trad.)

1% Nondenominational Family (Historically Black Protestant Trad.)

1% Nonspecific Protestant Family (Historically Black Protestant Trad.)

Figure 3—Religious Composition of Adults in Florida (Historically Black Protestant).⁴⁸

Comparing the above information with that of Pentecostals worldwide is interesting. The statistics tell a flourishing story. Pentecostalism has a broad appeal not just in Florida or the United States but also around the world.

⁴⁸ Pew Research Center, “Religious Composition of Adults in Florida.”

Pentecostals by Region

PENTECOSTALS BY REGION		
Regions	Percentage of Region that is Pentecostal	Percentage of World Pentecostal Population
Americas	10.9%	36.7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.8	43.7
Asia-Pacific	1.1	15.5
Europe	1.5	4.0
Middle East-North Africa	0.1	0.1
World Total	4.0	100.0

*Figure 4—Pentecostals by Region.*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ “Christian Movements and Denominations,” Pew Research Center, December 19, 2011, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/>.

Denominations of Protestants

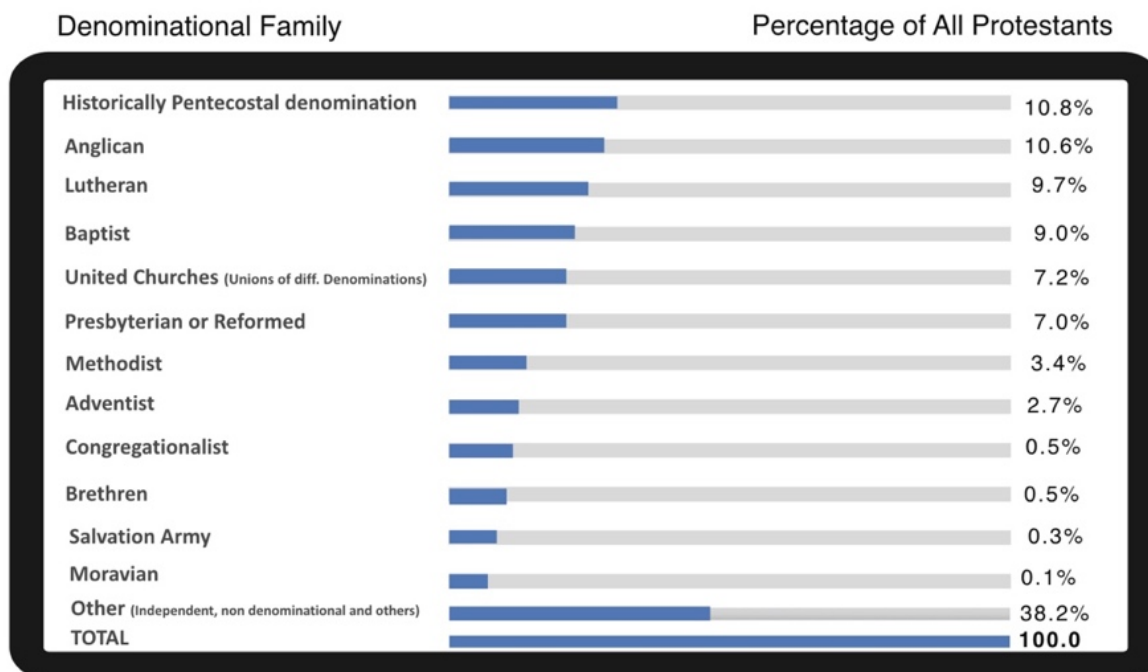


Figure 5—Denominations of Protestants, Identifying the Percentage of Pentecostals as Compared to other Denominations.⁵⁰

These statistics and evidence inform us that because of the growing number of Pentecostal adherents, there is a high possibility of mass social impact, particularly in South Florida, if local Pentecostal churches would begin engaging in social justice advocacy effectively as a holistic ministry strategy.

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center, “Christian Movements and Denominations.”

Is Social Justice Central to the Faith?

There is a call for all believers, including Pentecostal believers, to embrace social justice. However, it seems many Christians who see justice as central to the faith do not take steps towards doing the work required in social justice. Relevant magazine states that, “Justice is central to the Christian faith, yet many Christians, especially in the United States, leave the work of justice largely untouched. The signs of the times cry out for people who will stand in the gap and engage the pursuit of justice.”⁵¹ What can be observed within South Florida paints a grim outlook, the poor and people in the community starving for care, many racially oppressed, and churches that seem disinterested. The Christian faith is a healing force, and justice is one area that the Bible emphasizes that disciples of Christ embrace. Therefore, if justice is central to the faith, believers need to put effort into social justice advocacy.

A cursory observation of the world reveals there are many people suffering injustice, which means believers have much work to do. The numbers speak for themselves. Note, “more than 20 million people around the world are desperate to be freed from human trafficking. 795 million people across the globe do not have enough food to eat. More than 20 million people have been forced to seek refuge in foreign lands because of political unrest at home.”⁵² The picture of injustice across the world beckons on us to restore the dignity of the marginalized. The church is called to make a difference.

⁵¹ “Things to Know About Pursuing Social Justice,” Relevant Magazine, accessed August 16, 2020, <https://relevantmagazine.com/reject-apathy/what-they-dont-tell-you-about-pursuing-social-justice>.

⁵² Relevant Magazine, “Things to Know About Pursuing Social Justice.”

There are many issues in the scriptures that God’s people are called to address. In Micah 6, we are called “to act justly and to love mercy.”⁵³ Believers throughout history have participated in social justice advocacy. Take for example, “The underground railroad was a social justice movement that led thousands to freedom long before slavery was abolished. Organized primarily by Quakers, white evangelicals and black churches, many risked everything to host and care for the runaway slaves, working together to answer a truly biblical call.”⁵⁴

Scriptures emphasize that it is the church’s mandate to care for and love its community. “Christian love and charity must extend to all in need.”⁵⁵ It is pertinent to acknowledge that Scriptures point to the fact that holistic ministry goes beyond the spiritual needs of an individual and encompasses the mental, emotional, and physical as well; in other words, the whole person.⁵⁶ Accordingly, Alan Hirsch states, “churches must continue to seek opportunities for holistic care within communities.”⁵⁷

Consequently, this research suggests that local churches and their leaders acknowledge the need for holistic ministry strategies, including social justice. Therefore, the call is for churches to prioritize educating their adherents on social issues, identifying community needs, and developing social justice advocacy opportunities.

⁵³ Micah 6:8.

⁵⁴ Relevant Magazine, “Social Justice vs. Evangelism.”

⁵⁵ Stark Rodney, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York, Harper, 2011) 113.

⁵⁶ 3 John 2 (King James Version).

⁵⁷ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 26.

Church Leaders and Statement on Social Justice

In 2018, some pastors and church leaders published a website that presented a statement relating to social justice and the gospel. A few of the pastors who signed the statement belonged to the Pentecostal tradition. On the website, the leaders assert that modern social justice movements place believers at risk with “an onslaught of dangerous and false teachings that threaten the gospel, misrepresent scripture, and lead people away from the grace of God in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁸ These leaders viewed current social justice values as capable of undermining biblical values in the crucial areas of sexuality and race. They explain that possible threats to biblical values exist in any modern idea that addresses issues on human sexuality and that views on politics can polarize the church in the areas of race and ethnicity.

While these concerns are compelling, arguing that it is necessary for the church to ignore the quest for social justice because it can be secularized or politicized does not seem credible. The church has a call to pursue social justice advocacy alongside all other biblical values, as social justice is a biblical value. However, it is commendable that the website goes forward to address aspects of social justice in detail. A popular pastor John MacArthur along with other Christian leaders who signed the website statement came under intense criticism. Critics were quick to point out that their definitions were not clear, stating, “They’re so imprecise in the terms that are used.”⁵⁹ Other critics suggest

⁵⁸ The Statement on Social Justice & The Gospel, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://statementonsocialjustice.com>.

⁵⁹ “John MacArthur's ‘Statement on Social Justice’ Is Aggravating Evangelicals,” *Christianity Today*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/september-web-only/john-macarthur-statement-social-justice-gospel-thabiti.html>.

that “to boldly deny that oppression exists and suggest that the church should stop talking about it is irreverent and alarming.”⁶⁰

However, the statement on social justice does not seem to deny oppression; it only expressed the possibility that the modern social justice movement clashes with traditional biblical values. Without a doubt, churches shy away from social justice advocacy because “rebranding themselves as progressive often bring religious activists into alliances with people who reject their core values. For example, the catholic left allying itself with the progressive wing of the democratic party embraces the advocates of the most extreme abortion liberalization.”⁶¹ While these issues will be further addressed in the next sub-topic, crucial questions arise. Will the church abandon social justice advocacy because it believes some of the current issues do not align with its historical values? Will a local church choose to obey Christ at the risk of offending traditional viewpoints?

The Polarizing Effect of Politics, Ideologies, and Beliefs

As already mentioned, South Florida is more liberal than the rest of the state. This distinction is vital to note, as the Pentecostal church is often associated with less progressive ideologies. Of course, social justice is often looked at more on the liberal or progressive side. In an effort to preserve traditional values relating to sexuality and other ideas, Pentecostal churches tend to approach social justice issues with caution. This is

⁶⁰ “The Church Should Be at the Forefront Of The Fight For Social Justice.” *Relevant Magazine*, September 11, 2018. <https://relevantmagazine.com/current/the-church-should-be-at-the-forefront-of-the-fight-for-social-justice/>.

⁶¹ “Why Social Justice Is Killing Synagogues and Churches,” *Tablet Magazine*, March 1, 2019. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/social-justice-is-killing-synagogues>.

further exacerbated by the fact that most groups in the sphere of social justice have more liberal ideas on sexuality and abortion; consequently, churches that take steps in this respect are looked on with suspicion. As a pastor in South Florida and a church staff for the last eight years, these scenarios have been witnessed firsthand. From growing up in Sub-Saharan Africa and more recently living in South Florida, the reluctance of Pentecostal churches towards social justice is undeniable.

Furthermore, the idea that Pentecostals are generally not interested in social justice is juxtaposed against another backdrop that many Pentecostal adherents believe that social justice falls in the realm of politics. Naysayers have often reinforced this ideological stance by advising churches to focus on spiritual matters, such as preaching, teaching, and the facilitation of worship services.

Obviously, this kind of thinking assumes that the day-to-day life of people in society is outside the realm of spiritual matters, including their social, political, and economic concerns. According to this group of naysayers, an individual's overall well-being is not the church's concern—only their spiritual life. They believe that social justice is an inconvenient add-on to the Christian walk. Many churches in the Pentecostal tradition hold this view. The initial thought was that even mainline denominations and churches such as the Roman Catholic Church initially held this view. The view that justice is the concern of a nation-state and its political structures; that justice is not the focus of the church.⁶²

⁶² Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 56.

However, this view on the church's role in social justice has evolved and has varied historically. Therefore, the evolution of this view raises the ongoing question of how much the church should be involved. Authors Michael D. Palmer and Stanley Burgess trace the historical background to this and state that:

Although numerous Catholic philosophers deal with issues of social justice before the 1840s, including the great medieval thinker Thomas Aquinas, the church failed to develop a body of social thought and a program of social reform until the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878–1903). The very term “social justice” is adopted by the Jesuit Luigi Taparelli in the 1840s, largely based on the work of Aquinas.⁶³

The Catholic Church found itself at the crossroad of concepts in determining what should be the role of the state versus the church in social justice issues. Consequently, the Catholic Church embraced a holistic perspective of ministry in social justice. The authors argue that the church grew in its belief that, “Social justice is not a goal that humans decide to strive for: it is the commandment of the just God. God commands the Israelites to create a society based on the values embodied in laws designed to ensure equality and fairness for all.”⁶⁴

The Absence of Advocacy

Several critics suggest that there is an absence of social justice advocacy in most Pentecostal churches. Roy Notice observes that “the critique of the church comes out of the expectation that the church ought to make a difference in society, but it also arises from those who are of the view that the church needs to justify the need for its presence

⁶³ Palmer and Burgess, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, 55.

⁶⁴ Palmer and Burgess, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, 46.

in society”.⁶⁵ Notice explains the divergent views of people on both sides of the spectrum. Firstly, he refers to those who believe the local church should be involved in life transformation, particularly of the human soul.⁶⁶ Secondly, he refers to those who believe that the local church should be concerned about the needy and social transformation.⁶⁷ Notice agrees that Pentecostals are passionate about evangelism that deals more with the proclamation of the gospel message; however, lacking similar passion and practical steps in social causes.

Notice goes further and states that Pentecostals “were consumed with evangelistic passion, which was fueled by an eschatology of urgency. The philosophical dichotomy between proclamation and social action was captured further in a 1933 edition of the *Evangel*. Frank Madeley, a missionary to China, wrote that a local village had asked him to launch a school. He reported that he replied, “We did not come to establish schools, but to preach the gospel.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen writes, “in the formative years of the movement, many Pentecostals’ eschatological fervor blurred the meaning of social

⁶⁵ “Social Responsibility and the Pentecostal Church,” Bethel Bible College of the Caribbean—Jamaica, accessed July 23, 2020, <https://www.bethelbiblecollegecaribbean.edu.jm/images/docs/social-responsibility-and-the-pentecostal-church.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Bethel Bible College of the Caribbean—Jamaica, “Social Responsibility and the Pentecostal Church.”

⁶⁷ Bethel Bible College of the Caribbean—Jamaica, “Social Responsibility and the Pentecostal Church.”

⁶⁸ Bethel Bible College of the Caribbean—Jamaica, “Social Responsibility and the Pentecostal Church.”

improvement. Why invest in a world that it was believed would fade away?”⁶⁹ However, he explains further that:

Pentecostal theologian Peter Kuzmic (1986:146) of the former Yugoslavia argues that to interpret the impending premillennial return of Christ as a doctrine that paralyzes efforts for social improvement is more of a Western cultural-theological creation based upon conservative (American) political positions rather than on a clear reading of Scripture. His colleague Miroslav Volf (1990:29) has argued that when Christians create history that is compatible with the kingdom of God, such projects have eschatological significance: what is valid will remain. Volf contends that eschatological continuity between God’s present reign and the reign to come “guarantees that noble human efforts will not be wasted.”⁷⁰

Consequently, there are two opposing beliefs: those who hold human social efforts to have eternal significance, and those who believe that social works do not have any significance compared to winning a soul to Christ. The first view leads many to do good deeds that seek to bless the community. Conversely, and according to Calvin P. Van Reken, the second view leads some to believe that “the primary work of the institutional church is not to promote social justice, it is to warn people of divine justice.”⁷¹

Van Reken believes that this second view will lead people to believe “the church should not take it upon itself to entertain the political question of how a particular society can best achieve this goal. Are more police officers the best idea, or bigger jails?”⁷² According to him, these questions exceed the church’s sole concern and ability.

⁶⁹ Kärkkäinen, “Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice?” 419.

⁷⁰ Kärkkäinen, “Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice?” 419.

⁷¹ Calvin P. Van Reken. “The Church’s Role in Social Justice,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 34 (1999): 200, <https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcpi/fulltext/ctj/68491.pdf>.

⁷² Van Reken, “The Church’s Role in Social Justice,” 200.

Palmer and Burgess suggest that by exploring the historical context of religion and faith, a reader would find that religion engages social justice issues like discrimination, race, poverty, gender identity, classism, oppression, privilege, xenophobia, and much more. They express that Christianity, by its very nature, has its foundations on social justice. Accordingly, “religion has social justice implications in the way it shapes what its adherents believe about their roles and prerogatives in society.”⁷³

Nevertheless, this dissertation argues that the absence of advocacy in social justice issues among Pentecostal churches in South Florida is due to many reasons. Some Pentecostal churches have leaders who possess limited knowledge of the biblical nature of justice. Recently, church leaders tend to muddle the idea of social works and social advocacy with political engagement. While social justice advocacy is not necessarily politics, it may engage the political structures of society. Elizabeth D. Rios observes, “Pentecostalism has often been accused of being withdrawn from social and political concerns due to an either/or mentality that erroneously makes people feel like they have to choose between evangelism, personal salvation and political engagement.”⁷⁴

In *The And Campaign's Guide to Faithful Civic Engagement*, Giboney, Wear, and Butler express that, “whether we like it or not, politics impacts everything in society.”⁷⁵ The authors suggest that justice is inextricably connected to civic engagement and politics. Accordingly, Christians should not be afraid of engaging in politics because the

⁷³ Palmer and Burgess, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, 1.

⁷⁴ “Pentecostals, the Church and Justice,” *Pentecostals & Charismatics for Peace & Justice*, January 27, 2019, <https://pcpj.org/2019/01/27/pentecostals-the-church-and-justice/>.

⁷⁵ Justin Giboney, Michael Wear, and Chris Butler, *Compassion (&) Conviction: The And Campaign's Guide to Faithful Civic Engagement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 55.

very fiber of our gospel is compassion for others. This, therefore, involves political and social structures.

Giboney, Wear, and Butler further argues that, “one of the reasons Christians should engage in politics in a certain way is really because of the second half of the Greatest Commandment...if we would want justice for ourselves, we should want justice for our neighbors.”⁷⁶ They conclude by calling on believers to understand the impact of government policies on justice, noting that believers should think holistically on social justice, since it cannot be isolated from civic engagement.

This research reveals that South Florida Pentecostals know it is necessary to put faith to action; however they do not seem to practically put feet to their faith in ways that engage political structures, social works and justice. Pentecostals in South Florida are encouraged to seek social justice advocacy to make a difference, to engage social strategies that cause transformation in local communities so “justice can roll down like waters”⁷⁷.

Summary

It is very clear that social justice is a crucial subject for believers that needs to be given more attention, particularly within the Pentecostal churches of South Florida. From a historical perspective, the topic of social justice and the church’s involvement is not relatively new; however, within the last decade, there has been a lack of intentional social justice advocacy by local churches. The lack of intentionality is mainly the result of a

⁷⁶ Giboney, Wear, and Butler, *Compassion (&) Conviction*, 55.

⁷⁷ Amos 5:24 (English Standard Version).

disconnect to community needs. This includes an apprehension towards engaging in sensitive issues associated with modern social justice advocacy efforts, such as sexual identity and abortion, to name a few.

It is obvious that for progress to be made in social justice among Pentecostal churches, these churches need to have leaders with a perspective that sees social justice beyond sexual identity, abortion, or politics. These leaders are encouraged to consider the magnitude of the community impact and lives transformed with social action strategies. Furthermore, the necessity for churches to establish structures that provide for the weakest in society and foster compassion for the oppressed should be standard objectives.

The local church has to reach back to its history of good deeds, learn from its successes, and re-engage advocacy of social justice. Without a doubt, an expression of social justice advocacy will engender a church's desire to systematically have compassion and care for its community as well as the brokenhearted while still proclaiming good news to the poor and preaching freedom to the oppressed.

SECTION 2:
OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

“If Christians around the world were to suddenly renounce their personal agendas, their life goals and their aspirations, and begin responding in radical obedience to everything God showed them, the world would be turned upside down. How do we know? Because that's what first century Christians did, and the world is still talking about it.”⁷⁸ - **Henry Blackaby**

This research seeks to explore possible solutions for providing social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy for Pentecostal churches in South Florida. While other mainline and Protestant denominations have historically engaged in social justice advocacy, Pentecostal churches seem to lag for many reasons.

History informs us that Pentecostal churches traditionally are focused on expressive worship services, divine healing, and gifts of the Spirit. They are also generally less likely to emphasize community outreaches and social works. Due to this predisposition and a heavy emphasis on the supernatural, there can be a dissociation among Pentecostals that developing practical solutions in holistic ministry is “unspiritual” and maybe even acting outside the realm of faith.

For South Florida Pentecostals to respond with radical obedience and get involved in social justice work, there will have to be an effort to dismantle the idea that Pentecostals have to solely rely on impressions, prophetic words, or even emotionalism to

⁷⁸ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 29.

be Spirit-led. In actuality, God has given us our intellectual abilities as a gift. Regardless of the expression of these gifts, using these abilities is just as spiritual as prayer. It is also a necessary part of being good stewards of what God has given us. Therefore, solutions explored in this section represent practical strategies in social justice advocacy that are likely to be successful if used by a church in its proclamation of the Gospel.

This section will define social justice and consider other perspectives of social justice advocacy in order to synthesize some of the possible solutions. It will also review a few literary works that examine the subject and will explore social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy.

What is Social Justice?

The expanding spotlight on social justice in biblical studies and church leadership represents a renewed understanding of the church's role in society and a commitment to understanding the church's place in issues relating to culture, sexism and sexual orientation, gender, classism and discrimination, race and equality, and poverty. The modern church is beginning to see the need to forge a way forward into social issues that directly affect the communities around it. However, an effective social justice advocacy strategy requires a deep biblical understanding, a broad worldview, conceptual knowledge, and core competencies. Therefore, in understanding social justice as a holistic ministry, we first have to define social justice.

According to the handbook for social justice in counseling psychology,

Social justice may be defined as “the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within a society” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2004). Related to the legal notion of equity for all within the law, social justice also connotes that the distribution of

advantages be fair and equitable to all individuals, regardless of race, gender, ability, status, sexual orientation, physical makeup, or religious creed.⁷⁹

Authors Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, in their book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, admit that “There is no widely shared definition.”⁸⁰ They note, however, that one might shed light on its meaning by individually considering each word. The authors go on to define terms like intuitive justice, distributive justice, and procedural justice. They eventually define social justice as “the effort to find and fix cases where distributive or procedural justice is denied to people because they were born into poverty or belong to a socially disadvantaged category.”⁸¹

The subject of social justice is broad and extensive. It conjures a myriad of issues, such as human rights, equality, activism, intersectionality, feminism, racism, mental health, diversity, social change, climate change, LGBTQ individuals, police brutality, protests, women empowerment, Black history, criminal justice reform and the list goes on.

However, due to the very extensive scope of the social justice field, this study only considers a narrow and manageable scope of social justice. Consequently, within this work, research is restricted to three critical areas in social justice: care and compassion for the community, good news for the poor and broken-hearted, and the pursuit of justice and freedom for the oppressed in society, particularly relating to racial

⁷⁹ Rebecca Toporek, Lawrence Gerstein, Nadya Fouad, Gargi Roysircar, and Tania Israel, *Handbook for Social Justice in Counseling Psychology: Leadership, Vision, and Action* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2006), EBSCOHost.

⁸⁰ Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 217.

⁸¹ Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 221.

oppression. This restriction encourages a deeper and manageable consideration of these areas. It is hopeful that an analytical approach in these specific areas will produce practical ministry solutions. These solutions will lift the local Pentecostal church toward a more robust holistic ministry in order to make a significant spiritual impact in today's society.

Perceived Meaning of Social Justice



Figure 6—What Many See When They Hear the Word Social Justice.⁸²

⁸² Brad Glasgow, “A Problematic Guide to the Social Justice Left,” medium.com, accessed October 10, 2018, https://medium.com/@Brad_Glasgow/a-problematic-guide-to-the-social-justice-left-8dd54292855f.



Figure 7—Social Justice within the Context of this Research.

Practical Programs

Communities of Salt and Light

A well-known saying goes that the “best-kept secret of the Catholic Church is its social teachings.”⁸³ The Catholic Church is known for its social work, but it has come under criticism; although its social principles are clear, sometimes the praxis lags. This was one reason the Conference of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the United States instituted a project called Communities of Salt and Light. This project focuses on

⁸³ Susan Rakoczy, “The Best kept Secret of the Catholic Church—Its Social Teachings,” [opendemocracy.net](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/best-kept-secret-of-catholic-churchits-social-teachings/), accessed December 30, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/best-kept-secret-of-catholic-churchits-social-teachings/>.

building and strengthening local parish-based social ministry, learning practical social justice principles, and forming frameworks for active ministries in a church to be the salt and light of a local community. Accordingly, they emphasized the need to engage in what is referred to as missionary discipleship.

The conference stated that “In urban neighborhoods, in suburban communities, and in rural areas, parishes serve as anchors of hope and communities of caring, help families meet their own needs and reach out to others, and serve as centers of community life and networks of assistance.”⁸⁴ They believe that churches will be evaluated by their ability to serve the least, the hungry, the homeless, and the downtrodden.⁸⁵ This program reinforces the thesis of this paper, that churches should set the example of love and justice and demonstrate the gospel in action.

The project encourages the local church to see itself as an agency called to serve, to build bridges amongst different people, gender, viewpoints, and cultures. It emphasizes that the church is called to show care for all of God’s creation, including the community, as well as doing works of love and justice.⁸⁶ In a nutshell, the project is carried out with different aspects of focus. These areas include anchoring through prayer and worship; sharing through preaching and education; supporting family, work, and citizenship;

⁸⁴ “Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish,” *uscgb.org*. Accessed November 14, 2020, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/communities-salt-and-light-reflections-social-mission-parish>.

⁸⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish.”

⁸⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish.”

serving with outreach and charity; advocating for justice through legislative action; organizing for justice and building solidarity by going beyond parish boundaries.⁸⁷

The conference project further highlights four steps in unifying a local church to accomplish set goals. These steps were modeled after the experience of Jesus' disciples. They include praying together, reaching together, learning together, and responding in action together. This four-step strategy of mobilizing the local church to engage in social mission is commendable. It provides an avenue for believers in a local church to demonstrate love and generosity while serving the community together.

The Communities of Salt and Light strategy will be useful in mobilizing Pentecostal churches in South Florida. Research carried out revealed that Pentecostals are generally more interested in social action inspired during collective prayer. The prayer element highlights the spiritual side of doing works of love and justice, as works done in worshiping God.

⁸⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish."



Figure 8—Four Steps to be Salt and Light.⁸⁸

The UN and Social Justice Day

Several countries subscribe to maintaining social justice within their body polity. The United Nations Organization made strides toward a more proactive focus on social justice. On February 20, 2020, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDES) commemorated the world day of social justice and published a discussion paper titled, *Social Justice in an Open World: the Role of the United Nations*.⁸⁹ This document gives an overview of the three-year project carried out by the United Nations. The United Nations believes that:

Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote gender equality, or the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. We

⁸⁸ We are Salt and Light, accessed August 6, 2020, <https://www.wearesaltandlight.org>.

⁸⁹ “World Day of Social Justice” United Nations, accessed September 5, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/social-justice-day>.

advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability.⁹⁰

Their objectives include promoting fair outcomes for all, as the UN recognizes social justice is necessary for peace and security. The presence of human rights and freedoms is sacrosanct to social development. This focus on social justice seeks to address issues of poverty, unemployment, geographical disparities, gender inequality, and all issues that weaken social cohesion.

The UN focus on social justice gives clarity on specific areas that the church can further research. It also provides a good framework on how to engage local governments, which the local church can emulate. South Florida Pentecostal churches can learn from this, realize the importance of their involvement in helping society and find ways to partner with governmental structures.

Raymond Pfister and Western European Model for Social Ministry

Raymond Pfister is a professor at the University of Hamburg, Germany. He observes that, “Pentecostals in particular have been criticized for their emphasis on individual salvation and morality, and for their lack of concern for social issues.”⁹¹ He believes that this criticism is unfair, largely due to Pentecostals having shown a commitment to social justice and caring for the poor. Additionally, he believes that this attribute gives meaning to the Luke 4 mandate of Christ, while also noting that the

⁹⁰ “World Day of Social Justice” United Nations.

⁹¹ Raymond Pfister, “Social Ministry in the Local Pentecostal Church: Three Western European Case Studies,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 11, no. 1 (1994): 16–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537889401100104>.

Pentecostal movement emphasizes the relevance of meeting people where they have needs. This is similar to what Christ did, which has enabled the movement to flourish among the needy.

Nevertheless, Pfister states that the Western European experience of a Pentecostal social works approach is different from other existing models. Pentecostals in Western Europe perceive conditions a little differently for many reasons. This includes the fact that they are outside political structures and that their leadership has limited experience in social action, which in turn generally causes them to respond differently towards issues of social justice.

Pfister argues that Western European Pentecostals are interested in meeting people's needs in society but are more focused on meeting people in the process of serving. Consequently, the uniqueness of this model is its essential core motivation for ministry—meeting people before meeting needs.⁹² He cited the example of an Assemblies of God Church in Strasbourg, France, a Church of fewer than thirty people led by a pastor named Gilbert Ringenbach. This Church believed God enough to demonstrate outreach practically. Their approach to spreading the gospel took tangible forms, including helping the homeless and helpless. The pastor even opened up his own home, fed the homeless, and welcomed the downtrodden with love.

According to the author, this approach is an effective medium for the engagement of social issues. Pentecostal churches in South Florida can learn from Pfister's model and find creative ways to meet people where they are before meeting their needs.

⁹² Raymond Pfister, "Social Ministry in the Local Pentecostal Church."

The Assemblies of God and Holistic Ministry

The Assemblies of God (AG) is one of the largest Pentecostal denominations globally, with over “397,000 ministers in over 256 countries and serving approximately 69.1 million adherents across the world.”⁹³ Like most Pentecostal denominations, the AG believes Pentecostal practices such as speaking in tongues indicate the Spirit’s baptism and serve as a prayer language, and it also believes in divine healing. According to the AG’s 16 Statements of Fundamental Truths, “Divine healing is a vital part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the atonement and is the privilege of all believers.”⁹⁴ This fundamental doctrine of the AG supports the idea that church ministry should be concerned about its members’ welfare and the communities in which it resides.

Post-World War II, the General Council of AG in the United States has actively encouraged a growing interest in holistic health, particularly in mental health. Many AG-affiliated colleges now offer classes that help people learn about healing from a professional perspective. A growing number of its ministers are professionals in the healthcare field. AG schools like Evangel, Southeastern Universities, and even George Fox University⁹⁵ now offer counseling and mental health programs, where trained health professionals are encouraged to integrate biblical, clinical, and psychological principles to foster understanding and ultimately healing.

⁹³ “Assemblies of God,” *wikipedia.com*, accessed April 17, 2019, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assemblies_of_God.

⁹⁴ “16 Fundamental Truths,” *ag.org*, accessed April 27, 2019. <https://ag.org/beliefs/statement-of-fundamental-truths>.

⁹⁵ “Counseling Programs,” *georgefox.edu*, accessed December 6, 2020. <https://www.georgefox.edu/counseling-programs/index.html>.

The AG believes in the importance of community care, particularly in mental health, substance abuse, and other related issues. In this way, the AG embraces care for the poor and the sick alongside supporting the individual's treatment in medical and therapeutic practices. Thus, while promoting prayer for miraculous healing, the AG also encourages its adherents to seek holistic health.⁹⁶

Furthermore, the AG has made enormous strides toward social action by establishing care ministries at an international and humanitarian level through many forums, such as Convoy of Hope and Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM). Currently, AGWM has many care ministry outlets. These care ministry outlets include Compassion Link, which consists of five missionary teams: Community Health Evangelism, HealthCare Ministries, His-Ability International, Pastoral Care International, and Sustain Hope.⁹⁷ A few years ago, the AG approved a hospital in Calcutta, India, and has expanded its medical endeavors abroad.

However, it is quite interesting that upon a review of statistics and numbers of ministry endeavors within the United States, it seems that the AG mainly focuses on “attendance numbers, water baptisms, faith conversions, and Holy Spirit baptisms.”⁹⁸ Statistics about the AG's impact on core social justice issues within the United States is minimal and, in some cases, could not be found. While it is commendable that the AG, as

⁹⁶ “Divine Healing: An Integral Part of the Gospel,” Shepherd's Pasture Assembly, accessed August 29, 2020. <http://www.visitspachurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Divine-Healing.pdf>.

⁹⁷ “Compassion Link,” Assemblies of God, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://news.ag.org/en/News/AG-World-Missions-Launches-CompassionLink>.

⁹⁸ “Statistics on the Assemblies of God,” Assemblies of God, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.

a denominational movement, encourages holistic ministry approaches, capturing specific and relevant statistics will be a welcome development. When highlighted, these statistics relating to local social action could encourage local pastors and ministers to keep working to impact their community in areas such as hospitals visited, prisoners freed, counseling accomplished, benevolence and shelters provided.

Furthermore, most AG-affiliated congregations and churches in the United States have not been proactive in adopting holistic ministry strategies in social justice advocacy to implement them locally. AG churches should be engaged in initiatives that promote social justice and holistic ministry. One of the field research subjects interviewed for this dissertation agrees with this position that the church should exemplify the mission of Christ in its community; that since Christ's mission was holistic, so the mission of followers of Christ should also be.

Nevertheless, most local churches focus on exponential congregational growth to the detriment of care or social justice ministries. In the age of megachurches, we see many grow large in numbers without ever becoming rooted in community activities with social implications. Additionally, although we have seen a few examples of holistic ministry strategies amongst AG-affiliated churches around the United States, not many sustainable examples exist in the South Florida area.

David Wilkerson and Teen Challenge

The Teen Challenge story portrays a successful social action ministry. Teen Challenge was established by Assemblies of God minister David Wilkerson in 1960. Since that time, the ministry has had a significant impact in helping youth on drugs and at risk. Pastor David decided to win gang members to God and care for broken

communities. So far, “Teen Challenge has grown to nearly 250 centers in 48 states and over 1,000 centers in 95 countries. In Puerto Rico, the organization is building an AIDS hospital, the first of its kind.”⁹⁹ One of the fascinating stories of the accomplishments of David Wilkerson and Teen Challenge ministries was the conversion story of Nicky Cruz:

It was through the ministry of a sister Assemblies of God organization called Teen Challenge that evangelist David Wilkerson converted a young Puerto Rican MauMau gang member named Nicky Cruz. Cruz went on to work with Latino AG churches to evangelize gang members, drug addicts, and at-risk youth. His life and spiritual journey are documented in Wilkerson’s classic *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963) and Cruz’s own autobiography, *Run, Baby, Run* (1968) ... Cruz went on to conduct citywide evangelistic crusades with Teen Challenge and other organizations throughout the United States, Latin America, and Europe. Cruz served as a role model for a growing generation of Latino social evangelists now targeting the inner city and at-risk youth.¹⁰⁰

We need more social action ministries like Teen Challenge; this is why the solution proposed in this dissertation is a holistic ministry approach in social justice that seeks to go beyond to address societal challenges like poverty, oppression, and care. Whatever the needs in community care, Pentecostal churches in South Florida need to mobilize to meet their communities' crucial needs.

Kevin Palau’s Unlikely

Author Kevin Palau, son of evangelist Luis Palau, wrote the book *Unlikely*. In his book, he tells the compelling story of the great partnership between the church and the government of Portland, Oregon, aimed at helping the city. This endeavor launched the movement called City-Serve. Palau’s story puts forth a biblical argument for social

⁹⁹ “The Teen Challenge Story,” Adult and Teen Challenge, Pacific Northwest, accessed August 7, 2020, https://teenchallengepnw.com/about/teen_challenge_story/.

¹⁰⁰ Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, 325.

justice advocacy in the local church and the need to live out the gospel practically. Palau writes, “if evangelical Christian churches could unite and serve the community by opening more hearts to the gospel, I was in. More than that, I’d help organize it with our city officials.”¹⁰¹ Furthermore, “together we identified five initial areas of need: hunger, homelessness, health care, the environment, and public schools. Our officials were thrilled to receive the assistance, and so began an unlikely partnership between the City of Portland and a growing band of churches.”¹⁰²

Palau partnered with the first openly gay mayor in a U.S. city because he believed that Christians are called to demonstrate the command to love our neighbor. Palau advocated for partnerships in multiple areas, such as in kids foster care, clinics, and hospitals, prisons, curbing sex trafficking, and reducing street gangs and societal violence. Other Christians in the area were inspired by Palau’s example and joined the partnership. Palau narrates how the church mobilized volunteers to do a makeover on school premises and invest in students’ lives. The book also gives the seven-project story, where Christians fasted and prayed for the city, which was modeled in other cities around the United States.

Palau advocates for a “gospel movement that is gospel-centered, church-driven, disciple-led, and city-focused.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, he believes the local church is empowered to take the mission of Christ to the city and make a difference in its

¹⁰¹ Kevin Palau, *Unlikely: Setting Aside Our Differences to Live Out the Gospel* (New York: Howard Books, 2015), 6.

¹⁰² Palau, *Unlikely*, 7.

¹⁰³ Palau, *Unlikely*, 144.

neighborhoods. He explains that community officials tend to call the church first when needs arise due to their advocacy. Palau implores the church to follow Jesus' example by engaging the community in more profound ways; to walk with people we may disagree with, finding common ground; to work together for the common good. He advocates for a public church partnership and calls the local church to embrace its city's social issues.

Similarly, Kim Hammond argues, “the missional church thinks that life is holistic and believes that God is interested in the whole person.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, he states,

The missional church goes back to the life of Jesus. It submerges itself into the culture it is reaching. He did not construct a building or start a service. Rather he walked among the poor and hurt and lost. He incarnated himself. He became flesh; God came down from heaven and lived among us. He was born poor and grew up in a despised town called Nazareth.¹⁰⁵

Jesus sought to care for the community, preach the good news to the poor, and fight for freedom for the oppressed. That is what social justice works to achieve.

Theoretical Solutions

C.S. Lewis and Social Justice

Renowned author C.S. Lewis writes about social justice in *The Screwtape Letters*. In Lewis' work, Screwtape, a demon, writes to his nephew, Wormwood. This veteran demon spirit mentors his nephew about the temptation and deception of humans. He

¹⁰⁴ Kim Hammond, “Characteristics of Missional Church,” *jmm.org*. Accessed November 16, 2020, <http://www.jmm.org.au/articles/567.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ Hammond, “Characteristics of Missional Church.”

comments to his nephew about the connection between the Christian walk and the political landscape. He expresses that this connection is “delicate,” saying:

About the general connection between Christianity and politics, our position is more delicate. Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major disaster. On the other hand we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a means; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything—even to social justice.¹⁰⁶

Lewis goes further, “The thing to do is to get a man at first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice.”¹⁰⁷ Note well that the enemy here, according to Screwtape, is God. Furthermore, it would appear that C.S. Lewis explored the proliferation of politics in culture. His concerns seem to encompass the idea that while faith may be present in politics, politics have no place in the faith. His message gives an admonition to people who may want to treat their faith as a social justice tool or, simply, make a religion out of social justice.

However, the fact that Lewis acknowledges the importance of social justice, such as to warrant a mention in *The Screwtape Letters*, is worth noting. Thus, fundamentally it does not seem that Lewis discourages social justice altogether. On the contrary, he stresses the dangers of placing social justice ahead of personal faith and uses this story to discourage anyone who would choose to use the gospel as a tool for self-interest.

¹⁰⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters with Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1961), 126-127.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters with Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, 127.

Dr. King and Social Justice

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is known as one of the most prominent civil rights leaders in human history, seeking freedom for oppressed people. It is often overlooked that Dr. King was a reverend minister and pastored a local church. His beliefs on fighting for the oppressed were formed due to his education and role as a local church pastor. He believed in social justice and expressed that an individual's material well-being is equally as important as his spiritual well-being.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, Reverend King writes, "Let us continue to hope, work, and pray that in the future we will live to see a warless world, a better distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color. This is the gospel that I will preach to the world."¹⁰⁹ Consequently, Reverend King believed in a gospel embedded in social justice.

Numerous theologians and pastors influenced Reverend King's bent toward social justice and holistic ministry. However, it was Henry Emerson Fosdick who had an early influence on Reverend King's sermons. Fosdick believed any church "that pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them, the city government that corrupts them, the economic order that cripples them, and international relationships that, leading to peace or war, determine the spiritual destiny of innumerable souls" would receive divine condemnation.¹¹⁰ Reverend King was convinced that the church is called to social justice advocacy and holistic ministry to implement societal

¹⁰⁸ King Institute, "About the Social Gospel," Stanford University, accessed August 21, 2020, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/social-gospel>.

¹⁰⁹ King Institute, "About the Social Gospel."

¹¹⁰ King Institute, "About the Social Gospel."

changes. According to Jim Wallis, “Martin Luther King Jr. was clearly a Social Justice Christian.”¹¹¹ He goes further to reference the speech where King states, “...for justice to be just it cannot only be individual but must also be social.”¹¹²

When we take a closer look at King's speech, we observe that King used metaphors to compare biblical stories with the oppressed and African American people's plight. Note the following from one of his speeches: “To put it figuratively in biblical language, we've broken loose from the Egypt of slavery and we have moved through the wilderness of legal segregation.”¹¹³ He explains, “We're challenged after working in the realm of ideas, to move out into the arena of social action and to work passionately and unrelentingly to make racial justice a reality.”¹¹⁴ Reverend King goes further to say, “God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men, but God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race, the creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers.”¹¹⁵

King believed that God desires a just society where all can work for each other's total well-being in society. One potential weakness of Reverend King's stance on social justice was that he was not always successful in collaborating with some of the civil rights leaders of his day like Malcolm X, (originally known as Malcolm Little). Lewis

¹¹¹ Jim Wallis, “Martin Luther King Jr. Was a Social Justice Christian,” *Sojourners*, August 26, 2010, <https://sojo.net/articles/martin-luther-king-jr-was-social-justice-christian>.

¹¹² Wallis, “Martin Luther King Jr. Was a Social Justice Christian.”

¹¹³ “MLK at Western,” Western Michigan University, accessed August 22, 2020. <https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Western Michigan University, “MLK at Western.”

¹¹⁵ Western Michigan University, “MLK at Western.”

Baldwin reflects on the relationship between the two men and expresses, "...they did not work with the same organizations, and they frequently disagreed with each other concerning love and hate, violence and nonviolence, separatism and integration, and the relevancy of the Christian faith in the quest for equal rights and social justice."¹¹⁶

Nonetheless, Reverend King expected local churches, governmental organizations, and individuals to work together, take the lead with a heart of love, and commit to nonviolence in the fight for freedom.

Steve Sjogren and the Conspiracy of Kindness

Highly influential author and pastor Steve Sjogren explain in his famous book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, that for the local church to make an impact, it has to influence its community in such a way that people in the community can witness tangible change. Sjogren gives examples from his experience pastoring at the Vineyard Community Church in Cincinnati. Upon his decision to evangelize in a new way, he saw an initial attendance of only thirty-seven people. However, after seventeen years of an intentional strategy of evangelism, Sjogren reports his church attendance increased to over 6,000 people. He attributes the power of kindness and showing God's love practically as the foundational elements to reaching his community. He is convinced that the church is responsible for demonstrating God's love by engaging in acts of kindness.

¹¹⁶ Lewis V. Baldwin, "Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.: What They Thought About Each Other." *Islamic Studies* 25, no. 4 (1986): 395-416, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839793>.

He writes, “A great message doesn’t count for much unless we have an audience that is listening.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, “Christian researcher George Barna once wrote a powerful booklet titled, *We Have Seen the Future: The Demise of Christianity in Los Angeles County*. In this book, Barna stated that despite the appearance of large churches, the local church has gradually ceased to influence the secular community around it.”¹¹⁸ Sjogren warns of the church losing its influence locally due to an absence of local demonstration of God’s love.

The focus of Sjogren's message is the local church’s ability to make a significant impact by showing acts of kindness and humble service in their respective communities. In further reviewing his work, the simple step of offering to serve could radically change a community because the community can attest to the church’s authentic presence. Sjogren’s approach follows this equation: “Servant evangelism = deeds of love + words of love + adequate time.”¹¹⁹ He does not emphasize social justice but rather social works. He expands on the impact of their community projects and explains that part of their project in the Vineyard Community Church includes giving food to the needy, also the poor and single mothers. In light of their response, it is apparent that this church understands the significance of holistic care in social justice for the poor.

¹¹⁷ Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness: A Refreshing New Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus With Others* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 2003), 13.

¹¹⁸ Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, 13.

¹¹⁹ Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, 23.

For Sjogren, “it seems people don’t necessarily remember what they are told of God’s love, but they never forget what they have experienced of God’s love.”¹²⁰ The popularity of his writing hinges on its emphasis on kindness, taking the example of how Jesus demonstrated both the preaching of the word and the performance of actual works. He refers to this as the conspiracy of kindness: a “simple deed done in kindness.”¹²¹ Sjogren, without a doubt, strongly urges the local church to engage in holistic ministry and social justice when he explains, “Before we share God’s words of love with a hurting world, we must first be willing to do deeds of love with the heart of a servant.”¹²²

Cornel West and Race Matters

In his book *Race Matters*, Cornel West covers not only racial justice, but also issues such as gender equality, sexuality, and poverty; this includes what he refers to as “nihilism,” which he argues is the experience of living with meaninglessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness.¹²³ Furthermore, he emphasizes the need to meet the challenges of social justice:

We must focus our attention on the public square—the common good that undergirds our national and global destinies. The vitality of any public square ultimately depends on how much we care about the quality of our lives together. The neglect of our public infrastructure... reflects not only our myopic economic policies, which impede productivity, but also the low priority we place on our common life.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, 32.

¹²¹ Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, 34.

¹²² Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, 12.

¹²³ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 33.

¹²⁴ West, *Race Matters*, 27.

He argues that to reflect a new character and vision potent enough to address the challenges of the postmodern world, one has to think collectively with others. He laments the plight of children today and the pervasive poverty within this society that denigrates our collective quality of life. It is unfathomable for him to perceive a society that can survive without a committed sense of justice.

It was embraced with great joy that West covers a broad spectrum of racial issues, although not from a religious perspective. He addresses these issues of racial justice from an intellectual standpoint and calls on society to make changes that reinforce our overall desire for progress. West gave a brilliant explanation of the problems confronting race matters in America.

However, he bemoans past efforts made to address these challenges. In reflecting on his work, he did not comprehensively identify relevant stakeholders in the collective advancement of justice in society. However, Pentecostal churches in South Florida can glean from West's perspectives, specifically in his note on the relevance of being committed to a unified effort to see justice in society. Furthermore, just as West identifies the problems, the church is encouraged to identify the challenges confronting justice in society.

Walter Houston and Contending for Justice

Many scholars and mostly theologians believe the Old Testament's prophets inspire the fight against social justice alongside Jesus' teachings. In his book *Contending for Justice*, Walter Houston argues that "the Bible does not stand outside, above or at a distance from the world in which it came into existence. The Bible is a collection of documents that come directly out of that world and were written by people contending for

justice in that world—or failing to do so”¹²⁵ Houston’s perspective could create an awareness of our Christian obligation in social justice. He writes:

The issue of social justice is a theme in most parts of the Old Testament and is dealt with in distinctive ways in the various genres: we may read denunciation and oracles of judgment, and also utopian promises, in the prophets; moral exhortation in the laws; objective comments on life in Proverbs; passionate prayer in the Psalms. Even in narrative, where the subject is generally less prominent, we have the story of how a people resident in Egypt as aliens were put to forced labour and delivered by their God. It has a defining importance because of the frequency with which it is referred to in the rest of the Old Testament.¹²⁶

Like many writers, Houston claims that the tapestry of social justice runs throughout the biblical story and that the people worked to achieve a society built on a set of values and norms formulated for the collective good. Houston believes that King David in the Psalms provides the King’s role in justice reforms, while other prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel also emphasized the role of government in social justice. This view lines up with the call for believers to be involved in the political process and not be separate from it. Houston encourages believers in their role in social justice and community engagement. He emphasizes that believers are the hands and feet of God in social justice; therefore, there needs to be a commitment to social relationships and that Christian work reflects biblical concern for injustice.¹²⁷ Finally, Houston calls on Christians to work with people from all society segments, suggesting that the church works hard to see justice entrenched in society.

¹²⁵ Walter Johnson, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (New York, T & T Clark, 2006), 7.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *Contending for Justice*, 16.

¹²⁷ Johnson, *Contending for Justice*, 16.

Oluo and Racial Discrimination

Recently, the Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo movements have raised tensions in the body of Christ, the United States, and the world. Both movements relate to discrimination and bias—racial and gender-based, respectively. In her book, *So You Want to Talk About Race*, Ijeoma Oluo addresses these themes in an informative, insightful, and personal exposition.

Oluo does an excellent job examining fundamental concepts in social justice, and she calls for a re-engagement with the conversations about race, police brutality, feminism, and social justice. She discusses the subtle, everyday discrimination and microaggressions that cause oppression to minorities. According to Oluo, an individual's attitude and words against inequality matter. Oluo boldly calls out complacency in the face of injustice. One central theme in Oluo's book is the term "intersectionality." She explains this term as "the belief that our social justice movements must consider all of the intersections of identity, privilege, and oppression that people face in order to be just and effective."¹²⁸ She goes further:

Coined by the brilliant race theorist and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the term "intersectionality" was born from Crenshaw's work to shed light on the ways in which experiences in both race and gender intertwine to uniquely impact the lives of black women and women of color. ...Intersectionality as a theory and practice was quickly adopted by prominent black feminists to describe the need they saw for a more holistic view of race and gender.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race* (New York: Seal Press, 2018), 60.

¹²⁹ Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race*, 62.

There is so much regarding social justice that the local church needs to know. If the church is to stay relevant and informed in society, it would be in the best interest of local Pentecostal churches to teach social justice terms as part of their Christian education and discipleship process. Oluo advises on addressing systems of discrimination and microaggressions. She continues with suggestions of having productive yet difficult conversations and dialogue about social justice. Finally, Oluo does not seem to be graceful toward dissenting perspectives, but overall, she offers an engaging discussion of the subject.

Mason and Woke Church

In his book *Woke Church*, Eric Mason takes the reader with him on a discovery journey. He presents a historical commentary, philosophical criticism, and pragmatic proposition while examining the perception that the church is asleep and needs to wake up. Mason believes one area where the church has slumbered is in the area of racism and injustice. He compares racial and injustice issues to a volcano waiting to explode. Bearing in mind that this book was written in 2018, the imagery portrayed in this text is almost prophetic when one considers the events triggered by George Floyd's death in 2020. Mason further offers an engaging summary of the historical attitude to racism within the church.¹³⁰

Noteworthy is Mason's reference to the theology of *imago Dei*. He calls the Western church to teach the value that *all* people are created in God's image. He states,

¹³⁰ Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 112.

“Imago Dei must become a key part of the foundational biblical and gospel education for all believers.”¹³¹ Mason continues to add, “we must repent of the teachings that the church has overtly and covertly communicated about blacks in the narrative and theology of American history.”¹³²

Furthermore, he suggests that churches reevaluate women’s roles. He references specifically their restrictions due to cultural prohibitions. Mason encourages that qualified women have increased accessibility to positions that expand missional mandates and serve in higher roles usually only available to their male counterparts. He suggests that churches allow women to teach, preach, and lead ministries equally. He advocates for the church to create care ministries that serve oppressed groups like women victims of sexism and misogyny.

Mason also raises a call for the church to lament in chapter five of his book. He encourages the church to come into a place of brokenness and honesty about the things it could deal with and listed several things for the church to lament, such as:

- The fact that the Black church had to be created.
- Evangelicals’ dismissal of the Black church.
- Tokenism.
- Racial insensitivity.
- Evangelical perception of Black preachers.
- That justice is not seen as a primary doctrine.
- That the church didn’t create and lead the Black Lives Matter movement.
- Diminished presence on justice issues.
- Not effectively equipping the church to know how to engage Black ideologies.
- Giving up on white Christians who want to grow in their racial IQ and contribute to healing, resolution, and restitution.¹³³

¹³¹ Mason, *Woke Church*, 128.

¹³² Mason, *Woke Church*, 128.

¹³³ Mason, *Woke Church*, 84-100.

In *Woke Church*, Mason explains the issues that call for lament extensively. Mason refers to Matthew 23:23 and points out that the church needs to see justice as a central biblical doctrine. He shares, “Jesus says that justice is one of the weightier matters of the law. Also, we know that the principles of the law pervade the entire biblical narrative. Our Lord expected us to judge all of life rightly or see it rightly based on the Word.”¹³⁴ He goes further to say, “Micah named justice as a core desire of Yahweh for His people. We in the West seem to have what I call Selective Justice Syndrome (SJS). We select comfortable forms of justice to address; even then we don’t view it as central to the mission of God.”¹³⁵

Consider Mason’s belief that the pulpit gives the church the platform for influence, yet the church fails to use it to advance the cause of justice. Mason argues against leaders and those who condemn social justice advocacy causes, stating that a color-blind theology for the sake of unity is misplaced because it fails to accept real differences that solve real problems. He believes that this generation has a high expectation of the local church to engage at the table of justice. The church, according to him, cannot stay to the sidelines in ambivalence.¹³⁶

He calls the church to prophetic preaching, also defined as “the urgent call to respond to God individually and collectively.”¹³⁷ He submits that “a prophetic preacher is

¹³⁴ Mason, *Woke Church*, 105.

¹³⁵ Mason, *Woke Church*, 106.

¹³⁶ Mason, *Woke Church*, 95.

¹³⁷ Mason, *Woke Church*, 104.

biblically soaked and culturally informed.”¹³⁸ He suggests that this preaching “contain the gospel, be centered on Jesus, be clear on the issues, be biblically informed, be rhetorically contending, provide visionary hope, and offer clear statements of action.”¹³⁹ He praises the Black church for its role in history: “the gospel for the black church was to impact all of life—both soul and the body and the systems in which the disciple found himself.”¹⁴⁰

Mason excellently illustrates the unfair treatment of Black men in the criminal justice system, citing a recent example of United States rapper Meek Mill, who was sentenced to two to four years for a parole violation.¹⁴¹ Mason makes a good case when he argues that sermons address the problem of sin both at an individual level and a systemic one.

Beyond the book, Mason lives out this message in real-time. On his Epiphany Church website, Mason states that he believes in a church that is multi-socio-economic, multi-generational, city-reaching, engaging the city as agents of change in a way that enacts God’s grace beyond the four walls of the church.¹⁴²

Tisby and the Color of Compromise

Jemar Tisby, in his book *The Color of Compromise*, addresses social justice and racism with a sharp rebuke to the church for historically ignoring social justice. He calls

¹³⁸ Mason, *Woke Church*, 104.

¹³⁹ Mason, *Woke Church*, 118.

¹⁴⁰ Mason, *Woke Church*, 126-127.

¹⁴¹ Mason, *Woke Church*, 114.

¹⁴² “About Us,” Epiphany Fellowship Church, accessed August 24, 2020, <https://www.epiphanyfellowship.org/our-story>.

for an increase in authentic awareness of racial history. He gives a poignant and haunting rendering of church history, explaining that the end of the 20th century brought sweeping changes to the modern church. He goes on to state that “The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the nation’s largest Protestant denomination that had been founded to protect slaveholders within its ranks, finally apologized for its racist roots. They issued a resolution repenting of racism and slavery at their annual meeting on the 150th anniversary of the denomination.”¹⁴³ Tisby referred to the racial reconciliation at the Promise Keepers conference and the racial significance of the Azusa Street revival. He believes the church’s checkered and shameful history cannot be removed or ignored. Undoubtedly, Mason would affirm that understanding our past leads us to hold ourselves accountable for our actions.

Furthermore, he argues that:

Many Christians may agree with the principle that Black lives matter, but they still wonder whether they should get involved with an organization that espouses beliefs contrary to his or her religious convictions. There is no single answer that will fit every person’s situation. There should be efforts to critically engage rather than reflexively dismiss, and Christians should consider that the best way to start is to start local.¹⁴⁴

He admits that the impact of faith leaders on civil rights has been crucial.

However, he advocates that church leaders continue to learn from existing organizations that promote social and racial justice; this includes the church responding with action in the face of injustice. He explains:

If the church hopes to see meaningful progress in race relations during the twenty-first century, then it must undertake bold, costly actions with an attitude of

¹⁴³ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 336.

¹⁴⁴ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 234.

unprecedented urgency. The solutions are simple though not easy. They are, in many cases, obvious though unpopular. No matter their difficulty or distastefulness, however, they are necessary in order to change the narrative of the American church and race.¹⁴⁵

Although Tisby specifically identifies two significant social justice advocacy priorities today, he also alludes to mass incarceration and criminal justice. Some of this writing's weaknesses lies in its inability to suggest a step-by-step pathway for social and racial justice reforms that impact discriminatory systems in society. However, Tisby offers a challenge for the church to assume effective racial justice advocacy and thoughtfully consider the risk of unintended consequences.

He calls the church to speak up publicly and use its platform to articulate the church's stance on racial justice. He believes the church can create a mass movement for justice and consider non-violent protests, similar to Reverend King's approach. Tisby offers numerous bold ideas for achieving this position within the church. He gives an acronym known as ARC. This acronym represents Awareness, Relationships, and Commitment, a framework in the fight against oppression and discrimination. He suggests actionable steps that an individual can take to develop an enduring commitment to issues of justice. His recommended steps include the following:

Create something. Write a blog post. Write a book. Write a sermon. Do a Sunday School class. Host a forum. Write a song or a poem. Create something that speaks to racial justice. As you do it, though, remember it always helps to get feedback from a person from a different racial or ethnic background who is willing to help. Join an organization that advocates for racial and social justice. Donate money to organizations that advocate for racial and social justice. Speak with candidates for elected office in your area and ask them about their views of racial justice and the policies they advocate. Vote.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 236.

Tisby concludes his book with a straightforward proposition: that the church take steps to face racism, cancel compromise, do what God commands, and embrace the practice of courageous faith.

Summary

In summary, we have explored diverse approaches to social justice, both practically and theoretically. We considered the work of the Assemblies of God, David Wilkerson's work with Teen Challenge, the Western European Model for social ministry, the UN's significance in recognizing a Social Justice day, and Kevin Palau's story, amongst others. Dr. King focused on social justice as it relates to the oppression of Black people and discrimination. Recent writers like Tisby, Oluo, and Mason, directed more of their texts towards the aspect of discrimination as it remains pervasive today. According to the American Psychological Association, "Discrimination continues to be a source of stress for the majority of Black Americans. Two in 3 Black adults (67%) cite discrimination as a significant source of stress in their life... More than 3 in 4 Black adults (78%) agree that being their race is difficult in today's society."¹⁴⁷

Already mentioned are unique approaches and perspectives that support the local church's involvement in Social Justice. Firstly, Kevin Palau's partnership with city officials, which models an effective approach that would work well in South Florida if adopted by Pentecostal churches. His model would be effective because he engages in an

¹⁴⁷ "Stress in America 2020," American Psychological Association, accessed August 29, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-july>.

ongoing partnership with city officials, key stakeholders, and other churches to do tangible work for the community's benefit. Thus established trust and gained the confidence of people in the community.

Another significant perspective is the concept of *imago Dei*. *Imago Dei* is a theme in scripture that refers to the image of God. Theologians posit that it originates from the scripture: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"¹⁴⁸ Most theologians agree that all humanity is created in God's image, demonstrating each person's intrinsic value. Thus, no matter one's skin pigmentation, we all have immense value. No person is inferior to another, as most writers agreed with this perspective.

However, multiple perspectives from within the church contest the church's involvement in social justice and its biblical implications. For example, Mason argues that this biblical understanding of God's stance on social justice seemed to have been a threat to early slave owners, who refused to allow slaves to read the Bible. According to Mason, "If they were introduced to the theology of the *imago Dei*, slaves would have understood that they were fully equal with their masters in value. Reading Philemon and 1 Peter 2 would have broken the masters' ungodly hold."¹⁴⁹

Can we hope that there will come a time that social injustice and inequality will not exist? Yes. John the Apostle writes, "After this I looked, and there before me was a

¹⁴⁸ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁴⁹ Mason, *Woke Church*, 80.

great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”¹⁵⁰ In light of this, only one race matters, the human race. We are all equal before God.

¹⁵⁰ Revelation 7:9.

SECTION 3:

THESIS

“I think each village was meant to feel pity for its own sick and poor whom it can help, and I doubt if it is the duty of any private person to fix his mind on ills which he cannot help. This may even become an escape from the works of charity we really can do to those we know. God may call any one of us to respond to some far away problem or support those who have been so called. But we are finite, and he will not call us everywhere or to support every worthy cause. And real needs are not far from us.”¹⁵¹ — **C.S. Lewis**

Pentecostal churches in the South Florida area of the United States have not adopted clear and effective methods or utilized ministry opportunities in social justice advocacy to help the communities around them. In Section One, we identified the problem, historical considerations, and cultural realities of the South Florida area. In addition, it was clearly established that, Pentecostal churches are generally known to emphasize experiencing God in worship services through the Holy Spirit baptism, Spirit gifts, and speaking in tongues. Therefore, many believe that Pentecostal churches had lagged when it came to social action and social justice. Others are convinced Pentecostal churches have demonstrated considerable action in social works. We have evidence for both arguments.

However, the church is not called to be excluded from society, but instead to minister to it. Thus, there is an imperative biblical theology of the church’s holistic ministry; the body of Christ is called into issues of social justice. A significant number of existing studies have examined the position that the gospel and the local church’s

¹⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II; Books, Broadcasts, and War 1931-1949*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003), 1147.

existence bring implications for social action, and we are called to minister toward the total well-being of people in society; this includes advocating for social justice.

Nevertheless, Pentecostal churches in the South Florida area of the United States seem to project an ambivalent image about social justice as an effective holistic ministry strategy.

The Mandate of Jesus Christ The Messiah

We see the clear mandate of Jesus in Luke:

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”¹⁵²

Jesus’ call was to rescue the captives, give eyes to the blind, and help the destitute in society. Many of the points outlined in the passage above are noteworthy; however, it is pertinent first to consider the background of the text. The devil had just tempted Jesus in the wilderness; Jesus returned to Galilee to begin His ministry. Upon His return, He went to a synagogue to worship on the Sabbath. Historically, we see that it was conventional for noteworthy people to be asked to publicly read from the Scriptures and then make a brief comment on their reading.

Kenneth Bailey writes that “Jesus took the scroll, selected an obviously prepared text and read it to the congregation. This led to an interchange with the congregation after

¹⁵² Luke 4:17–21.

which Jesus invoked two heroes of faith from the Old Testament tradition to support his views.”¹⁵³ Bailey then provides the figure below, pointing out the keywords of the text:

The Holistic Nature of Jesus' Mandate

A look at Luke 4:18–19

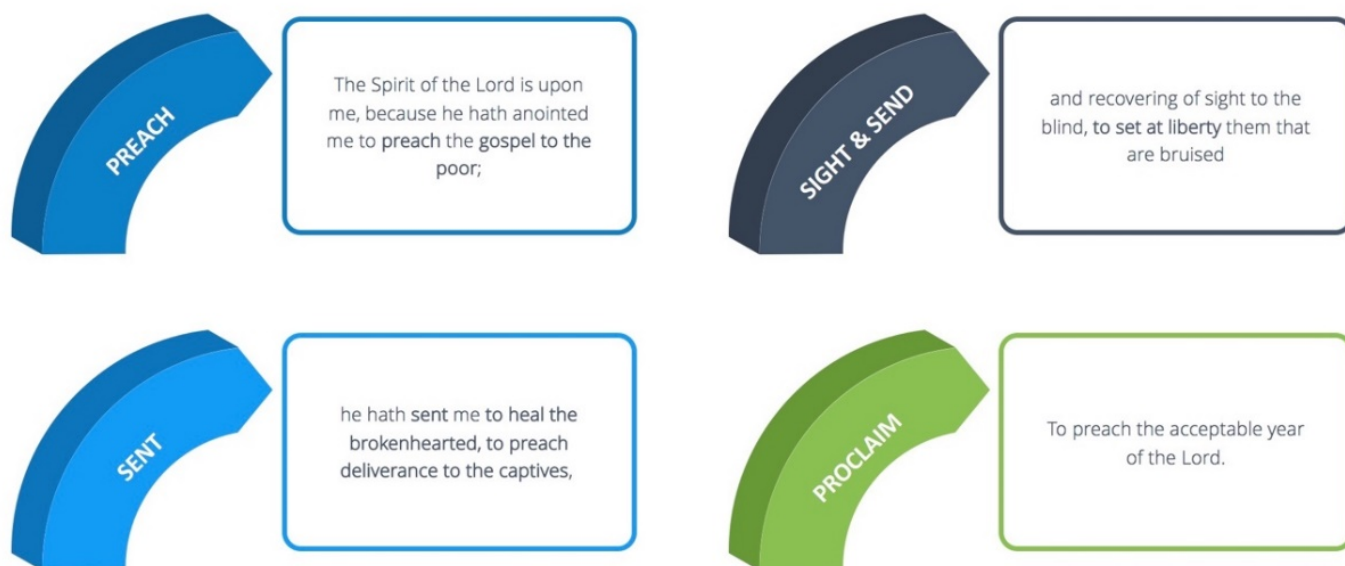


Figure 9—Jesus' Reading of the Scroll (Lk 4:18-19).¹⁵⁴

Bailey then explained the words he emphasized:

What is “good news for the poor”? Do the following lines in the text define it? If so, then “good news for the poor” is “release to the captives” and “liberty” for the oppressed. In such a case, Jesus’ ministry was to break the power of the economic, social and political chains that kept people in bondage. Or should the Greek words euangelizo (to preach good news) and kerysso (to proclaim) be

¹⁵³ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 315.

¹⁵⁴ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 335.

emphasized and the text be interpreted as referring to the new reality of God breaking into history in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins?¹⁵⁵

Bailey suggests that while the meaning of some phrases in the text seems to be unambiguously about justice advocacy, others are not so straightforward. The context of the usage of these words is to be considered. However, Bailey believes that the tapestry of justice advocacy is reinforced through the text's fabric, particularly justice for refugees. It is significant to note that Bailey concludes his explanation by stating that the mandate of Christ was holistic: "The ministry of Jesus (and thereby the nature of the kingdom) is for the whole person. It involves proclamation/evangelism, justice advocacy, and compassion."¹⁵⁶

God's voice echoes through hundreds of years of Christian history and biblical narratives that Jesus indeed came to care for the community, the poor, and to set the oppressed free. We are called to demonstrate the love God has for the defenseless and marginalized. God intends for people to have overall well-being. With this in mind, the body of Christ needs to set the standard for a reasonable response in social justice. The Apostle John makes a supporting statement in 3 John 2: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well."¹⁵⁷ Without question, this begs the vital issue of what our mission is. Accordingly, Alan Hirsch states that the church "yearn to be part of God's mission in the world."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 335.

¹⁵⁶ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 365.

¹⁵⁷ 3 John 2.

¹⁵⁸ Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 30.

The Apostle Paul on Social Justice

Dr. Lisa Bowen recounted the story she was told about Howard Thurman.

Thurman's grandmother would often read scriptural passages to him, apart from Apostle Paul's writings. Thurman had the courage to ask his grandmother why she avoided Paul. His grandmother said, "when she was a slave, it was preached from Paul that slaves must obey their masters. She promised herself that if freedom ever came, she would not want to hear anything from Paul again."¹⁵⁹ This narrative prompted Bowen to research the history between African Americans, the teachings of Apostle Paul, and slavery. She was able to prove that scriptures have been used negatively to justify social injustice and inequality; this is a fact that is hard to deny.

However Eric Mason suggests that Paul was in favor of holistic ministry, referring to Paul's own words, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁶⁰ Mason argues that "Paul viewed the spirit, soul, and body as a gateway into the experience of the believer. What does this have to do with prophetic care? Everything! Judging rightly and treating the poor justly is an outworking of loving your neighbor as yourself."¹⁶¹ Further, "when Jesus was asked about the greatest

¹⁵⁹ Lisa Bowens, "It's Complicated: Confronting Complex Scripture," *ptsem.edu*. Accessed August 6, 2020, <https://www.ptsem.edu/news/its-complicated-confronting-complex-scripture>.

¹⁶⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

¹⁶¹ Mason, *Woke Church*, 127.

commandment, he quoted Leviticus 19:18: ‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.’”¹⁶²

Nevertheless, Apostle Paul’s words do not seem to be intended to justify injustice of any kind. Paul understood that everyone has value in God’s sight and that Jesus desires that everyone prospers in holistic health.

Social Justice as Holistic Ministry

The argument that Jesus’ mandate in Luke 4:18 is holistic and compelling. God desires people to be well: body, soul, and spirit. Correspondingly, church ministry has to be done in a way that is impactful in people’s lives. The Apostle John’s reference to health and total well-being in 3 John 2 supports this idea. Additionally, scripture emphasizes the value of social action as tangible expressions of love. The Apostle James states:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.¹⁶³

The Apostle John also says, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in

¹⁶² Mason, *Woke Church*, 127.

¹⁶³ James 2:14-18.

truth.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, the need for churches to have a deeper understanding of their holistic ministry call is paramount. As a local pastor, it appears that a significant amount of people in the community are looking toward the church for a response on critical issues, such as discrimination, police brutality, and help for the poor. The mandate for the church to provide care cannot be minimized in difficult seasons.

We see that Apostle Paul faced many difficulties during his missionary journeys. However, he concludes that care is a necessary part of the believer’s call. He writes to the Galatian church, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.”¹⁶⁵

Consequently, for Pentecostal churches in South Florida to grow and fulfill their missional mandate, there has to be an understanding of social justice and how it affects communities. Furthermore, the local church needs to find creative strategies in social justice and fresh ideas in holistic ministry to best impact its surrounding community.

Existing biblical literature on holistic ministry is consistent with the idea that the core basis for social justice in the local church is Christ. Jesus clearly states His mission in the book of Luke.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, this research establishes that scripture represents Jesus as the embodiment of holistic ministry. Matthew gives us an example: “Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk,

¹⁶⁴ 1 John 3:17-18.

¹⁶⁵ Galatians 6:1-2.

¹⁶⁶ Luke 4:18.

those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”¹⁶⁷

Apostle Paul knew that Jesus expected His followers to show compassion and care. Therefore he advised the Church in Galatians, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.”¹⁶⁸ Wiersbe believes that the church is called to holistic care ministry, he states:

In ministry, we’re called to live for others. Ministry is not just another way of making a living; it’s a wonderful opportunity for making a life, a life that’s lived for others. It’s an opportunity to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. When He was here on earth, He met human needs, all kinds of needs...¹⁶⁹

Wiersbe explains, “Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the glory of God.”¹⁷⁰ The Christian church is called to serve, show compassion, and shine the light of Christ in dark places. Local Pentecostal churches are encouraged to perceive their role in the community and the world. After all, God did not send us to the world to ignore the issues our world faces daily. When God made the earth in Genesis, He instructed Adam to care for the garden.¹⁷¹ Therefore, it is expected that He requires us to extend grace and care for what He created. Denis Edwards presents

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 11:4-6.

¹⁶⁸ Galatians 6:2.

¹⁶⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 19.

¹⁷⁰ Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Genesis 2:15.

us with a theological view of a deep incarnation, which “requires an internal relationship between the Word made flesh and the wider creation.”¹⁷²

The above missional idea suggests we love Jesus and also love people. Edwards reminds believers to live in love because God has reconciled all things and people to Himself. He states, “My view of the universal reach of the resurrection is grounded in the range of New Testament texts that speak of the creation and reconciliation of all things in Christ.”¹⁷³

In one of the workshops during the field research of this dissertation, the facilitator covered the basics of the church's role in facilitating care and holistic well-being, including freedom from oppression. The facilitator believed it is the church’s responsibility to teach and model care and freedom. However, many local churches do not emphasize this scriptural truth that man is truly free. Local churches have a responsibility to provide the platform to enable individuals to walk in holistic freedom, well-being, and justice.

Psychologist J. Ellens Harold expresses that our “faith in God should benefit our ...holistic well-being.”¹⁷⁴ He believes strongly in the connection between “psychology and spirituality.”¹⁷⁵ According to Harold, this connection is necessary to “emphasize the urgent need for a thoroughly holistic and integrated model of people care, in all facets of

¹⁷² Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God’s Redemptive Suffering with Creatures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 111.

¹⁷³ Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God’s Redemptive Suffering with Creatures*, 126.

¹⁷⁴ J. Ellens Harold, *Radical Grace: How Belief in a Benevolent God Benefits Our Health* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 44.

¹⁷⁵ Harold, *Radical Grace*, 44.

the Helping Professions.”¹⁷⁶ He argues that many things shape our overall well-being, including our psychology, mental health, and spiritual views concerning God. He adds that it is Jesus’ intention that we live holistically, and, thus, Christians cannot ignore the need to experience overall well-being.

We are God’s hands and feet in the world. God’s intention is for us to bring His hope, justice, and healing to the world. Scripture points to this. The early church modeled this. Therefore, it is a priority for God’s church to understand social justice as a ministry opportunity for God’s glory.

Acts 6 and the Church Today

The church has not been a stranger to issues of equality and justice. In other words, social justice has always been a part of the church’s holistic ministry background. In Acts 6, we see the story of two groups who felt overlooked at the church in Jerusalem. The groups were both Jews; however, the first group was Hellenistic and the second Hebraic. According to Richard Longenecker, the Hellenistic Jews had migrated from the Mediterranean to Jerusalem and thus lived amongst Palestinian Jews. The Jews had a structure for food distribution as a religious group of people.¹⁷⁷

As we see in Acts 6, the early disciples saw the urgency to care for the needy, the poor, and the oppressed in society. Accordingly, “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the

¹⁷⁶ Harold, *Radical Grace*, 44.

¹⁷⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 327.

Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.”¹⁷⁸ The church made efforts to address the discrimination and inequality, thus seven men were selected to look to the welfare of the neglected widows.

Regarding the importance of the moment in Acts 6, Longenecker explains, “the apostles were not prepared simply to ignore the problem; they seem to have realized that spiritual and material concerns are so intimately related in Christian experience that one always affects the other for better or worse.”¹⁷⁹ Douglas Witherup refers to this incident in Acts 6 as a social justice issue requiring high-level leadership. He concludes that, amongst other things, Acts 6 points to “the importance of social-justice ministry programs.”¹⁸⁰ Witherup notes that even today, “it is not uncommon for missional churches to have ministries not only for the hungry and the homeless, but to be seen engaging issues such as human trafficking and the need for clean water.”¹⁸¹

The imperative idea is that the local church has a platform to influence social structures, foster moral standards, and make its voice heard. The church can accomplish this through many avenues, including teaching families the harmful effects of discriminatory thinking. Historically, churches have sometimes been at the forefront of education and health by establishing schools and hospitals. Social justice advocacy for the church would therefore involve:

¹⁷⁸ Acts 6:1.

¹⁷⁹ Longenecker, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 330.

¹⁸⁰ Douglas Witherup, “A Renewed Homiletic for the Twenty-First-Century Church,” (DMin. diss., Portland Seminary, 2014), 6, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/88>.

¹⁸¹ Witherup, “A Renewed Homiletic for the Twenty-First-Century Church,” 10-11.

- Actively working to see the advancement of systems that promote society's well-being.
- The transformation of structures that appear discriminatory, and
- Changing societal structures that promote ungodliness and injustice.

The proclamation of the gospel is incomplete without the repairing of the societal framework. In an essay on holistic ministry, Dr. Ron Sider states that “without social works, evangelism appears to be all talk. People are both spiritual and material beings; addressing only half the problem only gives you half of the solution.”¹⁸² Likewise, he calls on the church to embrace holistic ministry by emulating God’s concern for the poor; to embrace that biblical Christianity entails holistic ministry toward the poor and oppressed. A solution in social advocacy amongst South Florida Pentecostals would first involve a biblical understanding of God’s heart for the poor and oppressed. It becomes necessary for Pentecostal churches to examine themselves within the biblical context, which is to love God and also to love others around us.

Barna Report and Church Leadership in Society

A Barna report was carried out in partnership with Lutheran Hour Ministries to find answers on church-led solutions in society. This report was a study consisting of two surveys carried out online. Firstly, a survey of 2,500 adults done from July 25 to August 19, 2019. A second survey was conducted of 508 U.S. lead pastors from July 25 to August 13, 2019. The report considered the impact of lay believers’ initiatives in their

¹⁸² “Social Justice vs. Evangelism,” Relevant Magazine, accessed August 16, 2020, <https://relevantmagazine.com/life5/1308-social-justice-vs-evangelism/>.

local neighborhoods and how the local church can best be an instrument to release people for social ministry. Amongst other things, the report found that people generally look to the government first, then to the church and Christian organizations for solutions. The report notes that:

Practicing Christians, unsurprisingly, favor the leadership of churches and Christian organizations (33%), though not much more than that of the government (31%). Meanwhile, very few non-Christians select the Church as their first option (7%), or even in their top three. They are more likely to identify the government (42%) or citizens (26%) as suitable local problem-solvers.¹⁸³

The report produced the below graphic divided amongst practicing Christians, non-practicing Christians, and non-Christians:

¹⁸³ “Church’s Role in Community,” Barna Group, accessed August 16, 2020. <https://www.barna.com/research/churchs-role-in-community/>.

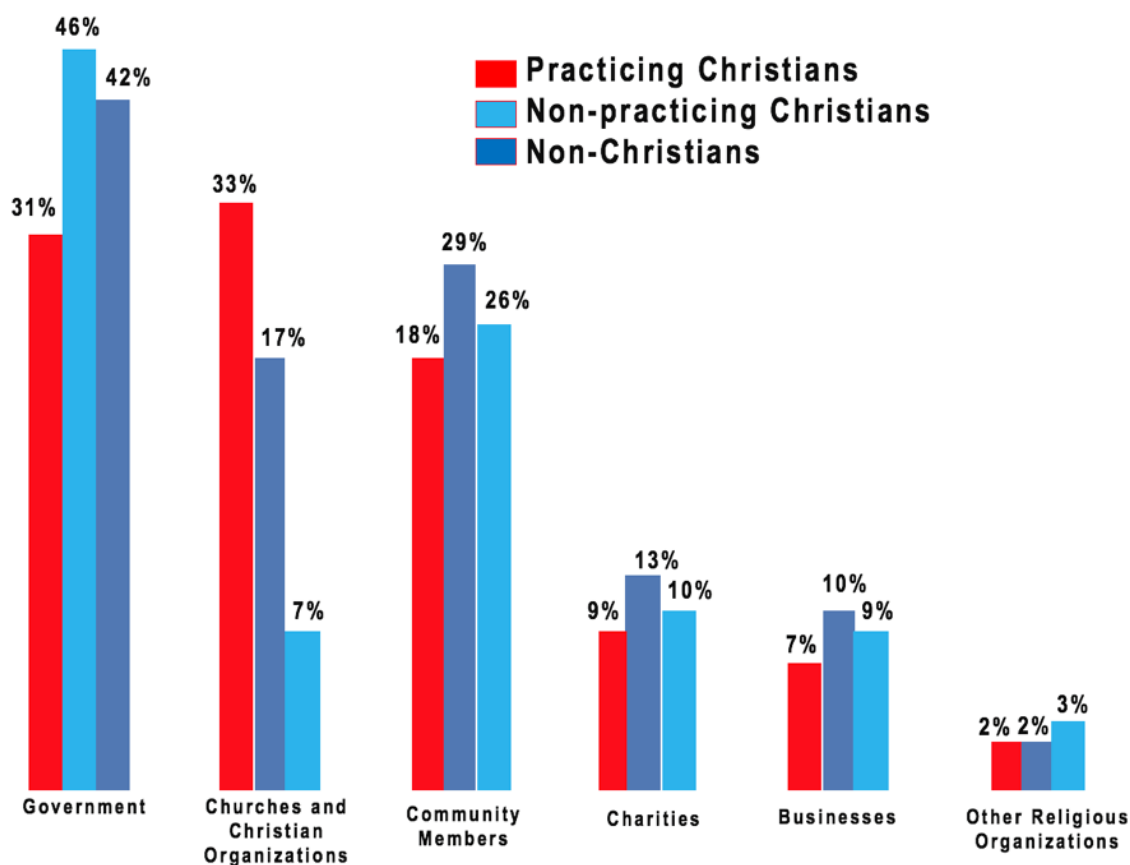


Figure 10—Who Is Best Suited to Solve Community Problems?¹⁸⁴

The initial question upon seeing the above report was whether the local church's limited impact influenced the way non-Christians viewed the church's role in solving community problems? How can the church change this perspective?

Furthermore, when asked how the presence of the church and Christian organizations has impacted the availability of good works, most practicing Christians believe that the church is very instrumental to good works in society, while a majority of

¹⁸⁴ Barna Group, "Church's Role in Community."

non-Christians believe good works will still exist even if believers did not do them. This information is reflected in Figure 10 below:

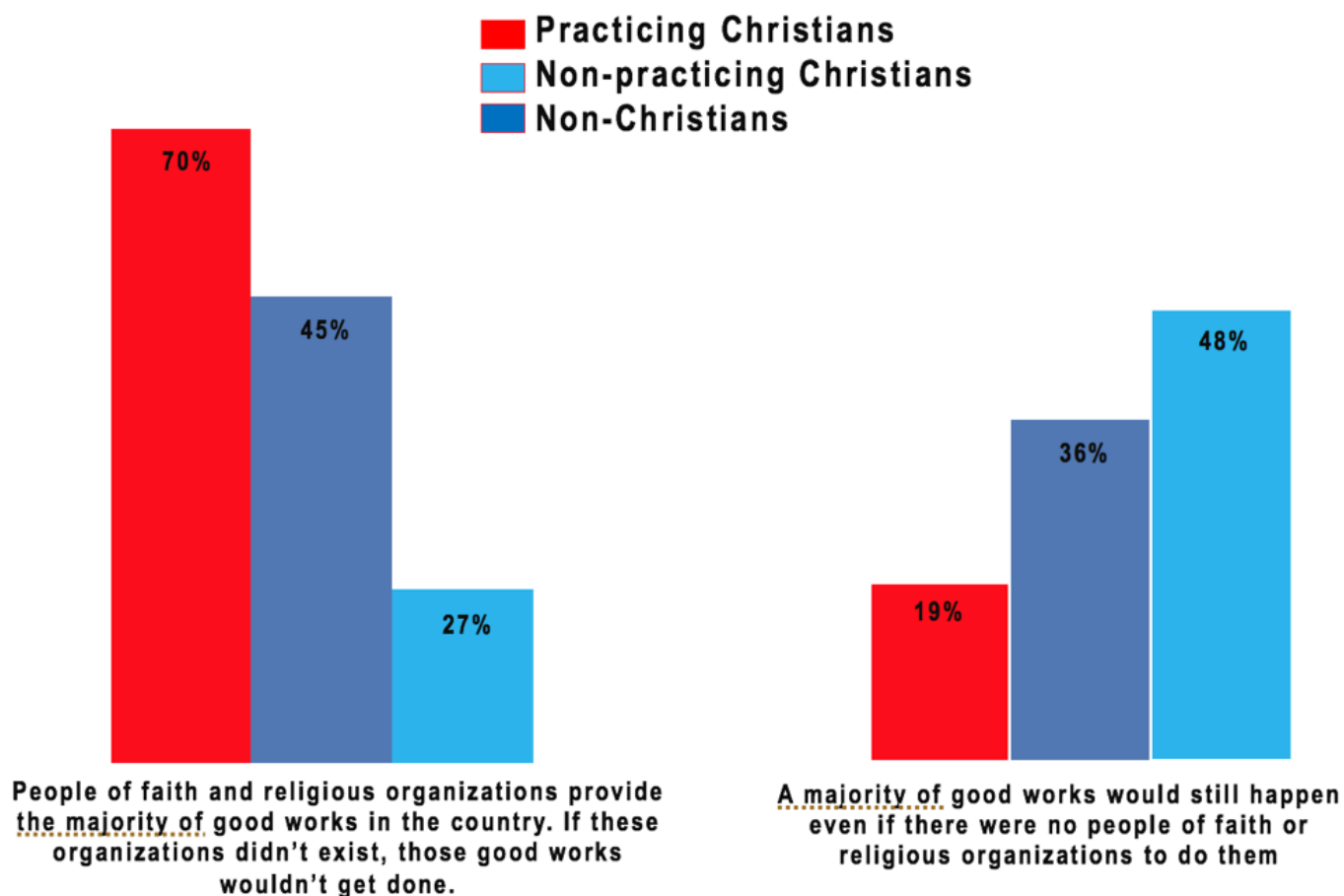


Figure 11 —Religion's Relevance in Good Works.¹⁸⁵

The Barna report reveals the difference between what practicing Christians versus non-Christians believe, mainly related to the needs the church can meet in society. Note these views below.

¹⁸⁵ Barna Group, "Church's Role in Community."

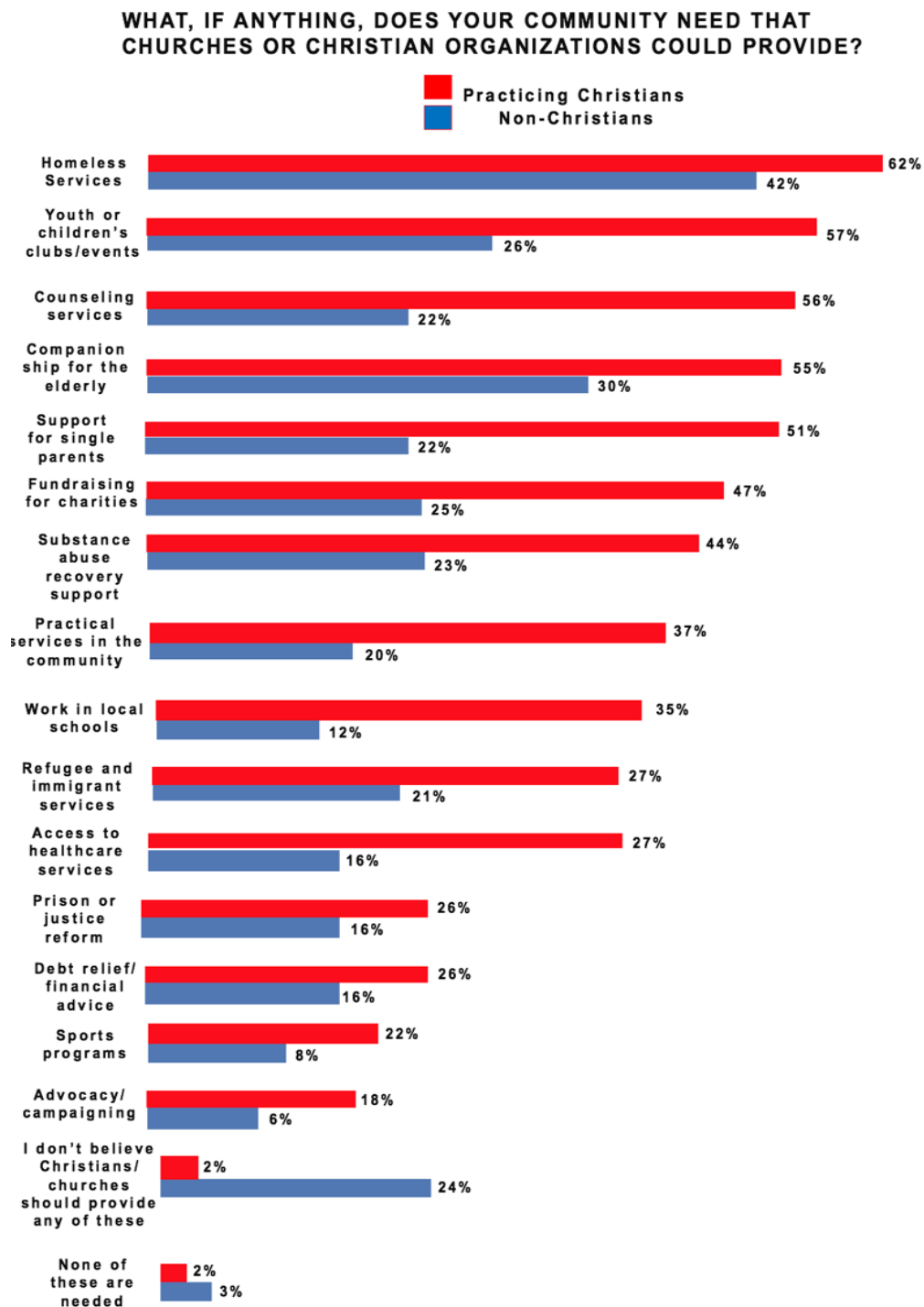


Figure 11—Should the Church Meet Community Needs?¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Barna Group, “Church’s Role in Community.”

The report also revealed that practicing Christians generally participate in social works within the community. Despite the non-Christians' perspective on how the church works best in the community, a large number of Christians do good within their communities; they are ready to go into deeper social engagement levels and collaborations in the community as in the graphic below:

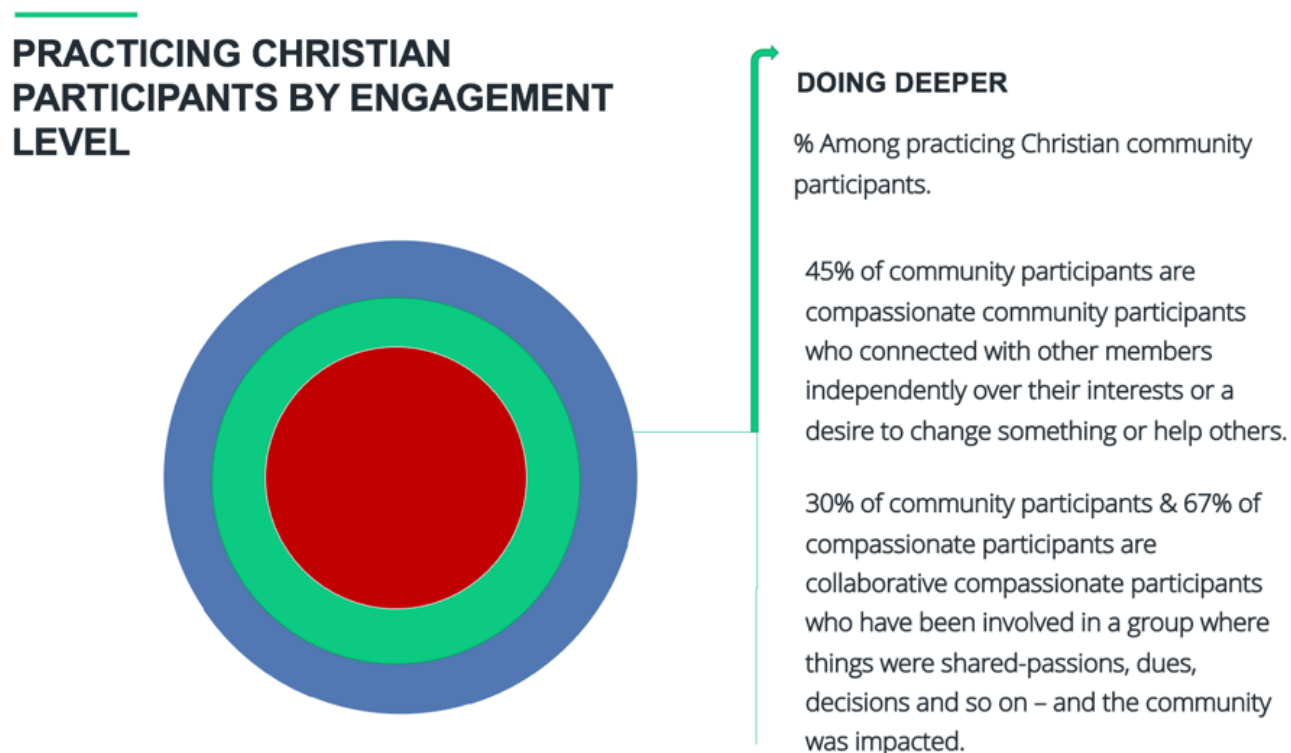


Figure 12—Practicing Christian Participants by Engagement Level.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Barna Group, “Church’s Role in Community.”

This Barna report was a product of a Barna workshop on building hopeful neighborhoods, which produced a “Better Together church kit.” Reverend Dr. T. Cook of Lutheran Hour Ministries - LHM (a partner of the Barna Report), states that certain principles guiding LHM in this research were as follows, “regardless of who we are—regardless of race, creed, religion or background—all of us have been knit together by God. God has placed where we are today—in our families, neighborhoods and jobs, where we are is important.”¹⁸⁸

Dr. Cook goes further, “A lot of times we think about ourselves as “the Body of Christ” so we just talk about believers coming together, but I believe this works in a very similar way when we have “the body of humanity,” when we have all people working together for the common good, working together for the betterment of humanity.¹⁸⁹ These opinions emphasize that church leadership or an individual believer’s contribution is crucial in society. Local Pentecostal churches have a call to lead in social justice efforts.

An Instrument of God

The local church has a mission to be an instrument of God to care for its community. This mission becomes possible when the local church embraces social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy. Mike Flynn and Gregg Doug examine

¹⁸⁸ Barna Group, “Church’s Role in Community.”

¹⁸⁹ Barna Group, “Church’s Role in Community.”

this idea that “the church must understand how God demonstrates his grace and how God uses us his church to be instruments to heal.”¹⁹⁰

Pentecostal churches in South Florida have a call to work to gain a more extensive and practical understanding of the mission of Christ for the South Florida community. Specifically, these local churches may seek out the wounded and those suffering to partner with them, especially in seasons of challenges. Gary Ferngren agrees, stating, “The emphasis on caring constituted the ministry of the early Christian community to the sick. Christians sought to fulfill the words of Jesus, ‘I was sick, and you took care of me.’”¹⁹¹

Henri Nouwen writes that every Christian “is constantly invited to overcome his neighbor’s fear by entering into it with him, and to find in the fellowship of suffering the way to freedom.”¹⁹² Nouwen further indicates that we are God’s instruments in volatile seasons. He is convinced that, “A Christian community is, therefore, a healing community, not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision.”¹⁹³ Nouwen argues that suffering becomes an opportunity to engage in ministering to people.

Similarly, authors Coe and Hall state the necessity for an effective method “on spiritual formation and relational approach to psychology for the sake of servicing the

¹⁹⁰ Mike Flynn and Gregg Doug, *Inner Healing: A Handbook for Helping Yourself and Others* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 12.

¹⁹¹ Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Healthcare in Early Christianity* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 14.

¹⁹² Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 18.

¹⁹³ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 94.

spiritual needs of the church.”¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, Scripture admonishes, “do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”¹⁹⁵ Without a doubt, the light of the gospel shines brightest in a dark world, and love shows brighter where there is hate.

The local church is called to shine, show compassion, and bless others. Leonard Sweet notes, “We are blessed to bless,”¹⁹⁶ and further writes, “...if as you dine together you can also provide help for others—then, according to Myerson, you’ve won the lottery of life.”¹⁹⁷

The Urgency of Now

In early 2020, many witnessed significant challenges. Two of these challenges stand out. First, a novel coronavirus disease (abbreviated COVID-19) generated severe disruption in the way people work and live. Secondly, the challenge of racial tensions due to police interaction with a man named George Floyd, which eventually led to his death. COVID-19 brought many challenges to churches globally, keeping in mind the very “first death to the virus was on January 11, 2020.”¹⁹⁸ As of January 8, 2021, thousands have died almost a year later; many families have lost loved ones to the disease. However, as

¹⁹⁴ J. H. Coe and T. W. Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 19.

¹⁹⁵ Hebrews 13:16.

¹⁹⁶ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2015), 45.

¹⁹⁷ Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 36.

¹⁹⁸ John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2020), 7.

history informs us, this is not the first time a health-related pandemic has disrupted life. During these times, the church has always risen to provide holistic ministry and care for the community.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), over 50 million people died in 1918 from the H1N1 virus.¹⁹⁹ In the face of overwhelming challenges, disease, or death, the church stepped up to care for the poor, the sick, and the dying, as explained by historian Stephen Neill.²⁰⁰ Neill's book examines Christian influence in missions and on the world, and he underscores the idea that the urgency of the church today to rise to meet the challenges of our time.

In response to COVID-19, John Piper writes, "The coronavirus is God's call to his people to overcome self-pity and fear, and with courageous joy, to do the good works of love that glorify God."²⁰¹ He believes we perform "deeds of love in the context of danger, whether disease or persecution..."²⁰² because "it is not mere good deeds that give Christianity its tang and luster. It is good deeds in spite of danger. Many non-Christians do good deeds. But seldom do people give glory to God because of them."²⁰³ Piper indicates an alternative view held by some writers, that facing danger is not necessarily a

¹⁹⁹ "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 Virus)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>.

²⁰⁰ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1986), 37–38.

²⁰¹ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 87.

²⁰² Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 87.

²⁰³ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 87.

Christian call. However, he believes that these claims do not represent the sacrifice of the early church martyrs.²⁰⁴

Studies show that challenges present the local church with an opportunity to show love and thus create impact. Where a need exists in the community, it allows the church to respond to the need. The Apostle Peter makes the same argument about the need for the church to rise to the challenge of holistic ministry and social justice, where he re-emphasized the teachings of Jesus. Peter states, “live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”²⁰⁵

As a local church begins to make tangible steps toward good deeds and extend holistic ministry to its immediate community, it will begin to be a beacon of hope that thrives in challenging seasons. Rodney Stark writes that a “truly revolutionary principle was that Christian love and charity must extend beyond the boundaries of family and even those of faith, to all in need.”²⁰⁶

Author and missional thought leader Alan Hirsch writes, “the church must see its God-ordained mission in the world.”²⁰⁷ Hirsch explains that this call involves showing compassion to those around us. Intentionality in providing care has to be prioritized for the church to thrive in holistic ministry, particularly in challenging times.

²⁰⁴ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 87.

²⁰⁵ 1 Peter 2:12 .

²⁰⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York, Harper, 2011) 113.

²⁰⁷ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 30.

David Benner agrees with this idea that the local church has a mandate to “touch the deepest levels of people’s inner lives.”²⁰⁸ He states, “Genuine soul care, however, is never exclusively focused on any one aspect of a person’s being (spiritual, psychological, or physiological) to the exclusion of all others. If care is to be worthy of being called soul care, it has to take into account not to address part or focus on problems but engage two or more people to foster holistic growth.”²⁰⁹ Benner's argument for holistic care is commendable. The local Pentecostal church has to model caring for the whole person – body, soul, and spirit.

Proposed Outcome

To see South Florida Pentecostal churches practice social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy is the desired outcome of this dissertation. These churches can do better in social justice advocacy by first deciding to engage with biblical perspectives on the issues. Secondly, deliberately educating its members on what social justice is and how the body of Christ can get involved.

This research intends to provide a practical understanding of the examples of leaders and communities that have exemplified what effective holistic ministry looks like, such as Kevin Palau’s example and Eric Mason’s suggestions. A practical implementation of social justice advocacy in local Pentecostal churches will factor in all ideas, such as forging strategic partnerships and making the teaching and preaching of

²⁰⁸ David Benner, *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 54.

²⁰⁹ Benner, *Care of Souls*. 54.

social justice key concepts a priority. The next steps for a local church would include discussions, education, and then advocacy.

Find below a summary of crucial suggestions for Pentecostal churches in South Florida:²¹⁰

- Acknowledge Jesus' mandate for social justice and define the church's social ministry philosophy.
- Gather a committee of stakeholders to identify urgent needs and pressure points, discuss crucial issues, and engage in prayer.
- Consider using the church's platform to articulate the problem and clarify its stance on the issues.
- Define clearly how the church would care for the community, treat the poor, and fight for the oppressed in a written document.
- Create an open-door policy and allow people to offer ideas on how to address the issues.
- Create safe spaces for people to talk in order to find healing.
- Exemplify action by creating a sermon series on critical issues.
- Embrace the mission of Christ and decide to invest time and to make sacrifices.
- Seek ways to influence societal structures and speak truth to power.
- Learn not to be reactive but proactive. Thus, have an ongoing plan to engage in advocacy.

²¹⁰ These suggestions are a summary of the responses to the interview in Appendix B.

- Develop curriculum and explore teaching the family unit on biblical social justice.
- Utilize a discipleship model to raise champions.
- Create volunteer opportunities for people to engage in social action.
- Find opportunities to partner with existing organizations and people in the field.
- Decide to step out of the comfort zone and step into societal pain.

Summary

The practice of social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry in Pentecostal churches in South Florida begins with an understanding of the church's history and insight into the culture and background of the people in the local community. However, it is strengthened by an awareness of the church's purpose, clarity about the mandate of Jesus, and knowledge of best practices in social justice advocacy. Effective engagement in social justice advocacy will also include a desire in church leaders to be proactive in the mission of Christ. This can be tangibly demonstrated by meeting the specific needs of people in South Florida in the specific areas of care for the poor, for individuals in the community, and in seeking justice for the oppressed.

In the course of this research, and during the compilation of the artifact, it was a privilege to become more aware of some of the social justice challenges and needs in South Florida, which local Pentecostal churches have not fully addressed. Some of these ideas are reflected in the artifact. However, a practical model covered within the proposed solutions that reflect the best possible approach is Kevin Palau's City Serve.

Palau's approach draws on partnerships between different churches, which seems non-existent in South Florida, as the research did not reveal any known partnership between Pentecostal churches on social justice issues. Furthermore, Palau's approach thrives on a practical expression of the gospel on an ongoing basis alongside a continuous non-profit partnership with city officials. Although local Pentecostal churches have founded private schools', engaged in food distribution and limited forms of partnership with the city. However, concrete examples of a sustainable not-for-profit program directly carried out by a Pentecostal church in South Florida with city officials on an ongoing basis is considerably limited.

Local Pentecostal churches can solve these challenges in social justice by learning from some of Palau's effective strategies in City-Serve, strategies that are: city-focused, missional, and make a difference for the community, poor and oppressed. Consequently, adopting such an approach would likely help address society's critical areas, such as incarceration rates, food insecurity, employment education, and health, where the local church can lend its voice.

In order for social justice to become relevant and practical within the local church, there is a need for social justice to be preached and advocated for within the church's context. This context would create opportunities for local Pentecostal churches to desire, declare, and demonstrate the mission of Christ in social justice. This call goes beyond a church's orthodoxy and compels the local church to advance in its orthopraxy.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The dissertation artifact contains two projects. First, an inspiring and challenging podcast that features ordinary people having honest conversations about social justice, inequalities, racial discrimination, and the church's response to these issues. In these conversations, people are allowed to express their frustrations, their undiluted views, and opinions. The comments made are unedited; it is provided raw and unfiltered. Guests include church members, leaders, pastors, and stakeholders.

In the podcast, the conversations flow freely and unabated. However, an effort is made to inform the guests on the podcast of the question that needs to be answered. This mostly consisted of, "how can the church address a social injustice, and what strategies can Pentecostal churches adopt to maintain ongoing social justice advocacy?" Guests on the podcast included people from all walks of life, single mothers with young children, whites, Latinos, Black young people with no children, and seniors over 60. The podcast's purpose will be to encourage, educate, and suggest how the church can engage in social justice.

The second project is a website regarding social justice. The website is designed to work together with the podcast. The main goals of this dissertation artifact is to:

1. Shed light on the subject in more contemporary ways,
2. Introduce ideas on social justice with a 360-degree perspective on the issues, and
3. Encourage engagement of church stakeholders in the advocacy of social justice in their communities.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Artifact Description

- The research topic focuses on the praxis of social justice advocacy among Pentecostal churches in South Florida of the United States.
- While this dissertation lends itself to multiple media expression forms, online media and podcasts are increasingly becoming the dominant source of information in the modern age. Therefore, a podcast will be produced to engage stakeholders in a conversational style about the problems and provide a platform for the expression of varied views. Each episode's goal will be to engage, educate, and encourage the expression of ideas to enable the church to see practical steps to take in social justice advocacy.
- A blog on the website will also be created to be used in juxtaposition with the podcast. This blog will be informational and hopes to highlight current issues and give brief and straightforward opinions easily digestible.
- The artifact represents over 100 hours of work, which includes time scheduling guests for the podcast, pre-podcast interviews, recording, post-production editing, and work on the website.
- Both the podcast and blog will be used as stakeholder tools to engage in social justice issues and emphasize the church's role.

Audience

- The audience will be Pentecostal churches in South Florida. Several churches fall within this category. The leaders, pastors, and staff in relevant churches are the podcast's primary audience, and, hopefully, the podcast will engage them and provide them with solutions in social justice.
- The other audience will be church members and non-profit organizations in the area. Due to the diversity of the South Florida area, it is expected that an interested person or individual will be able to glean value from the information in the podcast and blog.

Goals and Strategies

- The main objectives are to:
 1. create awareness on social justice and its relationship to biblical models in holistic ministry,
 2. educate and provide a platform for discussions amongst stakeholders and ordinary people, and
 3. provide an avenue that will proffer solutions for Pentecostal churches in South Florida to thrive in social justice advocacy.
- The podcast will be carried out via online audio platforms due to social distancing guidelines in place during COVID-19, allowing participation from guests based in any geographical jurisdiction.
- The website will be updated regularly with current content and relevant information on the subject.

Scope and Content

- The podcast and website's scope and the content will be social justice trends, news, and opinions to customize solutions for Pentecostal churches in the South Florida area of the United States.
- Personal perspectives on the subject will be given and an analysis of guest recommendations.

Key Terms, Concepts, and Issues

- The terms, concepts, and issues used in the projects would include but are not limited to social justice, Pentecostal churches, social action, and advocacy.
- It is intended that each episode be about 15 – 25 minutes in length; discussions would reveal the views and perspectives of ordinary people who have had some life experience in the South Florida community.

Dissertation Skills Assessment

- Podcast recording, production, editing, and graphic design.
- Website development, editing, review, and design.
- It is intended to develop one's interview hosting skill, including the ability to navigate discussions to allow others to express their opinions and stir conversations into profitable solutions and ideas.
- These projects will benefit from having support from other people who might be skilled in website design and podcast production to lend their expertise in giving advice.

Standards of Publication

- With the guidance of advisors, standards in the industry regarding podcast and website publication will be followed.

SECTION 6:
POSTSCRIPT

As a trained lawyer, who eventually became a pastor, justice issues always have been paramount. Having been a full-time staff member at a local church for over twenty years, it became evident that there was a passion for the local church and its relationship with justice issues. Therefore, the decision was cultivated to write on this dissertation topic.

Furthermore, the latest developments in the ministry context and around the nation have necessitated this dissertation's subject and raised very significant challenges. The local church stands at a crucial juncture in time; this is why this dissertation considers the praxis of social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy in Pentecostal churches in the South Florida area. By reviewing the problem, historical background, proposed solutions, and examining the context of social justice in scriptures, this dissertation weaves a tapestry of Jesus' mandate to society and offers a call to the local church to carry out Jesus' expectation of His church.

The research of this dissertation, spanning over the last three years has provided an initial venture and incursion into the subject of social justice. Thus, this work is by no means exhaustive, as more research work will need to be done.

The efficacy of the chosen research approach, such as the audio media, website blog, and written statement, has further enriched the concepts' local application and embodied authenticity. This approach has revealed challenges in Social Justice to be real and also personal. The experience gleaned from this research has forged a new perspective on how social justice issues can be addressed and how a local church can be

mobilized to impact society. Furthermore, attending conferences for the field research, interviewing church leaders, and participating in case studies have created a robust environment for learning significant lessons, such as how much the Pentecostal church has achieved and how much it needs to accomplish.

Besides, the written statement captures the research thesis that the local church is called to be an instrument of Christ in the World. Accordingly, Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the World." A true expression of the local church reveals Jesus through the church's activity and service to others. This research also highlights practical examples of believers partnering with the community and shows what the church can accomplish when yielded to Christ.

During the field research, specific problems came to light. Firstly, reassessing the meaning of social justice's praxis within Pentecostal churches, as it might look different from other denominations. Secondly, creating an effective and ongoing strategy to equip church leaders and laity on the necessary information.

In conclusion, this dissertation has created a more profound quest into the intricacies of applying some of the lessons learned in local congregations and church groups. Consequently, as a result of this research, local church pastors and leadership may begin to see the biblical mandate for social justice, social justice challenges in society, and the benefits of church-community partnerships.

APPENDIX A:

ARTIFACT

Appendix A includes the preach freedom podcast, podcast episode description on Anchor and Spotify: both podcast streaming services and link to the podcast and blog on the dissertation's website preachfreedom.com.

WHERE TO LISTEN


Conversation with Pastor Matt Larson

PREACH FREEDOM • Dec 19, 2020

00:00 33:39

Share

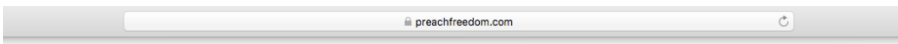
Conversation with Pastor Matt Larson December 19, 2020



Pastor Matt Larson joins our host Alex Umole to discuss biblical perspectives in Social Justice. Matt pastors in South Florida in a church of over 27 nationalities. With an ever-changing culture in South Florida, he acknowledges the need for social justice and the role of the Pentecostal church. He addresses the idea that because the gospel is defined in Jesus the local church cannot avoid ministry to the poor and in South Justice.

- Preach Freedom is a conversation starter featuring ordinary people such as laity, pastors, and professionals in secular workplaces having honest and unfiltered conversations about Social Justice and the role of the church. The ideas and perspectives discussed are then contextualized to South Florida in order to seek ways local Pentecostal churches can embrace new strategies in Social Justice in order to make an impact in the lives of people in society beyond the four walls of the church. Join the Conversation. Write to aumole18@georgefox.edu

33:39



PREACH FREEDOM

HOME **PODCAST** BLOG ABOUT PROJECT CONTACT US

PODCAST

PREACH FREEDOM

[HOME](#) [PODCAST](#) [BLOG](#) [ABOUT PROJECT](#) [CONTACT US](#)



CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR
FREEDOM FOR THE OPPRESSED

As the people of God we are called to Social
Justice.

[JOIN US](#)

ABOUT US



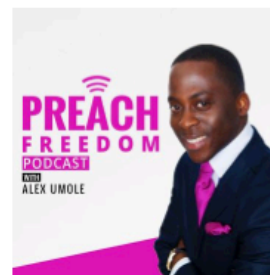
PROJECT

This project seeks to set out the ground work for my thesis, Preach Freedom. The outcome will be a completed DMin dissertation with this artifact on how the church can proclaim freedom in the society today.



BLOG

Seeing the urgent need for an effective Holistic Ministry in Social Justice amongst local Pentecostal churches, this website blog is intended to be a tool that addresses the role of the church and provide applicable solutions.



PODCAST

Preach Freedom is a conversation starter featuring ordinary people such as laity, pastors, and professionals in secular workplaces having honest and unfiltered conversations about Social Justice and the role of the church. The ideas and

PREACH FREEDOM

HOME PODCAST **BLOG** ABOUT PROJECT CONTACT US

MY BLOG



January 10, 2021

AGENDA FOR A SAFE SPACE MEETING

Upon starting our safe space group, our social justice committee came up with a sample meeting agenda and weekly plan that would help guide a meeting facilitator in having an effective meeting. Find below a sample meetin...

[Continue Reading](#)



January 10, 2021

PRAY FOR FREEDOM

As a social justice committee in our local Pentecostal Church, we had to create opportunities to engage our adherents in prayers for freedom and justice. These are some of the Prayer Points, my team and I came up with:

[Continue Reading](#)



January 10, 2021

COMPONENTS OF A SAFE SPACE

The aftermath of the killing of a black man named George Floyd raised apparent challenges. How can the church respond? What can our local church in South Florida do? Our local Pentecostal church decided to create what is...

[Continue Reading](#)



January 8, 2021

A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Some assume the hypothesis that a quest for social justice pre-supposes the idea that the community at large should be held accountable for the adversity of its oppressed. To some extent, that may be true. Key influencer...

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APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewer: Alexander Umole

- Would you consider yourself to be a devoted Christian?
- How long have you attended your local church?
- What is the current attendance of your church?
- What are the demographics of your church?
- Do you think the church demographics have changed in the last 5-10 years?
- If you are a volunteer in your church, what's your current role?
- What do you think it means to be Pentecostal?
- How long have you been a Pentecostal adherent? Did you belong to any other denomination previously?
- Did you or your parents immigrate from another country to the United States?
- What is social justice advocacy as an effective holistic ministry strategy to you?
- What are your feelings about social justice and the church?
- Do you think the church is caring enough for the community?
- How does the current discussions on social justice and racial inequality affect your views and feelings about the church's role in society?
- How do you think the local Pentecostal church and its adherents are responding to the growing racial tension in the country?
- Can you comment on the Pentecostal distinctiveness of being Spirit-filled, Spirit-inspired versus the church's obligation to social justice?

- Do you think the Pentecostal church is equipped to address social justice issues in society?
- Do you feel that the current tension has affected your local church?
- Is your church doing anything regarding social justice?
- Does your church have any social action strategy on social justice?
- How do you think progressive ideologies under social justice today affects the church's relationship to movements such as Black Lives Matter and #Metoo?
- What do you think should be the position of your church on social justice issues?
- If you were in a position of leadership in your congregation, and you felt that a particular action or incident in society was unjust, would you address it from the pulpit?
- What challenges do you think your church faces in serving the poor, the community and the oppressed?
- What solutions can you suggest for South Florida Pentecostal churches to execute to become effective in social justice advocacy.

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