

1-2023

# An Examination of Ministry Essentials for the 21 Century Post Pandemic African American Urban Church

Kenneth Sullivan Jr.  
ksullivan21@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Kenneth Jr., "An Examination of Ministry Essentials for the 21 Century Post Pandemic African American Urban Church" (2023). *Doctor of Ministry*. 561.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/561>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

AN EXAMINATION OF MINISTRY ESSENTIALS FOR THE 21 CENTURY  
POST PANDEMIC AFRICAN AMERICAN URBAN CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
AND JAKES DIVINITY SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
KENNETH SULLIVAN, JR.

PORTLAND, OR

JANUARY 2023



**PORTLAND  
SEMINARY**

George Fox University



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

DMin Dissertation

---

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Kenneth Sullivan, Jr.

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 21, 2023 for the degree of  
Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-Filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Eugene K. Austin, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Jamale Kempt, DMin

Copyright © 2023 by Kenneth Sullivan, Jr.

All rights reserved

## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I give honor to God who is the head of my life. Without Him, none of who I am or what I do is possible. I want to thank my church family for supporting me in my educational endeavors. Their love, prayers and support during this journey have allowed me to pursue my education without feeling as if I was failing them in any way.

I want to thank my wife, Lady Roxie, for putting up with my long hours of studying and writing. It is her love and support that has meant the most. I want to thank my children for allowing me to sacrifice time spent with them on multiple occasions so that I could study and travel and write and work on assignments.

I want to thank Bishop Jakes for establishing Jakes Divinity and exposing all of us students to such an incredible range of educators, as well as inspiring us with his amazing preaching and leadership. I want to thank all the faculty and staff of Jakes divinity, George Fox University and Portland Seminary.

I want to give a special thanks to my academic advisor, Dr Austin. He has been such an incredible encouragement during this journey, keeping us motivated and encouraged to persevere.

Finally, thank you to all my fellow cohorts who helped to share information and to encourage me personally along way! I cannot wait to see what all God has in store for us all!

## ABSTRACT

It is the goal of this research to explore the needs of the urban African American church in the post-pandemic era, and the adjustments it can make to remain a thriving, relevant entity within the culture. This body of work is designed to examine and explore how the African American church can pivot on a massive scale in this era. To pivot means to change course and/or direction. It refers to turning the body from one position or orientation to another. The church is referred to as the body of Christ in scripture, a body that may benefit by shifting course. The adjustments suggested herein can affect the church's ability to continue to be an influential voice within its communities and the society at large, considering the long-term impact of the pandemic as well as societal trends that have affected the strength and position of African American-led houses of worship. There are nuances that affect areas of the United States outside of what is known as the Bible Belt—specifically the Midwest and East Coast—that may possibly make pastoring even more challenging.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to create a manual for churches within the African American urban context to provide guidance and suggested best practices in leading their congregations in the post-COVID era. It will explore key essentials that the African American Urban Church may need to address going forward in this age, to not only survive, but also to thrive. While it is not possible to declare with certainty that every church who uses this manual will benefit, it is appropriate to assert that the manual can aid in equipping the church to maneuver in this period.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	III
ABSTRACT .....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	V
STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CHURCH GROWTH AND EFFECTIVENESS .....	13
DEVELOPING KEY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS FOR THE CHURCH’S WORK .....	26
EFFECTIVELY PRESENTING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE .....	50
EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES FOR CHURCH OPERATIONS .....	61
PRODUCTION AND CORPORATE WORSHIP SERVICES .....	75
EFFECTIVE MINISTRIES AND RELEVANT PROGRAMS .....	88
FAITHFUL CHURCH FINANCES AND STEWARDSHIP .....	104
IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY .....	109
MARKETING AND ADVERTISING IN THE DIGITAL AGE .....	119
BUILDING ALLIANCES AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS .....	124
CONCLUSION .....	139
ADDENDUM .....	147
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	148

This research will examine the needs of the African American Urban Church (AAUC) in the post-pandemic era, and the necessary changes and adjustments it can make to remain a thriving, relevant entity within African American church culture. While impossible to state with absolute authority that every church employing the recommendations will benefit, it is appropriate to state that the church using the manual can be better equipped to maneuver in this present age.

This work is designed to examine and explore how the AAUC can pivot on a massive scale in this era, to continue to be an influential voice within its communities and the society at large, considering the long-term impact of the pandemic, as well as societal trends that have affected the strength and position of African American-led houses of worship.

The subject of African American churches and the need for repositioning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a very pressing issue. The current climate of the African American church is extremely concerning. There is a shift in this season toward decreasing the size of African American congregations, particularly in the urban context. As an African American pastor who leads a predominantly African American church on the northeast side of Indianapolis, Indiana, this author's main concern is that African American churches will continue to lose members, due to (1) their relocation to predominantly Caucasian/Caucasian-led churches which are larger with more resources, (2) prior members who have decided not to return to church in this post-pandemic age, and (3) affiliation with non-Christian denominations that appeal to the needs of would be African American congregants in this season. Called New Direction Church, the church



shepherded by this researcher serves as a case study in shifts required for the AAUC for the coming age.

Observation supports the reality that African American churches of all sizes struggle to retain and attract new members. Many people, for a variety of reasons, do not attend church in person. According to Barna Research Group, “41% of churchgoers in the Black church favor a hybrid church.”<sup>1</sup> Understanding this metric helps us to recognize more than ever that the church is more than a building. Some churches which were not focused on virtual worship services began to assign an equal amount of time and resources to online offerings. Leaders began to purchase equipment and gave attention to details of production, resulting in increases in attendance and giving as a result. With the number of hybrid opportunities increasing, the AAUC can make necessary changes to remain relevant.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to develop a manual for churches within the African American urban context to provide guidance and best practices in leading churches in the post COVID-19 era. In addition, it will explore the various essentials that the AAUC may want to consider and address going forward in this age, to not only survive, but also to thrive.

Research for this dissertation included a fifteen-question, multiple choice, confidential survey. The survey was distributed to over one hundred senior pastors across the United States. There was a total of sixty-seven respondents, fifty of whom identified as leading a church in an urban setting while fifteen identified as serving in a suburban

---

<sup>1</sup> Barna Research Group, “41% of Black Church Churchgoers Favor a Hybrid Church Future,” November 2, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/tibc-hybrid-future>.

context. One respondent indicated that their church was in a rural area, and one did not respond to the question.

Of the sixty-seven survey respondents, sixty-one identified as African American, and six identified as Caucasian. No respondents identified as Hispanic. Finally, of the sixty-seven respondents, forty-nine indicated that their congregation was 90%-100% African American. Ten indicated that their congregation was 70%-89% African American, and two indicated that their congregation was 50-69% African American. Six respondents reported that their church was less than 50% African American.

Four of the six respondents who indicated that their congregation's racial make-up was less than 50% African American also indicated that the senior pastor was Caucasian, and the church was in a suburban area. The remaining two churches reported less than 50% African American congregation were in an urban area but reported that the senior pastor was Caucasian.

The research also included a twelve-question interview conducted with twenty-five pastors nationwide. Three of the pastors were Caucasian while the remaining twenty-two respondents were African American. The identities of the pastors and churches will remain confidential in this work. Overall, the pastors interviewed reported that they were doing well post-pandemic, although they reported significant declines in attendance in the building. They also voiced continuing efforts to operate effectively in the virtual context, and challenges with attracting a specific demographic (adults ages 18-35) to participate in its activities even in the hybrid space. The matters of attendance decline, hybrid worship, and ministry to young adults will be further explored in the following sections.

Jesus called the disciples to lead the church into uncharted territory when He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20, New King James Version). Commonly referred to as The Great Commission, this charge is followed by the account entitled The Acts of the Apostles, which chronicles the growth of the church after a shift in the spiritual landscape. After Christ’s ascension in Acts 1, the early church expanded and spread into new cities, new civilizations, and new societies due to the efforts of the apostles. In the 21st century post-pandemic era, congregations again find themselves in unknown areas of ministry. What is acceptable in terms of relationships, families, morals, and values has changed. The way people communicate, shop, and process information has changed. Social and political norms have all changed. The church is going to discover how to navigate through this new space of change to survive and remain relevant during this era. The Bible has provided examples of leaders who have taken the church forward into these unknown areas. In a similar manner, church leaders in this age can follow suit and realize similar results.

Prior to exploring essentials for the AAUC in the post-pandemic era, it is appropriate to briefly discuss the history of the African American church. This chronicle of the past provides a review of the historical relevance of the African American church and establishes a foundation for exploring the necessary shifts this project has defined. Henry Louis Gates produced an exceptional overview of the Black church in America in a series that broadcast on PBS. Entitled The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our

Song, the series includes a 400-year documentary history of the relevancy of the African American church to individuals, families, causes, political advancement, community development, and more. The notable civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton adds this to the moving discourse:

The Black Church was more than a center of worship; it was the epicenter of Black life. The Black Church has been the seminal force in shaping the African American people. It is the root out of which so many of the most celebrated aspects of Black culture would branch. It's the first institution that enslaved Black people and their free descendants created, the longest lasting and most consequential institution in the Black community.<sup>2</sup>

Executive Producer, Host, and Writer Henry Louis Gates, Jr., adds:

The African American church has long been considered the most stable, independent, and influential institution in the Black community. The Black church in America has always been an institution that has helped African Americans make sense of the world that its people were forced to live in, a world filled with oppression and abuse and injustice.<sup>3</sup>

The AACU finds its origins on the plantations of the pre-Civil War era. The slave masters in the south often sought to proselytize enslaved Africans, with the intention of making the enslaved more docile and easier to manage. Enslaved persons were not allowed to read or write or even assemble, and anytime Black people gathered White people had to be present. Black slaves were only permitted to attend the churches White slave masters controlled and were relegated to certain areas in the building or to certain activities during the worship service. African Americans found surreptitious ways to worship as an alternative, such as gathering in the slave encampments or in the brush, away from the plantation and the slave master's presence. It is in these areas Black

---

<sup>2</sup> John Meacham, "Henry Louis Gates Jr. on African American Religion," New York Times, February 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/books/review/henry-louis-gates-jr-the-black-church.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Meacham, "Henry Louis Gates Jr. on African American Religion."

Christians were to worship secretly in their own way. Black Christians found their first piece of heaven on earth in these “praise houses,” which provided spaces for worship, fellowship, and community.<sup>4</sup>

Slaves discovered promising stories and passages in the Bible that offered hope. The story of Jesus Christ suffering on the cross drew attention because of the similar, harsh treatment they both received. Bush harbors or hush harbors served as the location where slaves could combine their African religious traditions with Christianity. These places were also called canebrakes, and they were hidden, secret spots. So secret were these places, including their nature and function, that their true histories, rhetoric, and practices remain difficult to know. It is only through the oral tradition that the insights into hush harbor practices are at least partially known. In these assemblies, enslaved Americans “broke the prescription against unsupervised or unauthorized meetings by holding their services in secret, well-hidden areas.”<sup>5</sup> It is here that slaves met and worshipped God as they pleased, in a tradition of their own, and shared with each other the thoughts and beliefs that their masters never knew they had. It was safe to freely blend the components of each religion at these meetings. The slaves could let go of all their hardships and express their emotions. Here is where Negro spirituals originated. The songs created by slaves were known to contain a double meaning, revealing the ideas of religious salvation and freedom from slavery. The meetings would also include practices such as dance. African shouts and rhythms were also included.

---

<sup>4</sup> Meacham, “Henry Louis Gates Jr. on African American Religion.”

<sup>5</sup> Meacham, “Henry Louis Gates Jr. on African American Religion.”

Slaves would suffer punishments had they been caught in a hush harbor meeting. Slave owners were confident that slaves would compare treatment, working conditions, and punishments, leaving them worried about revolts and riots. African American churches have historically taught that all people were equal in God's eyes. Then as now, the African American church focused on the message of equality and hopes for a better future. In the north, former slave Richard Allen led a group of Black Methodists out of a segregated church service and founded the Bethel African Church in 1794. After several other Black pastors followed suit and started African Methodist churches in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and neighboring states, Allen organized a convention in 1816 to address their shared problems with Caucasian Methodists. That convention birthed the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) denomination, through which these churches placed themselves beyond White ecclesiastical jurisdiction. As the first elected bishop of the AME church, Allen created the Bethel Benevolent Society and the African Society for the Education of Youth as the AME church immediately became a center of Black institutional life. The AME church was founded due to racial differences, not doctrinal differences, and its members were activists in the fight for abolition and just treatment of Black Americans nationwide.

Abyssinian Baptist Church was founded in 1808, when a group of parishioners walked out of First Baptist Church of New York due to the implementation of racially segregated seating. It was the first African American Baptist church in the state. Over its 200-year history, Abyssinian prospered through its gospel of social justice and commitment to community empowerment, with its membership growing to 14,000 under the leadership of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who assumed the pastorate and

the leadership of the church's community service activities after the retirement of his father, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.

After Reconstruction, black churches, among the first institutions black people owned, began to arise in large numbers all over the South. These Black denominations became the bedrock of the community of freed slaves. Differences became apparent between the southern churches attended by the formerly enslaved, which were more African in their style of worship, and the formal black denominations of the North. Still, the institutional black church continued to grow, and as black Christians became more educated the black church became stronger and more influential in the lives of black Americans.

Olivet Baptist Church, the oldest African American Baptist church in Chicago, was initially organized in 1850. Many of its pastors were influential in politics from the church's incorporation. Through the support of the Bethlehem Baptist Association, Olivet's promise of jobs and housing stimulated the migration and led to the church's membership growing to 10,000 souls in the 1920s.

Out of the black church several schools and universities were birthed: Fisk University, whose founders were sponsored by the American Missionary Society, was incorporated in 1867, the same year Morehouse College was started out of Springfield Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA. Fourteen years later, not only was Tuskegee University founded in a one room shanty near Butler Chapel AME Zion Church in Alabama, but the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary held its first classes in the basement of Father Quarles' Friendship Baptist Church and would later become Spelman College. In fact, a number of

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded as seminaries and divinity schools, training grounds for ministers and preachers of that age.

In the years following emancipation, and despite the advancements made during Reconstruction, Black people faced great discrimination and were brutally harassed, including public lynchings. Black churches and pastors were targets in the South. After the turn of the century, a mass movement changed the form and function of the Black church as waves of Black Americans moved from rural areas in the South to cities in the North and West seeking economic as well as political mobility even while bringing their faith practices. These migrants often lacked access to basic services like health care or employment, but the Black church stepped in to fill in the social gaps that existed during this time.

In 1906 the Azusa Street Revival took place in Los Angeles, CA, led by Evangelist William J. Seymour, spawning the global Pentecostal and the apostolic faith gospel movement. Pastor Seymour and his team opened soup kitchens, shelters, and classes for adults. They operated relevant outreach ministries that met needs in the community as they migrated to this urban area, which made the church more relevant. Regardless the denomination, the African American church, and the urban church, have assumed a greater responsibility for the lives of its congregants beyond just meeting spiritual needs on Sunday, and this prioritization of the needs of the community has generated increases in membership and church involvement over the decades.

A survey by Pew Research Center completed prior to February 2020 found that Black Americans attend church more regularly than Americans overall, and that “59% of respondents consider religion very important in their lives as compared to 40% of all



adults in the United States. Additionally, nearly half of the respondents indicated that Black churches are less influential today than they were 50 years ago.”<sup>6</sup> The black church has always had a significant role in the black community, that started to decline even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several cultural shifts that have taken place that threaten the stability of the black church, recognized one of the longest-standing institutions in the African American community. As the American culture has experienced these changes, so too has the African American community. Everything from the breakdown of the traditional family unit to the rise of eastern religious beliefs and practices, from society’s lack of confidence in religious institutions to the rise of online church services and what will be referred to in this work as the corporate franchise multi-cultural mega church model. All of these and more have impacted the membership and the attendance of the AAUC. There is a concern for the AAUC to be fully aware of the moment of time in which it finds itself and make some adjustments to survive and thrive in this present age. If the AAUC does not evolve it could very well become obsolete.

If the Black church is the backbone for the African American community, any threat to the church’s relevance can have concerning implications for the entire community. As discussed earlier, the AAUC and its leaders have stood in the gap for the rights of black Americans, from abolition to Civil Rights, constantly attending to the needs of the most vulnerable within the

---

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, “Faith Among Black Americans,” February 16, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/02/16/faith-among-black-americans>.

There appears to be a growing trend of suburban, Caucasian-led franchise churches that are becoming more of an option for people who might normally attend an AAUC, thus removing resources from African American community-based churches and reallocating them to communities where there is already an abundance of resources. This widens the economic gap between the AAUC and the AWSC. As the AAUC positions itself not only to survive but also to succeed in this environment, it may require that the African American church reinvents itself in terms of how it approaches ministry.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the many disparities that exist within American society and the African American church, specifically the AAUC. Some churches closed, and many more had to work hard to figure out how to keep their congregants engaged and connected. The pandemic required that churches across the globe make major adjustments, as they adopted new methods of ministry. Forced to abide by new regulations implemented by federal, state, and local officials, churches managed restrictions that created a myriad of challenges, particularly for congregations which were not accustomed to operating in the digital space. Once the restrictions were lifted and vaccines had been administered, many churches had to figure out how to reopen and continue service to their communities safely given the risks that still presented themselves, considering both in-reach and outreach. Prior to COVID-19, many AAUCs focused on Sunday and midweek gatherings for corporate praise, worship, and prayer. Now, those same congregations are seeking to meet the growing demands of the congregation as well as the community in the context of a new normal.

It is the aim of this research to culminate in the production of resources such as paperback manuals and online courses which can provide pastors and church leaders the

opportunity to examine their status and define strategies to bridge the gaps in their service provision in these key areas. The resources produced from this research may assist the AAUC to improve the overall health and effectiveness of their churches in the age to come.

When God delivered the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He began to establish them as a nation and a faith community Exodus 20:1. God gave several laws, summarized in the Ten Commandments, to define structure and provide systems essential for the congregation to thrive in a new context.

Similarly, God has brought His people through the COVID-19 pandemic and the trauma it produced and has allowed a remnant to survive who will represent Him in this world. The remainder of this discourse will explore the following ten essential areas of development for the post-pandemic AAUC: (1) Strategic Planning for Church Growth, (2) Developing Key Staff and Volunteers, (3) Effectively Presenting the Gospel Message, (4) Effective Systems and Structures for Church Operations, (5) Production and Corporate Worship Services, (6) Effective Ministries and relevant Programs, (7) Faithful Church Finances And Stewardship, (8) Importance Of Safety And Security, (9) Marketing And Advertising In The Digital Age, and (10) Building Alliances And Strategic Partnerships.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CHURCH GROWTH AND EFFECTIVENESS

Churches included in this research, whether urban, rural, or suburban, operate with a vision and mission. The church may consider beginning with a plan useful to articulate its purpose and methodology. It is through strategic planning that an entity or organization can successfully reach its goals and realize its vision.

The church is to draw its purpose and mission from Christ. Christ establishes the church to be a body of believers set apart from the world into a community which represents the kingdom of God. The purpose of the church is to preach the message of Jesus on the earth and to create a community of followers who are committed to the kingdom of God and His work of making disciples. The Bible says “Go therefore and make disciples them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, New King James Version). When this purpose is clearly defined and the vision of how the church intends to conduct this mission the members can embrace it and see it fulfilled. Owning a clear definition of the mission and vision of the universal church as well as the local congregation may be an important consideration. A clear mission and vision can help pastors and congregations stay focused and committed to fulfilling the assigned task.

It is critical for this research for AAUC entities to articulate to current and future members as well as the public exactly why they exist. Church leaders should consider how the church’s mission is articulated so that it can attract and keep people engaged in the work needed to realize that vision. As with a nonprofit organization, it is suggested that the AAUC develops and implements vision and mission statements that are clear,

concise, portable, easy to recognize, and easy to recall. AAUCs understand their mission and can clearly communicate faith statements and purpose statements defining their existence.

One of the AAUCs in Indianapolis has done an excellent job of making the vision and mission of its church portable, recognizable, and easy to recite. Some version of the mission statement can be observed on all printed materials throughout their buildings, as well as all of their digital materials as evidenced on social media platforms. The senior pastor championed the defining and casting a mission statement that is known and understood by both the membership of the church and its community. This is a similar trend that exists among effective AAUCs that thrive.

AAUCs studied have an opportunity to strengthen their churches not just in terms of having a quotable vision and mission statement, but also a clear, detailed, mapped out strategy of how to execute that vision. The plan would include demographic studies of the community; a clearly detailed strategy for the personnel necessary to execute the plan; and the timeline for the phases of execution, all clearly articulated to the congregation and community in which it operates. In summary, the plan addresses who, what, when, where how and why for church. Many AAUCs studied can benefit from strengthening and/or building upon their strategic plan, to better allow them to communicate and carry out the church's vision.

Often, strategic planning is long term, and organizational action steps are established for two to five years in the future. The senior leadership of an organization is generally tasked with determining strategy. Strategy can be planned (intended) or can be observed as a pattern of activity (emergent) as the organization adapts to its environment

or competes in the market. Strategy includes processes of formulation and implementation, and strategic planning helps coordinate both.

Churches whose leaders were interviewed indicated that they are operating without a clear purpose, plan, and/or goal. To clarify, when asked about the vision for their church, the average pastor replies that they would like to grow their congregations. The pastors interviewed stated that “they would like to bring in an assistant pastor and attract more young adults, but the plan as to how to do so was vague. Ninety percent of the churches interviewed had neither a specific number of young people they were looking to draw nor a defined strategy as to how to make this a reality.”<sup>7</sup> (All interviews were confidential; the names of subjects are withheld by mutual agreement). As a result, the number of young adults in their congregations remain lower than what they desire. When asked to elaborate on the issue of young adult recruitment, two of the pastors identified that they were “having difficulty identifying personnel to oversee outreach and/or development efforts for young adult ministry.”<sup>8</sup> The failure to create a strategic plan for young adult ministry growth, or to create a strategic plan to recruit the leader(s) who would create a strategic plan for young adults, is likely the reason that there have been little to no gain in this area per the pastors interviewed.

The AAUC may need to be more intentional and calculating and study more closely the cultural shifts, ebbs and flows and where they fit into it all. According to Miller:

In addition to exploring alternative ways of worship, Christians are deviating from traditionally held values and beliefs. With the growing diverse and pluralistic

---

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with multiple pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with multiple pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

religious landscape, societal norms are changing. Certain traditional values of the church, such as family, married couples, and church services have been redefined.<sup>9</sup>

In examination of three well-known and growing suburban churches in the metropolitan Indianapolis area (ITOWN Church, Northview Church, and Traders Point Christian Church), all three have a well-defined strategic plan. They have studied the demographic shifts, they appear understand the city planning taking place, and they seem to have aligned their vision where people are moving as well as the changes taking place within their marketing area. In some cases, they are part of the planning of those shifts. All three churches have opened new buildings in recently gentrified areas.

These churches have key leaders in their congregation who hold leadership positions in corporate America and have familiarity with how a corporation is to be structured; that knowledge is used to inform the business models for their churches in various tiers of their development. In other instances, their church members work for the city or hold other government positions, which help them with serving on various boards and holding other positions of influence which allow them to be privy to conversations and plans of developers and others within the business community. 80% of AAUCs studied did not have leaders within their church who possessed the same knowledge, experience, or position that some of their suburban counterpart churches possessed. The AAUC did not have members that would allow them to have access to the kind of

---

<sup>9</sup> Maureen A. Miller, "I Knew it, But I Didn't Know It: Black Church Lay Leaders and Perspective Transformation," (PhD. Diss., University of Georgia, May 2020), <https://esploro.libs.uga.edu/esploro/outputs/doctoral/I-KNEW-IT-BUT-I-DIDNT/9949365744402959#file-0>.

information that their suburban counterparts had access to that was so valuable as part of the planning process.

During an interview, a Central Indiana pastor state money and resources are the biggest difference between the AAUC and the American White Suburban Church AWSC. He went on to state that “the AWSC can hire qualified staff, obtain sophisticated equipment, and run ministry programs with those resources.”<sup>10</sup> Not only does the AAUC lack available resources, but also have neither access nor connections to the key people who make decisions or have the knowledge to know from where the resources can be acquired. There is a wealth gap or chasm that exists as it relates to the AAUC in relation to AWSC, which directly impacts the AAUC’s ability to craft an elaborate strategic plan that would allow them to grow at the rate of some of their AWSC counterparts. It was discovered through some of the interviews that the senior pastor was the most educated and well-connected person within the AAUC congregation, and even he did not have the knowledge, connections and/or relationships to complete a well-developed strategic plan.

Interviews with pastors at AWSCs were telling. Both pastors led large congregations whose membership, ministry activities, and even their buildings demonstrated striking differences when compared with the average AAUC. A Caucasian pastor on the suburban northeast side of Indianapolis says “they have 40 acres of land for their adult living facility, and they also have a daycare that they have owned both for over 40 years. During the COVID-19 crisis, the suburban Northeast side pastor mentioned their tithes, offerings, and attendance has dropped, but they had other streams of revenue with the adult living facility and a daycare.”

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview with pastor, November 30, 2022.



For the average AAUC to be able to plan at the level of their suburban counterparts, they might consider being very intentional about developing key relationships that would provide access to information which would allow them to plan at this level. A pastor interviewed stated, “their city commissioner told them they needed to start writing grants and that there was funding in their area that African American churches did not think to apply for.”<sup>11</sup> It was this relationship that gave him access to over 1 million dollars. The pastor transformed his team into a grant writing team because the white churches were getting the grant funds and the black churches were asking for money. The pastor worked with his team every Tuesday and Thursday and they would write grants.

This is an added task which may require additional time spent seeking out the power brokers and decision makers who help shape cities and urban planning and building those relationships while assessing how the church’s vision and mission aligns with what is being discussed. This task is not impossible but does divert the focus of the senior pastor away from the myriad of other priorities that require his attention.

An African American pastor in northern Indiana, who also holds a position in local government, shared that “African American clergy and AAUC congregations are being left out and could be more active and involved in city planning discussions. He went on to iterate that those members and leaders of AAUC congregations need to fill up the city-county council chambers and let their presence be known and voices be heard, to

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview with pastor, December 14, 2022.

learn and share what is happening in their communities rather than being the last to know about changes taking place in the spaces around them.”<sup>12</sup>

Several miles to the west of Indianapolis, another African American pastor reported that in the aftermath of the pandemic his church was able to benefit from dwindling property values to purchase a second location for their church. The new auditorium and fifteen hundred seat sanctuary provide an opportunity for growth and expansion of the members of this AAUC. The pastor plans to use the new building strategically, as a means of generating job opportunities and attracting people back to the community. This is an example of a pastor being vigilant as far as the opportunities in his community and identifying alternative resource streams. Both the socio-economic climate and the disruption of the pandemic combined to provide a chance for this acquisition. The senior pastor not only had a vision for expansion, but also an eye for new prospects to make the vision reality. Funding and fundraising strategies will be further explored in a later section; however, the foregoing is an example of the type of strategic planning recommended for leaders of the AAUC.

The AAUC may do well to, that includes broadening its view and looking beyond its four walls or even the city block on which it sits; as an alternative, it may set its sights on the landscape of the entire city, at a minimum. The AAUC may consider refining its strategic plan and intentionally becoming a part of its city’s planning process, being front and center at critical city council planning meetings and both listening to what is happening and making its presence known, felt, and heard.

One common phenomenon that impacts the AAUC year after year in cities across the country has been gentrification. Pada summarizes the impact of gentrification

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview with pastor, November 30, 2022.

in this way: Religious organizations are faced with an identity crisis as gentrification transforms the urban landscape. They face economic challenges as the cost of real estate rises. In addition, old religious dogmas are challenged by the influx of new dwellers that predominantly emphasize rationalization and diminish the emphasis on traditional belief systems. Identities and organizational structures undergo significant change due to the shift from a machine-driven industrial urban character to a culturally centered paradigm. Religious institutions face the danger of extinction and are challenged to adapt to the changes by forming a hybrid identity.”<sup>13</sup>

For example, in one fifteen mile stretch on the northeast side of Indianapolis, there are Black churches in various phases of decline, in part due to gentrification. The area once thriving with African American life is now characterized by high numbers of younger, Caucasian families whose members are less likely to visit or join these churches, threatening the future viability of these congregations. There have even been instances when pressure was placed on AAUC in these communities to sell their property and relocate; and in some extreme cases the churches were forced to move out through imposition of eminent domain. Considering these common occurrences, it is important that the AAUC has a plan for its future as well as the future of its congregants, and that the church stays knowledgeable about changes taking place in the areas wherein it operates.

When the AAUC is current with the planning taking place within the city where it operates, it can often be better positioned to be proactive rather than reactive in terms of aligning the church’s vision and taking steps to protect said vision regardless of the goings-on in the neighborhood. In other words, if the church is not involved or included in the plans relating to community development, there is a higher probability that the

---

<sup>13</sup> Pada Orvic, “The Impact of Gentrification on Faith-Based Organizations,” *Justice, Spirituality & Education Journal*, No. 5 (2015): 45, <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jsej/vol2015/iss2015/5/>.

church is left unaware or left behind when changes take place. According to Mason, “Many churches have become like these over-personalized houses. They’ve made their customs and traditions their main identity and refused to adapt to changing culture. Traditionalism prioritizes cultural patterns that people refuse to change at the expense of ministry. Black church culture is beautiful; however, like any expression of culture, it has to adapt contextually if it is going to connect with younger generations in this new mission field.”<sup>14</sup>

The church may not know how to properly navigate the changing community. It is also possible that the church may suffer loss because of the decisions being made, since it was not present during the discussion and determination of steps in the surrounding community.

This strategic planning also involves the pastor and the church making sound financial plans so that they are not locked into a situation that becomes detrimental to the church’s future when the community they live in changes. In an interview in Evansville, Indiana, one African American pastor shared “the church he leads is also in an area that has been impacted by gentrification and has some new development taking place. Standing in the historic role of advocate for their community, the church, and the community council united and demanded that 30% of the new space being developed in their area is owned by African Americans.”<sup>15</sup> This stance for the community is a significant move on the part of the church in the post pandemic moment. It could mean retention of African Americans whose presence will likely mitigate the complete shift of

---

<sup>14</sup> Eric Mason, *Urban Apologetics Restoring Black Dignity with the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), Kindle.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with pastor, December 1, 2022.

the residents and business owners who have called this area home for decades. More notably, their presence in the community improves support for the church activities. This is an example of the proactive planning and execution which ensures that the original residents of that community are not marginalized, and that the business taking place in that community reflects the demographics of the current population.

Another strong illustration was shared by a pastor from a White suburban church. He described the plan his church has executed “to become an international congregation that offers English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to immigrants in the area. This initiative has enabled their church to attract many Christians from other countries who have relocated to the Indianapolis area.”<sup>16</sup> Having a plan that considers the changing demographic in the area has been instrumental in helping this church continue to thrive.

Earlier this year, New Direction Church purchased four acres of land near the church’s main campus. The church recently created a separate incorporated community development corporation. The plan for the property is to build affordable housing units so that community members—particularly people of color—will have access to housing despite the improvements being made in this part of northeast Indiana. Additionally, the plan for the building includes mixed usage on the first floor with priority being given to businesses that add value to the community. It was later revealed that, in the same area, plans were in process to develop the remaining real estate adjacent to New Direction’s property, with resources already committed to the scheduled projects. The assigned resources included set-asides for minority-owned businesses. This is yet another illustration of how the AAUC is often left out of the planning process and left to be

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview with pastor, December 9, 2022.

reactive versus proactive; New Direction Church was graced by God to partake in the process of this community's development. It is essential that the AAUC and its leadership not only create a vision for the church's future but has a team that is tied into the city to ensure that the church's purpose and relevance is protected.

American cities are very important because many have the largest concentrated number of people living within them and tend to have larger populations of African Americans living within city limits. The culture within cities influences the overall American culture and the culture within various regions of the country. Power and governmental structures are generally established or set up in cities. For these reasons, I believe that God desires that the AAUC has a clear-cut strategic plan as to how to conduct His work in urban spaces during each changing era, to include internal and evangelistic ministry.

New Direction Church on the northeast side of Indianapolis serves with an unyielding mission to make disciples and lead those disciples to a better life. The church vision is derived from 3 John 1:2 (NKJV), which advances God's desire to see His people "prosper and be in good health, even as their souls prosper." During the COVID-19 pandemic, New Direction launched a campaign entitled "Make Christ Go Viral," to advance a trendy catchphrase reflective of the circumstance of a novel coronavirus infection spreading uncontrollably across the globe, as well as the term assigned to virtual content that becomes popular very quickly. The motto was intended to remind the world of Christ's sovereignty despite the societal concerns and motivate the church to communicate said reminder with energy and intentionality. The leadership team utilized the circumstance of social distancing to take the message of Christ as communicated

through the senior pastor and cause it to amass an unprecedented amount of attention through an aggressive and strategic schedule of ministering through multiple web-based platforms. The mission to lead others to better lives did not waver, as the senior pastor and leaders ramped up efforts to post content on the church website and social media outlets; utilized virtual meeting spaces to promote communication and community amongst members and friends of the ministry; and upgraded the quality of digital productions to engage an online audience most effectively. The cessation of in-person worship services did not translate to the cessation of the active mission. In fact, due to the intensified need for believers and seekers to plug into a space of hope during a global pandemic, the ministry in turn intensified its efforts to be that source for disciples and seekers alike, both near and far. New Direction Church experienced a growth in membership through online engagement both within and outside of Indiana. Regardless of the unprecedented circumstances, New Direction remained steadfast in purpose, and was able to provide a place of hope, direction, peace, and faith-raising, during a challenging time.

Since re-opening, New Direction has grappled with the challenges presented to the post-pandemic church. Such challenges include new safety protocols; hybrid ministry structures and processes; and members facing new concerns as a byproduct of the coronavirus pandemic. Their issues may be physical, psychological, financial, familial, emotional, or spiritual. It is an allegiance to walking in purpose—foundationally, the word, witness, and community which has defined the black church from its inception—that has sustained the congregation's effectiveness and efficacy in this season. A church with a clearly articulated and executed strategy can exemplify the following qualities: attraction,

member retention, and community edification, which in turn feeds the mission of the church. One portion of a comprehensive strategic plan is identification of the personnel needed to bring the plan to fruition. It is to this essential for the post-pandemic AAUC that we next turn.



## DEVELOPING KEY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS FOR THE CHURCH'S WORK

For a church to carry out its mission and vision it may require people who are supportive of that vision and that mission active in ministry execution. This research identified that many of the AAUC pastors have inspired vision, but they lack the resources to see the vision come to fruition. A key resource gap is in personnel.

There are different facets of operating the church. There is the ecumenical side and the business side. There is the spiritual side and the structural aspect. It's important that we recognize and see the church as both an organization as well as an organism. It is classified as an organization with a 501C3 status. It is a non-for-profit organization. That's the way the government defines it. That's the secular side. The secular defines it as an organization but in a spiritual sense it is defined as an organism. An organization is a club or a group. An organism is any living thing. The body of Christ.

Since the church is a living breathing entity, it is in the process of growing. Every living entity is in the process of growing and everything that is growing goes through growing pains. Everyone say growth is good! That's what is happening with the early church. It is experiencing phenomenal growth. In the process of growing the church dealt with growing pains. This happens in many churches. There are unforeseen things that arise and issues which must be dealt with. As a church grows, it faces challenges at each level as it is being stretched.

There were those who begin to murmur about what was happening in the church. Murmuring is a half uttered, half concealed complaint not that a person comes out and says to the right person at the right time in the right spirit for the right reason or motive that something needs to be done. The devil can divide a church more over incidentals

than fundamentals. Moreover, functional than doctrinal. Satan can stop or slow down a church that's what he can do.

Before the Pastors and Apostles were doing everything, teaching, preaching and all of the church duties and affairs, now there was a shift about to take place. The apostles were now going to have to change the approach toward operations and select officers who could better help them make things to flow more efficiently. For the leaders to best benefit the church, we need to give attention more so to prayer and the Word verses handling day to day operations as much and getting supplies and solving every dispute (Acts 6:4). Peter says said we will appoint others over this business (Acts 6:4). Those who were within the church helped to find people who were reputable and who they could get to appoint their duties to. They were called to look for capable competent people from within to help carry out ministry. Loyal, spiritual, dependable, and spirit filled (Acts 6:3).

In a confidential interview, one senior pastor who leads at an AAUC, shared that the greatest difference between the urban and suburban church is resources: more education and more dollars mean suburban churches can take a percentage and train people to increase ministry capacity. “They have unlimited resources,”<sup>17</sup> he stated. Lofton and Davis state, “as a result of these multigenerational inequalities, African Americans must come to terms with a society that continues to produce unequal treatment and results in a country that prides itself on equality, liberty, and justice”.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview with pastor, November 30, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Lofton and James E. Davis, “Toward a Black Habitus: African Americans Navigating Systemic Inequalities within Home, School, and Community,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 84, no. 3 (2015): 215, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7709/jnegroeducation.84.3.0214/>.

Black churches are doing more with less, and they do not have as many volunteers or personnel. Many AAUC, even at their inception beginning late in the eighteenth century, did not have budgets for a full-time staff. In this research study it was found that, “19% of AAUC leaders surveyed stated that they did not have paid staff at their church other than the senior pastor. An additional 38% indicated that they had between one and five paid staff.”<sup>19</sup>

If the AAUC is going to be effective as it moves into the future, it is suggested that it correctly defines the team that it needs to evangelize the unsaved and disciple believers in current and future generations. Now that the church must operate in a hybrid space, church staffing needs have changed significantly. Churches may consider a possible need for skilled personnel to meet spiritual needs in the physical building; but they may also wish to consider the possibility of making edifying church engagement and involvement available online. The call on the twenty-first century pastor is to serve not only as a shepherd, but also as CEO; to be effective as both an ecclesiastical leader and an executive leader.

The first thing Jesus did when He started His earthly ministry was to assemble a core team who would facilitate the carrying out of His work. Jesus recruited men of various walks of life with unique skill sets for what His ministry required. Several fishermen, a tax collector, even a politician, who were willing to follow His vision and carry out His work, were selected and deployed. After Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He poured out His spirit on His disciples, equipping them to carry out the work to which they were called in Acts 2:1-11. In the second chapter of the book of Acts, the author

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview with multiple pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

records that Jesus gave them His spirit so that they might expand and extend His work on the earth. By the time Jesus finished their training and orientation period, they literally had His spirit acting inside of them. Jesus handpicked and equipped certain men to carry out specific roles and responsibilities in His ministry. Similarly, each pastor might consider assessing the direction in which their ministry will go, then exploring and examining who they need to fill various positions.

Many church congregations in initial development stages do not have budgets for a full-time staff. According to Barna, “the consensus, for many pastors, may be driven by their own urgent needs: Half of pastors in Black churches share that there is no benefits package in place for leadership at their church (49%). The percentage without benefits increases among pastors in small churches (66%), in small towns or rural areas (60%) or in ministries with no full-time staff (84%).”<sup>20</sup> The reality of the lack of health insurance, disability insurance, life insurance, retirement plan contributions, and the like, may possibly cause a pastor or church to be

discouraged, and may impact the senior leader’s ability to complete the task of outlining the ideal staff positions needed to carry out the work.

One confidential pastor interviewed worked with leaders at his former church to implement a system wherein the pastor’s wife paid for medical insurance at her job, and the church reimbursed her monthly in the amount of the payroll deduction.

Other churches remain open to their senior pastor being bi-vocational until such time that the church can compensate them adequately. Finally, partnerships with funding

---

<sup>20</sup> Barna Group, *Trends in the Black Church: Celebrating its Legacy and Investing in a Hopeful Future* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2021), 129.

organizations can subsidize the compensation to the Senior Pastor. There is a Ministerial Excellence Fund, for example, sponsored by Reformed Church of America's Board of Benefits Services in partnership with Lilly Endowment. They help people pay for retirement and help with certain benefits for pastors. In the post-pandemic age, pastors and leaders can cooperate with one another to support inadequate funds for pastor compensation packages.

Regardless of how church leadership addresses any challenges Pastors and church leaders are encouraged to have a defined and documented visionary team, a chart of people and positions that would best execute the vision for that congregation. The goal is to attract and position people who can receive and act to carry out the God-given mission, as is demonstrated by Christ's disciples. Defining and fulfilling these roles will often contribute to the type of church growth that can later position churches to increase the Pastor's compensation. Jesus was able to get men to leave their full-time jobs and businesses and follow Him, even though He did not have set-aside funds to pay them. Scripture says that Jesus Himself did not even have a home as He initiated His earthly ministry activity, much less an itemized operating budget (Matthew 8:20).

Dr. R.A. Vernon of The Word Church in Cleveland, Ohio shares a compelling note about staffing for a growing church. He writes that "when a church experiences dynamic growth, it is not possible to hire all the people needed to run the ministry."<sup>21</sup> He suggests that senior leaders quickly learn and appreciate their most prized commodity: volunteers. Vernon goes on to iterate that volunteers are free labor, and not to minimize

---

<sup>21</sup> R.A. Vernon, *Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry from Micro to Mega* (Cleveland, OH: Victory Media & Publishing Company, 2011), 65-66.

their value but to highlight these individuals who unselfishly avail themselves to the work of internal and external ministry. Much of the church's internal ministry success is due to volunteer labor. Dr. Vernon also encourages senior leadership to treat everyone who does anything in the church as if they were full-time staff, including the standards defined for their ownership of the churches mission. Full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff should be regarded similarly as laborers in ministry. Additionally, it is beneficial even for volunteer staff to be given a scale that defines tracks to be promoted within the church organization.

In like fashion, after defining the people and roles required for ministry in the hybrid space, pastors in this age can implement an effective means of identifying and assigning those individuals in the following processes of recruitment, reward, and retention.

Recruitment refers to the method of identifying, attracting, and vetting team members. It is important that the people on the team share the values of the organization, and potential team members should be assessed on basic values that begin with their commitment to Christ and the church. It is suggested that leaders recruit, constantly. In John 4:35 as well as Luke 10:2, Jesus speaks of the state of the harvest field that cannot wait until later to be attended, and that disciples must continually be in prayer for God to send laborers. Jesus attests that there will always be a labor shortage, but any organization should always be scouting for good talent and for people whose gifts and skill sets fit the needs even while their values align with those of the company. While the ministry context requires deployment of the strategy to pray and fast and grow a team organically, as we see with Jesus and His disciples, this day and age also offers other

resources useful for the recruitment process. There is a wide scope of staffing agencies designed to help companies and organizations find suitable team members. These agencies also offer the option of outsourcing certain functions and even temporarily filling certain roles as the budget will allow and as seasons or projects will require. Churches can be linked with hiring agencies that provide employees, as well as have partnerships with institutions that provide volunteers and interns. While principles for selecting partner entities will be further explored in a later section, it is notable that companies who specialize in nonprofit staffing, local institutions of higher education, and outreach/mentorship agencies for members of at-risk populations learning service and leadership skills can all be effective sources of personnel for the work of the church.

Churches may not have budgets to pay people financially, but it is important for people who participate in ministry teams to feel appreciated. One repeated comment encountered during pastor interviews was the lack of resources for ministry with which their church grapples.

One pastor interviewed from Ohio stated that “there is no shortage of vision, only resources, in response to a question about response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>22</sup> This same pastor, however, led his team to add paid positions in their audio-visual department. They realized that these additional roles were essential, despite the lack of funds that the church has for operating.

Smaller organizations or churches in early development may not be able to pay salaries for full time staff; as an alternative, a strategic combination of part-time employees, volunteers, and creative methods of showing appreciation may be appropriate

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview with pastor, December 11, 2022.

methods of maintaining productive teams. Church leaders can explore alternatives like monthly gift cards, public acknowledgements such as Volunteer of the Week, and inclusion in special occasions in the community (examples are galas, celebrity presentations, concerts, ball games, and the like) to help team members experience the recognition and fulfillment that leads to motivation and continued productivity.

New Direction Church sponsors a volunteer appreciation celebration each year. The occasion has included such activities as distribution of branded apparel; bowling or adult arcade competitions; catered multi-course dinner; fun games and prizes; and personalized, handwritten thank you cards. Ministry leaders have also been encouraged to plan separate appreciation events for their individual teams, such as luncheons, coffee outings, and conferences. Last year, the youth ministry began to distribute gift cards to instructors and instructor aides for each week of service to the youth. The qualitative feedback from these appreciation activities has been overwhelmingly positive, and a core of committed volunteers remains faithful to the ministry.

Rewards are often determined by the budget allotted for the year. Churches with a larger budget have the resources to add systems to assist with tracking the hours that a member has volunteered throughout the year. Bluebir, PushPay, and TinyPlus are examples of systems that assist the leadership team with managing employees and volunteers. These systems give the volunteer the ability to track attendance, the time spent volunteering and various reward options. The volunteer selects the reward based on the points available from the tasks that they have completed throughout the year. The goal is to provide church branded options that the members can enjoy, can wear on with their teams when serving, and to wear daily to increase the marketing of the church.



During the pandemic, New Direction purchased branded face masks to distribute to members and volunteers. Several of the members commented that they have seen other people in the community wearing these masks. New Direction Church was blessed to have increased attendance during the pandemic where many African American churches were closing.

Many people share and serve in church from a pure heart, but it is the nature of mankind to wonder “What’s in it for me?” Jesus' disciples served Him, and they sacrificed in their serving; but even they wanted to know what was in it for them, or what assurances they had for their futures. According to Mark 10:29-30, Jesus told His disciples that no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

Recruiting and rewarding good people are important priorities; however, retaining them is even more critical. An organization should have a scale which allows employees and volunteers alike to see how they can grow and develop within the organization. There should be a vision of how to ascend and be promoted to new levels of influence or responsibility in any organization. John 4:35 as well as Luke 10:2, Jesus speaks of the state of the harvest field that cannot wait until later to be attended, and that disciples must continually be in prayer for God to send laborers. Jesus attests that there will always be a labor shortage, but any organization should always be scouting for good talent and for

people whose gifts and skill sets fit the needs even while their values align with those of the company.

The AAUC often misses the mark when it comes to training and developing its staff and volunteers. Larry Osborne discusses the need to close the back door of the church. Many churches are good with gaining new members, but the issue is retaining the member and supporting their growth into productive disciples of Christ. According to Larry Osborne, he focuses on three fundamental principles:

Shifting the focus where they want to invite friends and family member to volunteer. This principle helps with creating a community within the church where people have a stronger buy-in. The next principle is to place emphasis on what really matters. This principle is described as the glue to keep the members together especially when tough times arise. The final principle is to find alignment with the leadership. One of the goals with this principle is to ensure that the leadership team is speaking the same language to assist with building trust. Along with building trust, leaders need to be held accountable for their actions and to ensure that the overarching vision is being followed. There will be times when crucial conversations are necessary.<sup>23</sup>

At New Direction Church, the training model for staff, ministry leaders, and ministry participants includes a quarterly session focused on equipping team members for serving and discipling others in different aspects of the church's ministry context; a monthly leadership summit for discussion and coaching on ministry strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; and an annual training series that alternates between Ministry Leadership Training (MLT) for laypersons, and Ministers In Training (MIT) for those called to preaching, teaching, and evangelism ministry. The training is designed to build capacity for service in the church as well as promote personal/professional development for the overall benefit of the disciple. New Direction

---

<sup>23</sup> Larry Osbourne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 24.

Church works to schedule guests who have achieved in various sectors—ministry as well as corporate America—to add value to the sessions for leaders and staff. This model of periodic/consistent development sessions with visiting speakers can be optimal for keeping talented individuals engaged and productive.

In another confidential interview in Indianapolis, December 2, 2022, a bishop of North Carolina shared in an interview the bishop explained that he established a Volunteer Coordinator role at the church where he presides. The Volunteer Coordinator helps to engage, assign, and organize the ministry volunteers within the congregation. The church also implements an innovative model of volunteer management, which includes a monthly corporate leadership training and tracking of the volunteers' hours. He goes on to state “ministry volunteers can use the hours of service in the church on their résumé and even write them off on their taxes.”<sup>24</sup> These kinds of investments are not only an incentive to serve but it is a way to recruit, reward, and retain volunteers.

This era requires placement of individuals with unique skill sets who fit into nontraditional roles within the AAUC. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, when church congregations were not able to gather in person, every church had to obtain or upgrade equipment needed to conduct online worship services and bible study classes to continue to feed their flocks. In a confidential interview, a pastor of a growing church in southern Indiana church had not been equipped for online worship or online giving. The church was not set up to receive donations from members in the digital space and were not prepared to connect members and guests for worship in the cyber space. The COVID-19 pandemic was a cultural shock which revealed the gaps in his church, including the

---

<sup>24</sup> Interview with pastor, November 30, 2022.

staff and volunteer base. While members were coming to the church to give their tithes and offerings during the pandemic, the AWSC in his area were much further ahead. He summarized “those leaders in the AWSC were more forward-thinking and more calculating than the urban church, and therefore more comfortable for the future.”<sup>25</sup>

Many AAUC churches were not as equipped as their Caucasian counterparts to pivot quickly at the time of the pandemic. Traditionally, the AAUC has placed a priority on recruiting gifted singers and musicians for the music ministry and offered more attention to those positions right alongside the preaching ministry; the pandemic helped to reveal to church leaders what roles in the church were essential and which were not.

New Direction Church, like many churches, discovered that facilitating online ministry is quite distinct from facilitating ministry in-house. New Direction was already streaming worship services weekly and had an audience online; but the experience of the online audience did not receive much consideration on a weekly basis in comparison to the audience on the ground. Building a team in the pandemic/post-pandemic era means identifying individuals with the skill sets who could translate a quality service to an online audience.

It became evident that videographers, editors, social media producers, and sound technicians are as important as greeters, musicians, teachers, and ushers, because the message cannot reach the intended audience without their expertise. These professionals were—and are—the essential works in the church, and leaders might consider modifying operations to support their work, whether they are full time, part-time, or volunteer. Production management will be further explored in a later section.

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with pastor, December 1, 2022.

As churches reopened, church leaders were required to scrutinize in-person operations, as social distancing, safety, disinfection, contact tracing, and simultaneous online worship experiences all had to be considered. At New Direction, multi-level operations leadership was reassessed and reassigned, to make the teams more robust and increase oversight for each worship service. According to Megan Ranney “the trauma impact of issues like long-term isolation, limited outlets for activity, and financial implications of business closure coincided with the introduction of legislation that made firearms more accessible to members of the community.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, churches in urban areas may consider being cognizant of needs for the security measures in during worship services as well as ministry activities throughout the week. In addition to the recruitment of internal security personnel through the men’s ministry, New Direction Church contracted with off-duty police officers from Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, as well as private security firms, to have a consistent presence of security officers in and around the building.

In Acts 6, Luke shares the issues that arose regarding food distribution, which required the establishment of deacons. There were concerns that developed as to what the church should do with unchurched Gentile believers should they be required to be circumcised, which led to different apostles traveling to different parts of the land to proclaim the gospel. Roles developed out of the newly identified needs in the church of the 1st century, and the same phenomenon is upon the church in the 21st century. In the

---

<sup>26</sup> Megan Ranney et al., “What Are the Long-Term Consequences of Youth Exposure to Firearm Injury, and How Do We Prevent Them? A Scoping Review,” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 42, no 4 (2019): 724-740, doi:10.1007/s10865-019-00035-2/.

church now as well as then, people are growing, and the truth is being proclaimed. Any time that takes place, problems will follow.

Pastors and lay leaders who protect the unity of the church at all costs are essential to the post-pandemic urban church. A unified body working as one can retard the impact of societal ills, as well as impede the progress of the enemy. Leaders in the 21st century AAUC in the post-pandemic age may wish to consider the importance of preventing division and promoting unity. It is key that leadership minimizes the opportunity and curtails the growth of any discord within the church. It is notable that even though they had problems, the believers in the early church did not quit the church. The church was facing challenges, including the church at Jerusalem. There is no perfect assembly of people, but leaders in the church may wish to prioritize a culture of unity, grace, and truth in love to advance the mission.

One of the greatest challenges the church faces is spiritual warfare in the ranks of leadership. The devil works to disrupt and distract leadership. In Ephesians 6:12, leaders in the church are tasked to identify spiritual wickedness in high places and protect themselves as well as the senior leader from losing focus on God's vision. Significant investment in a team of leaders who serve as filters for the senior leader as he continues to hear and follow God's voice may be beneficial. It is likely that leaders will be the object of attack, particularly as God calls them higher in the kingdom, as even experienced by Christ and the apostles during the first century. This group of leaders who had been selected to lead the Church forward in the first century was energetic, tenacious, determined, and suited to the challenges of leading the church during turbulent times. In the 21st century AAUC leaders may consider exemplifying these same attributes.

Challenges force change. In the first century, church leaders had to lead change. Some leaders learned new languages, cultures and customs as the church expanded. Leaders kept the church encouraged through the hardships they faced. They helped organize the flow and structure of the church. Leaders learned how to assimilate Gentiles (unchurched) people. They had to write policy and procedure for the church. They systematically organized theology and doctrine. There were the tasks of doing missions and going into increasingly uncharted territory.

God was doing something special with the early church. He was doing something new. As God was expanding the church, He was changing His method to spread His message. In Acts 10:34-35, God told Peter to rise, slay and eat as He was deprioritizing even the strict dietary laws of the Jews to advance the unifying cause of Christ. Then as now, God challenged the traditions and preferences and customs of the leadership. If the church is not careful, it may become more caught up with Preference than Productivity. From music to media, from colors to caterers, from activity to appearance, some individuals may complain that the church has never done these activities before. They can become an impediment to effective ministry in the 21st century church, and leaders might consider actively working to neutralize that notion in all areas of the ministry. If the church is to be most effective, it may wish to consider that evolving at the hand of effective, forward-thinking leadership is a path to that end.

Near the middle of the first century, Antioch becomes the leading church. As the church in Jerusalem struggled with finances and other ills, the church in Antioch became the church that sent more missionaries and had greater international impact. Acts 11:26

says they were trendsetters. God brought in these new leaders of change, to include the notable apostle Paul, so that they might lead the charge in moving the church forward.

God selected individuals like Paul, Barnabas, and others, who could engage the culture.

Paul engaged the culture and found common ground with people, and then he would witness them. He was a striking example of what we would call workplace evangelism. Paul led the church into uncharted territories as they went into places and introduced the gospel for the very first time.

There is a pattern evident that the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban church can follow. God is again empowering new school leaders He can trust to lead the charge in carrying the gospel forward into new territory. He is seeking new voices and personalities who will represent Him, leaders who have brains and boldness and are willing to turn the world upside down...and right side up...in His Name.

In this age there is a need for leaders who are energized and intentional, who can lead the congregation to pray, intercede, serve, witness, and who will hold up the blood-stained banner. It takes special people to lead a charge, those who are willing to risk it all and who are bold and courageous enough to put themselves on the line as their reasonable service. As it was in the first century, so, it is today.

In consideration of this great task, there are different facets of operating the church. There is the spiritual side and the structural aspect. There is the praying side and the practical side. Senior pastor and leaders may want to consider defining and managing the church as both an organization and an organism. While the organization of the church can be a collective body that operates as a tool to work toward a particular purpose, it can



also be an organism, a living thing made up of other living things that carry on the activities of life. Organization's structure, build, and promote; organisms grow, use energy, and reproduce. Both engage the world around them, and the goals as well as the impact of both entities are relevant for the church.

In the first century, the church was growing and reproducing, and it became necessary to adjust in terms of how ministry was handled. The organization needed to respond to the state of the organism. Initially, the Pastors and Apostles were teaching and preaching and praying and laying hands and feeding, essentially managing all the church duties and affairs. The apostles discovered that they were going to have to change the approach toward operations and select officers who could assist them to administrate God's business.

The congregation had changed. They were no longer in the upper room, leading a small group of believers. A consideration for leaders is the idea that in some instances doing ministry for 30, or even 120, may not continue to work when the numbers grew to 3,000. What was effective in that early stage may not necessarily be successful at this stage, and as the church was changing the Pastor's role and duties changed. Most notably, in the book of Acts 6:2, the Pastor's role and duties needed to be guarded, and the disciples had to clarify the primary role of Pastor and Apostle. It is not good that they should leave the word to settle disputes and serve tables. In other words, it was not appropriate for the apostles to spend their time managing the natural things of ministry by resolving problems and overseeing programs, risking adequate attention to the spiritual matters of prayer, preaching, and following vision for the development of the church. The disciples in the first century recognized that for them to best benefit the church, they need

to give attention to the word rather than handling day to day operations and solving every dispute.

That may be related to going to a restaurant and discovering that the person cleaning the tables, greeting, and seating guests, setting the table, taking and filling the drink order, and taking the food order was the same person who was cooking the entrees. The quality of the food's taste could assuredly be at risk, when the chef's attention was divided, managing all aspects of the diners' experience. The leaders in the first century recognized the need to appoint others over the church's business; in similar fashion, leaders in the 21st century urban church may wish to follow suit.

As the leaders in the early church indicated, the called-out body of Christ functions as a business. The Godhead provides an illustration of division of responsibility when Jesus stated I must be about my Father's business in Luke 2:49. Even at a young age Jesus acknowledged that there were administrative or structural aspects to the kingdom of God, and He had a particular role in the administration, beginning with study and engagement with others in the church regarding the word of God.

The senior pastor's role can be likened to that of a CEO. He is Chief Executive Overseer, casting vision, giving direction, delegating responsibility, and serving as the voice of God to the people of God. As illustrated by Moses who went up to Mount Sinai and came back down with a word that will give direction for the House of Israel, the CEO may want to prioritize making themselves available to spend time with God to get instructions and directions to move the entire corporation toward its success indicators. The CEO might consider positioning himself/herself to see further and beyond where the people were currently operating, to take them to where they needed to go.

The church's sole business is soul business, and its victory comes from transforming lives through the word of God. The Senior Pastor, much like a General Manager, needs tiers of people to whom he can pass things to with confidence that they will not fumble, but will run the vision to its goal line. The Senior Pastor also needs those who are blockers, who will intercept those detractions from the primary goals. The deacons appointed in Acts 6 were reputable men who were loyal, Spirit-filled, and dependable, who could be entrusted to manage the duties within the church. Some of the qualifications for leadership in the 21st century AAUC reflect those of the 1st century church, and include character, competency, and consistency.

The disciples instructed the congregation to choose individuals who are filled with the Holy Spirit. They are spiritual in posture and Spirit-led in their deeds, individuals who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Character can be of chief importance for someone who serves in the ministry. It takes time to see an individual's character, and often a person's character is not evident until they are placed in position. There are times when leaders desire positions or roles, but they may not have the character to really manage them, which is sometimes not apparent until they step into responsibility. A leader with character has the right spirit about them. They have a teachable spirit and are a team player. They diffuse situations rather than spreading division. They are a supporter rather than a saboteur, and they can receive correction with humility and determination to step up to the standard. These are all areas to assess even above skill or talent when selecting people for roles of leadership.

The apostles in the first century also stated that they needed faithful men. Leaders tend to be consistent. They are individuals who are dependable and can be counted on.

Unfaithful leaders can hurt the body and do not fully-serve their purpose in the body.

Second to character in a leader is consistency.

Finally, the disciples indicated that leaders should be full of wisdom and knowledge. It is important for the leader to have competency. Leaders should have the ability to implement what is delegated to them. They can do the work and get the job done. Leaders may not have to be actively managed and guided through every task. They should be able to catch the ball and run with it. The wisdom considered in the church includes an understanding of people, of culture, of the state of society, nuances of business strategy, and elevated levels of emotional intelligence. These individuals would be managing the distribution of resources and everything that is involved. Competency can be key in leadership roles.

The church in the first century was faced with astronomical growth and an extension of the access people had to the world. In the 21st century, through technology and social media, churches of all “sizes” have the potential to grow to hundreds of thousands of members.

The church in the first century was faced with challenges related to serving the physical needs of those in special populations, including women whose families were not intact. The men of God recognized that the church could address these needs, but also recognized that there needed to be an expansion of the team even beyond the twelve of them. They recognized that for the church to do everything it needed to do, it would need attention to spiritual matters as well as physical matters, and selected individuals who had already proven themselves to take position over their responsibilities.

In the 21st century, the AAUC is inundated with requests for resources from members in the community; as the church responds, it may wish to carefully evaluate the level of sensitivity used by leaders as they address the needs of these special populations. The church in the first century was faced with a multi-cultural, multilingual congregation, some of whose members felt the sting of discrimination. The leaders were charged to respond to the dangers of privilege, as well as traditionalism, and potential barriers to evangelism and potential church growth. The 21st century AAUC has inherited a legacy of being a partner in the fight for justice and equity for all, regardless of ethnicity or national origin. As Harris discusses, “to reimagine the original diversity in scripture and Christianity we must first problematize this socially manufactured concept of race. The Bible is chock-full of ethnic and cultural diversity an excavation of biblical history reveals that from Genesis to Revelation.”<sup>27</sup> Fluker adds to this discussion by “urging churches to reclaim the historical identity” of the AAUC and has a strategy to remain relevant to a new generation of leaders.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, the AAUC has a rich and longstanding tradition which has served the community well in many ways. However, in this age, it can be significant to reimagine the practice and personality of the AAUC, as it seeks to maintain its relevancy for a new generation which does not share allegiance to the church’s history. Just as the Jewish tradition included many elements that were valuable and sustainable based on their ability to honor God in His holiness, the AAUC has an opportunity to assess its

---

<sup>27</sup> Antipas L. Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion? How the Bible Is Good News for People of Color* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 94.

<sup>28</sup> Walter E. Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted: The Future of the Black Church in Post-Racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), EBSCOhost.

traditions and maintain those which propel the message forward, while adjusting to free itself from those which potentially alienate the individuals or people groups God is calling to be the church of today.

The church in the first century was faced with persecution from powerful forces, some of whom claimed a faith in God, and some of whom openly and boldly worshiped idols but maintained power in the society. In the 21st century, the AAUC is at war on several fronts, between those who claim to know Christ but remain silent on issues of social justice, and those who openly tout their allegiance to Satan; from those who speak their disdain about the church and its leaders in front of thousands of followers, and those caught up with the evils of violence and addiction that are neutralizing the most valuable human resources in the community; from those in power who fail to make resources readily available for the entities who are doing good, strong work in the community, to those officials who participate or cosign (often through inactivity) the conduct of their fellow officers to express their narrow views through harm of Black and Brown people at alarming rates; from the poisons of processed food and soul-snatching music, to the evils of predatory lenders and disparate health care—the AAUC is living on the battlefield. Billingsley and Morrison-Rodriguez give honor to the historical role of the AAUC and as a community leader during times of crisis, and names the disintegration of the African American family as the root of the current crisis in our community. The 21st century church may consider addressing the issue of family empowerment directly, with its leaders selected, trained, and positioned to do so.

The actions of leaders in the first century church serve as an example of leadership attributes as well as principles that inform the 21st century church as it

transitions to a ministry model and organizational structure that will meet its current needs. Lehr “defines the ways and means of maintaining focus on Christ even while responding to cultural shifts that can lead to a congregation’s demise.”<sup>29</sup> The cultural shifts of this age include social challenges like disparities in healthcare access, employment rates, median income, and educational access; exodus from churches; pandemic protocols which involve vaccination administration; food pantry expansion to fill in gaps with food insecurity; widespread drug abuse; and increased violence and partnerships with civic leaders to address it.

The staff expected to respond to the needs of the 21st century church to include men and women of character, consistency, and competency, who also have the chemistry to work on a team with others. The roles include both salaried (full-time and part-time, in recognition of the culture of workers impacted by the resignation of individuals unwilling to commit to a full-time position) and volunteer staff, with a subset of volunteers who receive a regular stipend for their work in ministry. There should be a wide array of volunteer opportunities available in the local church, so that every member can find an area to plug in and contribute to the work of their church. This includes roles for members who have limitations, such as physical and/or intellectual disabilities, remote/online membership, members aged sixty-five and older, and members with full time employment/family commitments. Due to the wide array of needs and roles in the church, it is strongly suggested that a Human Resources department is developed and implemented, with a focus on recruiting, vetting, assigning, and facilitating distribution

---

<sup>29</sup> Fred J. Lehr, *Becoming a 21st-Century Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 29.

of financial and non-financial rewards. Roles and responsibilities in the church can be assessed and addressed for each individual church congregante on a unique context.



## EFFECTIVELY PRESENTING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

The church is a nonprofit organization. Churches do not buy or sell products with the aim of maximizing net income for distribution to its members, directors, or officers, as would a for-profit organization. However, the organization of the church should be viewed as an entity which presents a product. The primary product that is served is the message of Jesus Christ. It is the message of spiritual salvation. John 14 presents the narrative where Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). He proclaimed to the Pharisees that He came to give life, and life more abundantly, and preached in the temple that The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that God loved the world so much, that He gave His only Son, that whomsoever believes shall not perish but have life everlasting, and Peter declared to the early church that there is salvation in no other and no other name given among men by which we must be saved. The purpose of Christ’s coming, and His commission to the church, is to spread the gospel of salvation through God’s Son. That message is the fundamental reason that the church exists.

It is important for pastors to know that what they do is not something that can be sold for profit. Rather, they have a product that the world desperately needs although many do not desire it, are not willing to sacrifice to obtain it and may not even know they need it. Pastors and churches do not *sell* a product, but they do *present* a product. They present the gospel message of Jesus Christ without price, the message to repent from sin and turn to God through His Son. The product is the preaching and teaching of God’s word; the bottom line is transformed and changed lives. The goal is to see people give their hearts to Christ and to dedicate themselves to His followership. As with any other

organization, whether nonprofit or for profit, those who present the product can understand it and have an unwavering commitment to present it to as many potential converts as possible.

One African American pastor in northeast Indiana explained that “his primary strategy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been continuously preaching the word of God, and teaching what he called a “solid word.” While this pastor recognized that he still needed to make adjustments in other important aspects of the ministry, including community programs and diversifying funding sources, he maintains a priority on preserving the product at his church.”<sup>30</sup> As a result, his church has not only sustained post pandemic, but is experiencing expansion as they prepare to establish a new location.

A successful presentation of the gospel message is both relatable and translatable. The message of Jesus Christ is often rejected, especially in a culture that is more in love with the world than it is with God. 2 Timothy 3:2:

But know this, that in the last days terrible times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...II Timothy 3:2

It is clear in scripture that there is a natural rejection of God’s word and the message of the church. Christ’s messengers may want to strongly evaluate the implications of this rejection and learn how to present the gospel message as effectively as possible. This includes finding the balance between diluting the message on one hand and making it more offensive (and therefore less palatable) than it needs to be, on the other.

---

<sup>30</sup> Interview with pastor, December 5, 2022.

Much of what is contained in Christ's message is offensive to a world that is becoming increasingly opposed to the Christian worldview. According to Crary, "In May, the Southern Baptist Convention reported its twelfth year of declining membership. The SBC said it had 14.8 million members in 2018, down about 192,000 from the previous year."<sup>31</sup> Messengers of Christ may not only recognize that truth, but also have the task of determining how to overcome some of the barriers to the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrating the hearts of mankind.

Paul coached his protege Timothy, planted as pastor over the church at Ephesus, to:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth...II Timothy 4:2-4.

Paul exhorts Timothy to take the time to explain the scriptures and the message of Christ, but to also realize that there will be those who do not receive the message no matter how carefully he works to make it palatable. But Paul expects for Timothy to understand the times and to know how to communicate the message as effectively as he possibly can. The same is true for senior leaders in the 21st century. There are several things that the messenger should keep in mind when presenting this most cherished product, which is the message of Christ. The message may be relatable to the listener. The message of Christ transcends race, creed, color, or culture. It is a message for all mankind. God expects for His message to be presented in such a manner that all hearers

---

<sup>31</sup> David Crary, "Share of Americans with No Religious Affiliation Growing," AP News, October 19, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/us-news-ap-top-news-reinventing-faith-religion-christianity-35bd96f6beccc4cdeb191392a58ebdc2e>.

can relate. This is a principle the apostle Paul teaches in I Corinthians 9:19-22, for though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Paul, who was raised in a strict orthodox Jewish family, was not only successful in presenting his message to Jews but also to Gentiles and members of various people groups. He was able to win thousands of people who were not Jewish for the cause of Christ, and to establish churches that would stand the test of time. Paul was used by God to go into Gentile nations and influence people to give their lives to Christ. He had to learn new languages, cultures, and customs to ensure his message was received.

Christianity was neither popular nor was it prominent in the first century. It was quite new, seen as strange by the Greeks and rejected by the Romans. Still, Paul was able to prioritize the necessary principles to make the message relatable to people in cultures wherein he was unfamiliar; today's leaders have the same task.

When Jesus established the church, it was with the intention that His disciples would carry His message and ministry further. His ministry was primarily in the nation of Israel, but he intended that it not just be local, or even national, but international. When Jesus said that he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, John 14:12. He was referring to the work of spreading the gospel worldwide. After His resurrection, Jesus gave what is known as the Great

Commission to his disciples: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Furthermore, in Acts 1:8, He told the apostles that they shall be His witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the entire world. The apostles were slow to go and carry that message out unto the ends of the earth and remained within their silos, so God allowed the persecution which led to a dispersion of Jewish people into Gentile territory. As a result of the traumatic experience, Christians were forced into new territory where God used them to further advance His message outside of Jerusalem and Judea.

In the same way that persecution pushed the disciples out of their comfort zone, it seems as if the pandemic pushed the AAUC out of its comfort zone. Many AAUC were slow to embrace the new methods and approaches many of their AWSC churches had already adopted, such as shorter worship services, multi-site campuses, teaching style on Sunday morning, use of streaming services, and establishment of social media pages to spread the word across the world. Feedback from confidential interviews, the hesitation to update processes was due to lack of resources, including team members with required expertise, supplies, equipment, and/or finances to acquire the same. Another leader shared that little attention was placed on streaming or other online services due to the priority placed on attracting members and guests to the physical campus.<sup>32</sup> Finally, traditional styles of preaching, teaching, and corporate worship often persist in the AAUC context, including leadership boards that did not support the senior pastor's recommendations to update processes. For these reasons, many AAUC struggled to shift and present change within their church prior to the pandemic.

---

<sup>32</sup> Interviews with pastors, November-December 20, 2022.

In the post-pandemic age, such changes are considered to effectively communicate the product of salvation through relationship with Jesus Christ. The product was made clear by God through His Son during His earthly and post-resurrection ministry, and it should remain focal centuries later in this post-pandemic age.

Churches, when not intentional about the product, can easily become complacent and get caught up in “Christian Cliques,” failing to seek new converts and prioritizing comfort over commission. Church members can isolate themselves into spiritual silos and deprioritize the work of sharing Jesus. Those who are saved can be taught and discipled and may have their spiritual needs met through ministry; however, the church cannot fail to seek and to save the lost. Each Christian has a sphere of influence that includes family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, business associates, and even casual acquaintances who can receive the gospel message through the witness of the church. Many AAUC have made a habit of ministering to those who are already within the Christian community. After interviews from several pastors it was gathered that observation reinforces the truth that many churches are built with the intent and design to strictly focus on attracting people who are already saved.<sup>33</sup> These congregations seek to attract those from other congregations instead of seeking to attract those who are outside of the body of believers. Some churches have come to depend on growth through transfer as opposed to growth through transformation. Rainer states, “many churches found people in the neighborhood

---

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with several pastors, from November-December 20, 2022.

who were longing for a connection with the church who's familiar with the building they knew but whose people they did not often encounter."<sup>34</sup>

It can be necessary to welcome those who are already saved and have experience in ministry who can help disciple members while they develop ministries in the church. While this transfer growth is not bad, it may miss God's purposes if it replaces transformative growth. God's priority is on people who have never been introduced to Christ hearing the message, accepting Christ as Savior and Lord, and being ingrafted into the family tree.

Not only should the message be relatable, but also translatable. The world appears to be becoming increasingly diverse; but the reality is that the ever-present diversity is becoming more visible with our increased access to people all over the world. Through developing technology, the world has just become smaller, and people from a wide scope of backgrounds are more touchable than ever. Leaders in the AAUC may realize that the messages shared on Sunday are not just seen and heard from those who are within the four walls, but to a much broader audience. African American urban ministers should strongly consider the way they present the message of Christ in a diverse landscape. According to Bryson, "Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches have moved completely into the digital space, where people from all over the world can stream the services and hear the messages."<sup>35</sup> According to Bryson work leaders should consider

---

<sup>34</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges + Opportunities that Will Determine the Future of your Congregation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Ministries, 2020), 41, Kindle.

<sup>35</sup> Bryson, John R et al. "COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home." *Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 111, no. 3 (2020): 360-372. doi:10.1111/tesg.12436.

how their churches message is being conveyed to people in other parts of the world. Key considerations include the addition of translators to the ministry team, who can share the message in various languages to grant access to people in other nations.

The Potter's House is in Dallas, Texas, has an international reach. Senior Pastor Bishop T.D. Jakes and his team are leading the way in including translators in their worship services, both in-house and online. Bishop Jakes' messages are being translated in multiple languages, which allows viewers/listeners the ability to understand what is being shared, but also to appreciate the efforts to make the message translatable. The urban pastor and church may consider planning for more than a local audience, but also for a global one, as they strategize methods for spreading God's word. At New Direction Church community events, the team has developed a better understanding of the population frequenting the events. The Community Outreach Ministry now uses signage in English and in Spanish to ensure that many attendees are receiving intended messages when they attend the ministry events.

There are several businesses who had products that were in demand at one point in history, but their failure to shift to meet the changing demands in their respective markets led to those businesses closing permanently. Pacific Theaters in California closed due to the pandemic, and later announced that it would not open due to an inability to identify a way to move forward in their industry. On the contrary, Paramount Pictures Corporation shifted and began to make their message and product and films available to customers who could stay at home and stream their movies.<sup>36</sup> Their message moved

---

<sup>36</sup> Ryan Faughnder. "Pacific and ArcLight Theaters Will Not Reopen After the Pandemic, Company Says," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment->



beyond brick-and-mortar buildings and adjusted to their audience's lifestyle, leading to survival of the pandemic and long-term viability.

Businesses like Pacific are no longer around because they were not able to make the proper changes or adjustments to stay competitive or relevant. Blockbuster Video, Venture Discount Stores, Sears Department Stores, are additional examples of chains who were not able to compete in their markets and subsequently ceased operations. If the church is to be effective, it may want to consider the lessons apparent in the experiences of these businesses.

PepsiCo, Inc is one of the largest food and beverage companies in the world.

According to Encyclopedia.com:

The first Pepsi-Cola was created in 1898, and Pepsi Cola Company was incorporated in 1902. PepsiCo has reorganized, improved chemical balancing, developed creative sales promotions, and acquired such companies as Loft, Inc, and Frito-Lay, Inc. as well as popular restaurant chains Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. The history of PepsiCo, Inc is an inspiring story of countless nuances of growth moves both within and outside of the United States, anticipating and/or responding to everything from movements in the health consciences of people to packaging from glass bottles to aluminum cans. Over their 100+ year history, the identifiable contents of the Pepsi product have not changed, but the containers and sales strategies and promotion have evolved over time. They have changed the packaging time and again, but they have not changed the product. So it is for the church; while the methods may progress, the message must be maintained.<sup>37</sup>

People in this age are managing information differently, so the presentation and communication should adjust accordingly. People are sending and receiving messages in 40 characters or less through various texting platforms; they are receiving nuggets of

---

arts/business/story/2021-04-12/pacific-and-arclight-theaters-will-not-reopen-following-the-pandemic-company-says.

<sup>37</sup> Encyclopedia.com, "PepsiCo, Inc.," accessed December 18, 2022, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/economics-business-and-labor/businesses-and-occupations/pepsico-inc>.

messages in the form of reels through Instagram and Tik Tok; and they are streaming services while at home completing chores or producing at their places of employment. If the message is presented in a way that fits into the target audience's hectic schedules and busy lives, its impact increases. The churches that understand how to move in this digital space are the ones that can survive and continue to thrive. This moment suggests that senior pastors see themselves more as a coach than a lecturer, someone who is there to steer people in the right direction by sharing encouraging and inspiring messages using the language of the everyday people and present a short lesson with a hands-free microphone. Similar personalities on sites such as YouTube are attracting subscribers by the millions to consume their content, in the age of the YouTube pastor and the life coach pastor. People do not just want access to the church's product on Sundays in worship services, but they want to be able to access them Monday through Saturday even as they participate in other activities. The pastors that understand the need to reinvent themselves in this hour are the pastors and churches that can be more effective. The pastors of the AACU and the church itself would do well to make this pivot and shift in a new digital age.

During an interview with a pastor from Indianapolis shared "that his preaching and teaching is thriving in this season. The pastor explained "the COVID-19 pandemic helped him become a better homiletics pastor, as he obtained certification as a life coach which expanded his ability to make persuasive presentations and effective pitches. As he travels across the country as a consultant, he recommended that all pastors get

certification in coaching to become stronger orators who are able to reach more diverse audiences.”<sup>38</sup>

Traditionally, many people come to know Christ on Sunday mornings. These are the hours of operation within which a large portion of people shop for the church’s product. However, it is also important to note that people in the 21st century do not just tune in on Sunday or travel to brick-and-mortar locations to receive the product; rather, they are also “shopping” on media outlets such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and the like, even throughout the week. “Nearly half of Black adults (47%) who participated in church during the pandemic said the experience made them more open to digital church.”<sup>39</sup> In this post-pandemic world, there are several available platforms which allow church leaders to present Christ and the churches message (product) in new ways, to assure its viability for the future. The Production segment of this work will further explore various platforms and how to maximize their use.

At New Direction Church, Facebook and YouTube are used to stream services. The Facebook congregation engagement is higher than the YouTube engagement. Many of the viewers on Facebook will respond just as they would at a typical church service. YouTube engagement is lower. Many of these viewers are not watching from their phones. They are casting the service to the television so the family can watch the service together. Tracking attendance via Facebook and YouTube is extremely difficult since it cannot be determined how many family members are watching the service the way you can in the physical building.

---

<sup>38</sup> Interview with pastor, December 2, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Barna, *Trends in the Black Church*.

## EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES FOR CHURCH OPERATIONS

There are Twenty First Century companies using structured business processes to keep their operations organized and consistent across teams. The processes facilitate the company reaching its goals. Business processes are important because they help ensure that the operation of any organization is conducted effectively in pursuit of its vision, and that team members are held accountable as the organization gauges its activity. Processes enable leaders to analyze determinants of organizational success, and to measure the effectiveness of decisions to course correct as needed. Process helps with the development of new employees and volunteers and guides them in carrying out their assignments.

The local church, like any organization, should have clearly defined and outlined processes to support the mission and vision of the body. These processes can be maintained in an accessible and comprehensive format so that leaders, staff, and volunteers can learn and implement them in their various spaces. In the post-pandemic urban church, having key processes in place may often distinguish between thriving churches, surviving churches, and those churches that lose their ability to remain relevant and ensure future viability in the community.

The term mechanics refers to the technical side of how things work and operate. So often consumers see things happen but have no concept of the strategy behind how they happen; this phenomenon is also apparent with the church. Consider the ministry of Jesus Christ. So many believers have studied Jesus' ministry but fail to ruminate over the mechanics involved. What He did may be readily apparent, but the analysis of how He did what He did often remains unattended. Deliberation over His miracles often miss

nuances of the point He was advancing or the lesson He intended to teach. Each time Jesus performed a miracle there was an accompanying message, but there were also mechanics or technicalities behind the miracle that in themselves are worthy of contemplation. There can be something deeper to observe that informs priorities related to ministry implementation. Jesus was intentional; anytime He did something it was not just about that one thing. Rather, everything He did consisted of more that could be examined and explored.

In feeding the five thousand (not counting women and children), Jesus performs a miracle by taking a little and using it to meet a great need. To make this miracle happen there would have to be a sacrifice made. The boy saw the need he was young and wasn't a disciple but He saw what Jesus was trying to do and so he sacrificed his lunch so that Jesus can minister to more people and feed the multitude. The little boy is the one who makes the first sacrifice. He is willing to give so ministry can go forward. The ministry operates off the giving and contributions of those who sacrifice and give of their substance. The disciples had to make some sacrifices. They are watching everyone else eat while they are helping to assist them in being fed. The others are being fed while they are assisting Jesus with feeding them.

Ministry is not spiritual without practical principles to execute. This miracle could've easily have been performed Jesus is God in human flesh, but he gave those who were present an opportunity to participate and give toward ministry and to something greater than themselves. Giving is about an opportunity for you to give to God and to make some sacrifices in order to be a part of ministry and be a part of Jesus working and operating and blessing others. The disciples to understand this they were reluctant to

give, and they wanted the people to go away but this boy gave his gift. As we grow it should become less about what we get from God and more about what God wants to get from us. In the process, He teaches the disciples a lesson about leadership and member care; He teaches the little boy a lesson about the rewards of sacrificial giving; and He teaches the crowd a lesson about getting their needs met at the hand of Jesus Christ. He's maturing his disciples to see the importance of helping and assisting with getting them to see the importance of ministry. Ministry is not just the message but it also involves meeting the needs of the people so that they can better receive the message and see the message in real time. He is doing multiple things with messages, methodology and mechanics in a singular event, and leaders in the church may do well to be similarly intentional in all ministry activity. Every Sunday and Wednesday those who are involved in ministry are assisting the pastor in helping the people who come to church to be fed.

One of the roles as the pastor is to go before the Father and take two fish and loaves and pray over it and ask God to bless it, then break it, then pass it out to those who are in ministry online and on the ground to assist to help make sure that everybody gets a piece. The disciples had Jesus to themselves they had access to him they would have personal devotion time with Jesus and receive the word and prayer. In this instance the disciples would have to make sacrifices so others could get some of what they always had.

In the 21st century post-pandemic age, any given week the urban church is tasked to implement Sunday worship services in a manner that promotes and supports the message going forth. However, it should also consider hosting such classes as those to help people cope with grief and loss and addiction recovery. It may support a wellness

ministry to educate on the benefits of fitness and nutrition, as well as a ministry to assist and sustain businesses that benefit the community. There is a call on the urban church to provide a food pantry that can help provide for people's felt needs, and a system of referring those in need to other community resources. It can also build and support a youth and young adult ministry to provide a community focused on the growth and development of members and seekers aged thirteen to thirty-five years of age. Ministries to disciple and reinforce the valuable contributions of men, women, and senior citizens in addition to couples and families are all needed through the local church, not to mention all that pertains to supporting the operation of these ministry groups.

This concept of ministry mechanics is best illustrated by a closer look at the feeding of the five thousand. The gospel of John records the miracle as such: After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee which is the Sea of Tiberias.

Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nearby. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, where shall we buy bread, that these may eat? But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many? Then Jesus said, make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So, the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks. He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So, when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost. Therefore, they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten in John Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, this is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world (John 6:1-14).

The miracle and the ministry would be executed to deliver a message about methods and mechanics. The disciples' first response was to send the people away to attend to their own needs, but Jesus provided an ideal demonstration of ministry implementation. The young boy made a sacrifice, showing his willingness to give what he had so ministry could go forward. Churches operate off the contributions of those who give of their substance. Jesus chose to make provision for many community members by initiating it with a sacrifice, to illustrate how ministry to others should present itself. Ministry is not just supernatural, but by God's design it also requires substance. Jesus is God in human flesh and could just as easily have commanded that manna fall from Heaven to feed this crowd.

Instead, He gave those who were present an opportunity to participate and give toward something greater than themselves. God wanted the disciples—then and now—to understand this principle, as they were reluctant to give what they had in response to the identified need. In ministry, whether it is sacrifice of one's time, talent, or treasure, there must be an offering for the needs of the community to be met. As disciples grow and mature, their participation in ministry should become less about what they can get from God and more about what God will get from them.

The young boy made a sacrifice and gave materially, but the disciples had to make sacrifices of a slightly different nature. They were required to execute the distribution of the food, leading, and watching everyone else eat before they were able to partake. Church leaders and ministry members are responsible for serving others prior to serving themselves, and do so by hosting events that address needs within the community beyond the strictly spiritual ones to which the preacher-teacher attends on Sunday



mornings. This miracle was executed in a manner that involved a strategy to respond to the need. Then, as now, there was a system established and operated to get the food to those who needed it. There was division of labor amongst the disciples, and there was organization of the people.

The plan was conceived and communicated by Jesus Christ, and the vision realization occurred through the hands, feet, and minds of the disciples. Each disciple and leader had a particular role and was required to execute with excellence for the vision to become reality, which is instructive for the fashioning of ministry in the urban post-pandemic church. Throughout any given year God will use the church to respond to the needs of the people, even with limited resources and short turn-around times. People of God are not only tools for ministry, but technicians designed to help carry out the ministry and the work of the church.

Prior to the execution of the miracle, the ministers (servants) were selected and in place. Jesus called Peter from fishing and when he did he gave him such a huge catch of fish that he had to share some of the fish he had caught and Jesus said I will make a fisher if men. Now Peter who is a fisher of men is not fishing for fish he's fishing for men. He's sharing fish in a different kind of way. He's now passing out fish to hungry men and women and their families full time. Jesus did not choose the twelve after identifying the need but instead had the twelve in place prior to engaging the community for ministry. The twelve were a diverse group with a scope of skills, predispositions, experience, and knowledge levels, with close access to Jesus and the lessons He would teach. The twelve were in position to experience the messages from Jesus, but also to behold illustrations of true ministry executed in real time.

Similarly, in the 21st century church, senior pastors should consider assembling teams whose attributes complement one another and present a spectrum of abilities, and have an executive team or committee prepared to respond to the needs of the community as God makes them apparent. It is often presumed that Jesus was just a nomadic sage walking around with no system and no structure. On the contrary, Jesus' team includes a treasurer (Judas, John 12:6); an accountant (Matthew, Matthew 10:3); an armor bearer (Peter, John 18:3-10); a youth minister (John, the youngest disciple of record); and a resource manager (Andrew, John 6:8-9), to name just a few. Jesus had identified and positioned disciples who could execute per their giftedness and skill areas, and they were available to be used in ministry. There were leaders of the groups and of the teams and as they served others there were groups of fifties and hundreds and he sat them down in ranks (Mark 6:40).

This demonstrates there was structure he had the apostles who could also be described as team leaders in ministry leaders oversee various groups of people and he had them set up and structured. It is notable how many gifts given to the body of Christ, later identified by Paul in his epistles to the churches, are in operation for this miracle. The spiritual gifts include Helps, Administration, Faith, Compassion, and Leadership by the apostles (I Corinthians 12:8-9, 28), as well as Giving by the young boy (Romans 12:8). Paul describes the gifts as being varied (Romans 12:4), co-equal (I Corinthians 12:4-5) and purposed for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12), all of which are on display for this miracle. Jesus is actively demonstrating the methodology and impact of the church in the community.

This crowd had traveled to hear Jesus' message, but their felt need became a potential barrier to their reception of kingdom principles. Jesus' team was poised, positioned, and available to address those felt needs. Furthermore, meeting the needs of the crowd is a key aspect of the message itself. While Jesus' primary mission was to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10), He communicated that message during His earthly ministry through signs and wonders that addressed physical needs (see Mark 2:5-12). Moreover, Jesus came to serve (Matthew 20:26-28) and taught the disciples that this must not only be their priority but is the very way through which they demonstrate their love for Him (John 21:15-17).

All the disciples played a part in carrying out the work. There are tiers of disciples defined during Jesus' earthly ministry that are likely deployed to meet needs in this community. The scripture defines the twelve (Mark 6:6), the seventy (Luke 10:1-2), and the one hundred twenty (Acts 1:12-15) who were activated in various ways to carry the message of Christ and His kingdom come. In Mark, the earliest account written, it is noted that Jesus directs that the people are divided into ranks of fifty and one hundred to be served (Mark 6:14-15), creating fifty-to-one hundred groups of men (not counting women and children) prepared to partake.

The feeding of the five thousand provides a multi-faceted and multi-layered illustration of ministry in action. Jesus as the Senior Pastor shares vision with core leaders, who then turn around and implement the ministry of service to the community. The message in this account is not just the miracle; the principles, priorities, and processes involved in ministry are defined for the student of scripture to clearly receive.

Leaders in the 21st century AAUC can extrapolate a great deal from this account in the scriptures. It exemplifies how to prioritize (1) the message of Christ extending to the community; (2) leaders exercising compassion; (3) leaders addressing felt needs; (4) delegating tasks to tiered leadership; (5) members of the congregation giving sacrificially; and (6) leaders implementing ministry in a strategic, ordered, and effective fashion. Christ also models dedicating resources to God before putting them to use, delayed gratification for those involved in leadership, and even avoiding waste by exercising appropriate stewardship over resources after they are used for a ministry event. Furthermore, as the disciples served the crowd, they had opportunity to witness to what had occurred and the provision made for them by the Son of God on this occasion. A crowd this size would not have witnessed the boy, the lunch, or any of Jesus' conversation. As they were reeling from their own encounter with Jesus' show of power, the disciples would have used this opportunity to share the great things that the Messiah had done in their lives. As they were ministering to physical needs, ministry to spiritual needs would be just as active.

In the post-pandemic urban church, it is suggested that processes in ministry be established, employed, and evaluated on a routine basis to honor Jesus' demonstration of how the church best operates. Processes are recommended not only for the execution of worship services each week, but also for the supplemental services that Christ calls upon the church to provide outside of preaching and teaching ministry. The principles are carried further in the model of the early church introduced in the first century after Christ's ascension. Processes for the 21st century church include, but are not limited to,

those summarized in the following list, many of which will be explored in greater detail in other portions of this study:

- Disciple recruitment, training, deployment and management, to consist of culture management; guest services, to include celebration of potential new members visiting on campus or online; marketing/promotion/communication services; facility and grounds care; guidelines for conduct of church representatives during hours of operation; definition of core team roles; training of leadership; introduction of members to the church ministry teams; new member intake; periodic all-volunteer training sessions; membership data collection and maintenance; assimilation team schedule of member care and contact, beginning with three touches the first week of membership and continuing-at minimum-through the first quarter.
- Disciple development, including new member training in church doctrine, church mission/vision, and member/disciple responsibilities; introduction to key leadership; digital/on the ground training in specific ministry functionality and responsibilities defined for each ministry.
- Leadership identification, vetting, coaching, assignment, accountability, and effectiveness checks, to consisting of leadership training series at least annually; leadership check-in sessions; senior leadership coaching sessions; succession planning.
- Human Resources Management, consisting of defined full-time/part-time employment positions; written job descriptions; current organizational chart reviewed on a minimum monthly basis; screening, onboarding, training,

competitive compensation/benefits models, and evaluation methods; time tracking.

- Member care and response systems, to include electronic member information delivery, family crisis intervention, life event support processes (wedding, funeral, hospitalization, long-term illness, childbirth/child dedication), pastoral counseling scheduling; care/cell group model of fellowship, relationship building, knowledge development, and personal accountability; member tracking process that consists of evaluation of attendance, individual giving, benevolence receipt, and ministry participation.
- Worship service/ministry event preparation and execution methodology, including published/maintained calendar of activity; defined operations leadership personnel; pre-published run of show reports that include names and roles of participants, attendance tracking; hourly activity schedule, facility/equipment usage, contingency plans, and event approval workflows.
- Community outreach and service provision model, based on community needs survey and church congregation mission/niche, and to include seasonal community care events; application and screening processes for crisis intervention services such as emergency food/housing/mental healthcare/domestic disputes/complications with justice-involved procedures; provisions for community elevation, to consist of financial literacy/educational/employment connection, grief support, addiction recovery support.
- Member/visitor safety and security protocols, to include combination external/internal security monitoring and oversight scheduling; building walk-

through; annual emergency response training for staff, ministry, congregation, and community.

- Financial structure which consists of functional committee (e.g., Chief Finance Officer; Bookkeeper; Accountant; Grants Manager; Assistant Grant Writers; Assistant Financial Officers); annual budget submission with quarterly review; funds procurement process.
- Ministry development, oversight, and deployment model, including annual review of all established church ministries and their participation, activity, relevance, effectiveness, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, continuity, recruitment, retention, and reward systems.
- Administrative oversight system, to include church board, bylaws, articles of incorporation, policy manual, and unifying faith/vision/mission statements; administrative director, facility hours of operation, operations attendants; supplies procurement, inventory, and fixed asset control program; contractor database and maintenance schedule; member/visitor databases, attendance, incoming/outgoing telecommunication records; community asset, partnership, and referral database.
- Online campus support, to include dedicated personnel; worship service planning, run of show preparation; virtual ministry activity, member support, disciple-making, social media/website/mobile app maintenance; virtual support of all ministries and events in partnership with audio-visual team.

Leaders should strongly consider documenting the forgoing processes in readily accessible standard operating procedures (SOPs), including a digital library of every role

and training procedures for all functions. The digital library provides an opportunity for remote/on-demand training in all ministry areas.

Built into the churches processes should be a way to measure outcomes. Every aspect of the organization's activity should have a system of evaluation built into it, to gather and analyze its respective data. Metrics can necessarily evolve based on the adjustment in systems required in this age. For example, a pastor interviewed from central Ohio defined the measurements utilized to evaluate outcomes as "an area of needed change in the post-pandemic era. The objectives associated with effectiveness in ministry will have to change, as well as the measurement or standard of membership. In the new era, absence from in-person worship for so many consecutive days can no longer be a measure of membership."<sup>40</sup>

One key consideration in the measurement of outcomes is a shared definition of ministry success. Without articulating it in the presence of key stakeholders, senior leadership cannot assume that said stakeholders are fully aware of what a win looks like in any given aspect of ministry. Elder Mark Moore, Jr., founder of the Young Leaders Conference, provides an expansive scope of training for ministry leaders worldwide. "One concept he promotes as being essential to growth is that of clarifying the win, so that all leaders in the congregation can aim for the same targets and train their team members to do the same."<sup>41</sup> Measuring outcomes should involve an evaluation of the results, which rest on notions of the desired end result. In the context of the urban church, wins for a Sunday worship event might include full attendance in the building as well as

---

<sup>40</sup> Interview with pastor on November 28, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Moore, "Midweek Check In" February 2, 2023, YouTube video, 2:44:09, <https://youtu.be/qtdo2VaxqrA>.



on online streaming platforms; maximum participation of youth in children's ministry; a defined number of new members dedicating themselves to the ministry at the time of invitation to discipleship; and possibly a target amount as far as church contributions.

New Direction Church recently began the process of including success definition as part of ongoing training for operations leaders. As part of the review of ministry execution for the prior month and ministry planning for the following month, success metrics are articulated for the leadership team. For New Direction, success metrics include capacity seating for in person worship; online attendance that exceeds the prior week; at least ten souls added to the congregation's membership, whether online or in person; the Children's Church ministry to youth ages infant to twelve years filled to capacity in each classroom; worship service concluding at ninety minutes or less; no one leaving the building having been distracted from the message of the day, as evidenced by interruptions during the sermon presentation; and guests invited, welcomed, and celebrated, as evidenced by reported interactions with first time attendees for worship service. With the metrics in mind, leaders are better equipped to strategize as it pertains to ministry training, ministry assignments, and ministry instruction during any given worship service.

## PRODUCTION AND CORPORATE WORSHIP SERVICES

The post-pandemic age is filled with an unending barrage of information, with myriad opportunities to receive education, entertainment, and engagement. The world is officially in the digital age. God expects for the church to pivot properly during this moment in history, to carry out the Christian commission to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” Matthew 28:19. There is a digital revival taking place, wherein God has thrust the church into unknown areas which requires an adjustment to the way His message is presented to the masses. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift in the execution of worship experiences wherein each church has an opportunity to assess their ability to become a production studio of sorts. This review of systems serves to help the church remain relevant, accessible, and viable as a source of a life-changing message to the target audience of those who are saved and those who are seeking. In the post-pandemic era, every Sunday features a standing hybrid event taking place during worship hours across the world.

When the pandemic began and restrictions were placed on all public gatherings, many churches were not equipped to present their services online. This was new territory, which “90% of the pastors interviewed stated that they were not prepared for the total shift to the digital space, and 100% of pastors indicated that the online ministry offerings were what had changed the most in their ministry strategy. Finally, 100% of pastors also

indicated that ministry in the digital space was an area in which they will continue to build in the future as they see more and more people attending online.”<sup>42</sup>

Churches that had substantial attendance in person began to stagger under the challenge of how to maintain the engagement of the membership as well as the greater community. 63% of survey respondents from AAUC indicated that their in-person attendance has decreased from pre-pandemic numbers, and 69% indicated that online attendance has slightly or significantly increased post-pandemic. Providing a worship experience which was adequately appealing, and which effectively promoted the message over the airways, was a mighty feat. Some churches were able to decrease the regular operating budget substantially, and re-allocate funds to focus on essential workers, equipment, materials, and supplies for the digital space on a weekly basis.

Even when operating in the digital space, pastors and church leaders do still have the responsibility to balance the importance of utilizing the physical sanctuary to present worship services. Leaders should see the space that has been consecrated for corporate worship as a stage to the world, as their opportunity to use their literal platforms to make the church go global. When New Direction Church turned to fully online worship services in 2020, the membership was energized with a campaign entitled Make Christ Go Viral, as everyone connected to the body was encouraged to get involved, to join, worship, like, and share every online experience from New Direction Church.

The campaign not only reflected the terminology trending at the time due to the coronavirus infection spreading worldwide; it also played on the word used to describe the phenomenon when virtual content amasses a large number of views in a short time

---

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

period. This catchy phrasing allowed members to rally around a common theme with a sense of purpose that was not diminished by the restrictions on physical gathering. It demonstrated a rapid pivot to advance the vision for the church despite the circumstances and sought to impress upon members and friends that this congregation was prepared to continue its work for, with, and through God regardless of the shift in methodology.

With this online campaign, New Direction was able to minister to the membership and keep them engaged, even while expanding its reach beyond the geographic region. People all over the world - with all the fear, uncertainty, isolation, illness, and trauma brought on by this historic and tragic event - were able to hear from God through the worship services lighting up the cyberspace from New Direction's campus in Indianapolis, IN.

New Direction Church, like many other churches, discovered that the church needed to create and hire an entire production team to be effective in that season. Positions that had previously seemed optional or extraneous became essential. One of the first things added was the role of Production Director. The Production Director is responsible for identifying, coordinating, and implementing all the required aspects of a production.

One of the priorities of the Production Director is to identify and document Standard Operating Procedures for an entire worship service from beginning to end. These procedures would include defining the personnel required for the worship experience, including in house greeters, ushers, musicians, altar workers, prayer warriors, security personnel, sound technicians, videographers, photographers, visual assistants, online administrator, online greeters, online altar workers. It is important to determine

which of the positions are paid positions, and which are volunteer positions. Some churches have found it advantageous to train and deploy audio visual personnel from the congregation rather than creating paid staff positions for each essential team member. However, leaders may strongly consider outsourcing the production management to a reliable company. Outsourcing serves to provide a more consistent and higher level of service in this area and allows for greater accountability.

Additional production components include (1) visual aids for the screens, both in house and online, such as flyers for upcoming ministry events, images for the sermon, lyrics to music; (2) defined time blocks for equipment set up, j, visual check, personnel placement; (3) defined time blocks for each aspect of the program, from opening welcome and invocation through to the benediction; and (4) established communication systems for key leaders inhouse and online. While historically this type of planning has been seen as lacking regard for the movement of the Holy Spirit, the contrary is true in the 21st century urban church.

Members and visitors both in house and online are part of a society that is growing more and more technological. A study completed several years ago by the Economic Times identified that technology has an “adverse effect on attention spans and defines “popcorn brain” as the result of the constant stimulation received from a never-ending stream of information found on the internet. This phenomenon makes people less able to handle the slower pace of life, and/or to remain attentive to anything for long periods of time.<sup>43</sup> Church leaders can potentially use this information to adapt worship

---

<sup>43</sup> Economic Times, “Technology Addiction: Check Out The Perpetual Influx Of New Technologies In Our Lives,” India Times, January 13, 2018,

service plans to the culture shift by being more intentional about each moment of the worship experience and being particularly attentive to protecting the congregation's ability to receive the preached word of God.

Relatedly, the Production Director will ensure that all equipment in use for the worship experience has an accessible operation manual, so that unplanned shifts in personnel do not lead to an inability to move forward with the worship experience. Equipment includes, but is not limited to, microphones, sound boards, switcher boards, cameras, mounts, speakers, computers, LED screens, and stage lights. The sound equipment is a priority over some of the visual equipment, particularly with the online audience. People may be more likely to endure average camera quality if the audio is good but may be less likely to endure poor audio despite the camera quality.

When the pandemic began and the assembly restrictions were announced worldwide, many AAUC were not equipped to present their services online. This was new territory. Even some churches that previously had high attendance numbers were struggling with how to keep their members engaged and to present their worship services at a high level. Churches soon discovered that a more developed production team was essential to worshipping during the pandemic.

While considering a full production with a sound, video, and tech team, may not seem fitting for a Sunday worship service, it is aligned with how God presented the gospel. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century since there are many technological advances, to reach a broader group of people, such as television, streaming platforms, and radio and podcasting, the church can reach a multitude of people at the same time. The presentation

of Jesus' life, crucifixion, and resurrection was a production. Jesus' story is presented continuously; it remains relevant, and never loses its power. Old Testament prophecies about Christ serve as trailers to the coming Messiah.

When Christ arrived on the scene, the world was presented with various acts and scenes of His life from the beautiful miracle of His birth to His earthly ministry of teaching by word, deed, signs, and wonders. The gospel writers are meticulous with detailing Jesus' life and ministry from slightly varying perspectives, as Jesus is presented to all as a person with whom mankind can identify and all can aspire to be. The account of His earthly ministry culminates in betrayal, tragedy, and the victorious triumph of the resurrection. Witnesses to these events observe an exhibition that not only aligns with the theatrical, but also brings into existence a kingdom that had not fully been introduced prior to Christ's incarnation.

The crucifixion occurred Passover weekend, the time Jews celebrated God's deliverance of His people out of Egypt by causing the death angel to pass over their ancestral houses in honor of the blood of the lamb. A lamb was sacrificed and slain, and His blood was placed over the door post and because of the shed blood of that lamb the sentence of death was removed. That celebration was the context God chose to complete the earthly ministry of His only Son in the ultimate world-altering production.

Numerous books and movies have been produced about Jesus' incarnation, life, ministry, miracles, death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus' story is presented from its attention-grabbing beginning through to a grand crescendo that would ensure His story is retold again and again; a well-scripted production with every detail planned just so.

There was no accident, no coincidence, and no happenstance. God spent time orchestrating things and moving things all around so that all these things might come to pass per His design. It was a very intentional effort on the part of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. If God was so intentional and meticulous about presenting His Son to the world all those centuries ago, those who are the handlers of His story can put as much intentionality as possible in telling that story to audiences in the current age.

The culture is starting to shift away from in-person worship. There is a trend in the number of people attending church online. People now have the ability to stay at home, avoid getting groomed or dressed or commuting, and still take part in a worship experience. Add to this the matter of rising gas prices, and the continued health concerns with which some people still grapple since COVID-19 remains a threat for those with certain underlying diagnoses and co-morbidities. Maintaining online worship as their alternative of choice for church participation is something many people have opted to do, and they are doing more frequently. In fact, many people see the church as akin to supermarket shopping: they stop in when they feel like they absolutely have to, but they mostly stay home and watch worship services through online streaming.

One Caucasian pastor of a church in a northern suburb of Indianapolis indicated “that while, technically, more people are coming to worship services and ministry events in person, they are coming less often. He went on to explain that it is because of the worldwide impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic that congregation members are more cautious about coming to the building. “They take more care and consideration in



deciding what is or is not worth it when it comes to traveling to and for an in-person ministry event.”<sup>44</sup>

Churches in this age are challenged with finding ways to be innovative while attracting members to worship and serve in person, even while recognizing that having an online presence allows the church to tap into the Kingdom to a greater extent than does focusing on a particular location. To quote the 2021 article by Cooper, “The digital realm as a thread of the universe leads to rethinking of the church as a social, digital and physical unity.”<sup>45</sup>

The AAUC can evolve in communicating its message to include a wider international digital audience if it is going to be effective. The church may begin to see that every Sunday there is a hybrid event taking place. There is not only the congregation on the ground that is seen, but an online audience that is unseen. One of the mistakes some AAUC make is giving more attention to the in-person attendees on Sunday morning and neglecting to accommodate the needs of its online audience. The reality is that many more people will stream services during and after the service has aired than who come into the building. Understanding this should cause pastors and churches to give equal attention to their online audience as they do to the audience in the building. “Fluidity between the physical and digital representation in a worship environment enriches the complementarity of the particular and the universal further.”<sup>46</sup> A failure to

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview with pastor, December 11, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony Paul-Cooper, et al., “The Reconfiguration of Social, Digital, and Physical Presence: From Online Church to Church Online,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 77, no. 3, (2021): e1–e9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i3.6286/>.

<sup>46</sup> Paul-Cooper, et al., “The Reconfiguration of Social, Digital, and Physical Presence.”

evolve in terms of messaging has caused some AAUC to become less relevant and to suffer the consequences of less frequent engagement.

In this hybrid space, there is the concern for churches to ensure that Sunday corporate worship service runs like a well-orchestrated television show with varying angles, great audio, and high-quality camera footage. The pastor and leaders in the AACU might not just think local but also global in terms of how God wants His message to be shared. Key questions to consider include which ministry opportunities require a translator who can share the message in various languages; the acceptable length of worship services to keep the online attendees engaged; and how many live worship opportunities or satellite locations are needed. Sunday morning is a production and everything that comes from the church now is a production. Even the outreach events at the church must be executed as productions, hence the importance of an experienced and effective event coordination team to maximize the quality and the reach of each outreach effort.

A pastor on the west side of Indianapolis shared that people in his congregation are “slowly sliding back into seats.” Because of this reality, they have reduced their Sunday morning live offerings from two worship services to just one. The church he leads has also worked to reduce their service times down to one hour and five minutes.”<sup>47</sup>

An additional priority is to stream on multiple platforms because there are times various platforms have outages and it is important to shift the audience to other available platforms so that they can view and see. It is notable that 56% of survey respondents indicated that they only stream on one or two platforms, and nearly one quarter are only

---

<sup>47</sup> Multiple interviews with pastors, December 2, 2022.

streaming on one platform.<sup>48</sup> These churches are at risk of compromising their online production due to common technical difficulties with these sites.

It is important for all speakers and presenters at AAUC's to exude joy and cheer and excitement at every opportunity. In an interview with an African American woman who now attends ASWC about what caused her to change congregations, she stated "that the AAUC in her experience had a dark cloud over them, and all those churches seem to be gloomy."<sup>49</sup> It appears that leaving the AAUC allowed her to escape the dark cloud that seems to hover over the traditional/historical Black congregation in America.

The African American community, and the AAUC in particular, has stigmas it must overcome. For some, the Black church can appear to be an ominous place, within which each experience occurs under a shadow of trauma and despair. To combat this stigma, it is important to consider that everything from beginning to end of the worship service, from the greeting to the benediction, is executed with the intention of uplifting those who attend, whether in person or through the digital space. It is important that all aspects of the church's production are welcoming and inviting. One pastor shared that "he went as far as contracting an outside worship team and musicians to minister at his church so that both online and in person audiences could experience a positive and professional worship presentation."<sup>50</sup>

It is also very important to establish a team of online ambassadors to support the effective execution of online production. These ambassadors not only serve as liaisons to

---

<sup>48</sup> Multiple interviews with pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with pastor, December 3, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with pastor, December 2, 2022.

the production team, informing them of any trouble-shooting needs during the live worship hour; but there is also a set of ambassadors whose sole purpose is to engage and help people to feel seen and welcomed online around hospitality. These are virtual ushers whose role is to greet, like, comment, and respond to everyone who is worshipping online. It is important to note that those who live outside of the city, state, or country, or who cannot attend the physical campus for any other reason, feel as if they are part of the church life and community. Members of an assimilation or connections ministry should follow up with new members as well as those who are interested in joining ministry for the first time, to help them to get involved in the online life of the church and benefit from digital discipleship. The Prayer Ministry must also be available during worship service to help to pray through issues any member or guest may have.

The post-production team should consist of persons who ensure that those who were not able to view worship services live will still be attracted to the ministry and messages by the attractive titles, covers, thumbnails, etc., on social media sites or from the sermon snippets on the Churches website. This may require individuals with a unique set of skills who know what to look for and what material to use to attract people of various ages and backgrounds, skilled with using thumbnails and hashtags and breaking down messages, powerful points, and ministry moments to post on all digital and social platforms. This team would also assist with advertising and promoting services on social media for maximum online attendance and engagement.

Finally, each week commercials from worship services should be created serving as recap clips that encourage people to go back and watch the service or the replay. New

Direction Church discovered through its analytics that more people watch the services after the service has already aired than in real time.

An accomplished pastor from a suburb of Dallas, TX, is one of the most creative pastors in America when it comes to presenting series and messages. “He hosts a conference each year to support and encourage faith leaders to “do church differently.” His staff and production team meet every Friday—even prior to the pandemic—to do a comprehensive review of the run of show for Sunday morning services. This allows them to identify any gaps and resolve any issues, as well as gather and review all images and props and other aides for the message. The team can enter the building on Sundays feeling free to execute the documented plan without concern for questions not answered or needs unaddressed.”<sup>51</sup>

A comprehensive run of show, and the opportunity for key team members to review it prior to the day of production, is essential for the church of this age. It includes a review of each speaker and their scripts, as well as equipment tested for functionality to allow time for necessary adjustments before live worship. Recently, New Direction Church implemented a review of run of show review on Friday afternoons. Their review includes a look at a blueprint of the building and grounds for each campus, and an assessment of which ambassadors are assigned to which areas of ministry. Ministry leaders have been asked to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of each ambassador on their team, and to assign them to roles or positions during production based on that assessment. The review also includes a defined contingency plan in the case that the assigned ambassador is not available to execute their duties on the upcoming

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with pastor, November 29, 2022.

Sunday. The addition of the personnel placement review was deemed necessary due to perceived opportunities to strengthen the flow of worship while minimizing the need to make adjustments during the live worship hour.

In *Don't Drop the Mic*, best-selling author Bishop T.D. Jakes shares the wisdom and skills he has learned over the decades he has spent speaking in front of large audiences. One practice he shares is that of visiting a venue where he is scheduled to speak, in order to get a feel for the setting and assess anything he may need to know in order to optimize his output during the production. The production team for any given local church, and the AAUC in particular, would do well to commit to a similar practice for the comprehensive presentation. The run of show review, even to the details of who, what, when, where, and how ambassadors are serving, removes the pressure that is characteristic of any production. It allows the leadership to focus on the critical matters of ensuring the product, which is the message of redemption through Jesus Christ, is presented without impediment or distraction both in the building and through the streaming platforms. These proactive measures of assessing the venue of the local church building and the related run of show equate to practice Bishop Jakes provided in his book.

## EFFECTIVE MINISTRIES AND RELEVANT PROGRAMS

In a survey published by The Washington Post in 2017, it was noted that “three in four physicians chose the profession because they want to help people. Doctors enter the field of medicine because they want to assist those who are sick and hurting.”<sup>52</sup> Jesus, called The Great Physician, did not just teach to those in the temple who were well and had established relationships with God; He taught that it is the sick who need a physician Luke 5:31, and was intentional about meeting various needs of people outside the walls of the church. The 21st century AAUC must not just be known for its message, but also its ministries.

Jesus focused His ministry efforts primarily on the poor. He gave attention to the downtrodden, disenfranchised, and disadvantaged. Jesus provided his services free of charge to the public. He treated everyone who came and turned none away. No matter how contagious, repulsive, or dreadful their disease, Jesus treated them all. During a time when there were no hospitals or universal health care initiatives, Christ sets up a program wherein He could treat those who believed in Him or not, and those who did or did not follow Him (John 6:37).

It is notable that Jesus did not only serve those who came to Him. He also went to them. Jesus shows up where the sick people are. He sought out people who were afflicted and met their needs, and this is true Christianity at its core. Thus, the African American church and its leaders can recapture this level of outreach, implementing programs that

---

<sup>52</sup> Fallon E. Chipidza, Rachel S. Wallwork, and Theodore A. Stern, “Impact of the Doctor-Patient Relationship. *The Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders* 17, no. 5 (2015): 10.4088/PCC.15f01840.

minister to people outside of the four walls of their church. This is the kind of ministry that the AAUC may be seen doing if they are to remain relevant in this age.

The 21st century AAUC can become a place that demonstrates it cares about people no matter their sexual orientation, political affiliation, economic class, or even history of sin. The church, like Christ Himself, must communicate its genuine interest in people who have issues. It must be acknowledged that the church is a hospital, and in every hospital, there are more sick people than doctors, nurses, and technicians who treat them. They are bruised, scared, hurt, suffering and who are sick. The church must recommit to its identity as a hospital, a place where people should not feel judged for their illness or made to feel worse or hurt more due to their ailment. The church is a place for caring, treating, recovering, and healing. Those who serve in a hospital must have compassion, patience, tolerance, and a heart for helping people who have issues. Additionally, Jesus took a holistic approach to ministry, meeting the needs of the whole man—body, soul, and spirit. His abilities and expertise allow Him to treat the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual issues of mankind.

Jesus also came to proclaim liberty to those in bondage. He came to free those who are oppressed or in captivity. The world is full of people who are bound. People struggle with physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological bondage. Many are bound by evil thoughts, depression fear, lust, chemical substances, and various potentially destructive habits. Mental health professionals are in high demand, and treatment opportunities continue to expand, but deliverance is not taking place. The reason many are not being delivered may be because much of what binds people is not just natural but spiritual. The world can make the mistake of trying to treat spiritual issues with natural



means only. However, for the church to minister to people spiritually it can see people of faith as those who have engaged with them in a spirit of genuine interest and affection. The church can meet them where they are and initiate authentic relationship.

As has been discussed, the churches first mission is to preach and to teach Christ and make disciples. However, meeting the physical needs of the people within the community it serves is not something urban pastors can neglect. For the church to be effective and relevant it can demonstrate that it is not an isolated group of people who meet in urban environments but has no real impact in those areas. On the contrary, the church may be seen as a very real asset to the community that helps to improve the overall lives of the people within its ministry context.

There are ministries and programs that the 21st century AAUC model may require to function and operate. Urban areas in America have had to deal with significant socio-economic issues that have historically plagued its communities. Those issues have been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Issues of crime, violence, food insecurity, mental health issues, substance abuse, poverty, and racial inequities afflict urban communities, especially predominantly African American ones. The church may not just disciple those within and engage in in-reach toward those who are already part of the congregation; but also, can participate in outreach to those who are outside of the body. It is essential for urban churches to make sure their ministries are reflective of the needs within that community so that the church cannot only remain relevant but that it can be diligent in carrying out the real work of ministry that Christ exemplified.

One African American pastor from southern Ohio shared that he noticed that his church, “which is predominantly African American, is very hungry to engage in outreach.

They have increased their focus on serving outside of the building and found that this shift helped him to keep his membership engaged during the pandemic.”<sup>53</sup> People wanted to be a part of a church that was helping to make a difference in the lives of people when it mattered most.

An African American pastor of a predominantly Black congregation in central-western Ohio shared that in hindsight he would have preferred that his church had spent more time with outreach and service to the community during the novel coronavirus pandemic. He shared that “meeting the felt needs of those in the neighborhoods in the church’s vicinity would have positively impacted the church both during and immediately after the pandemic.”<sup>54</sup>

The community looks to the church to be a beacon of hope and to provide solutions to meet physical needs. The church can benefit from aligning its mission and work with funding sourced from the local, state, and federal government. The partnerships can be effective as long as the church avoids becoming overly dependent on those funds and is not asked to compromise its core values and beliefs. Each pastor and church must find what is best for their ministry, and carefully determine what resources, partnerships, and funding sources are best suited to assist the work of service.

While there are certainly common themes in urban communities, each specific neighborhood has its own culture and unique set of challenges; each church must discover what ministries and programs fit the community they serve. One associate pastor interviewed shared that “their church has had to contend with an increase in gun violence

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview with pastor, December 2, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with pastor, December 11, 2022.

in their community as well as food insecurity. She explained that the pandemic and its aftermath served to show them that the leadership was not adequately trained to lead initiatives in response to these issues.”<sup>55</sup> According to Rainer, “Having become accustomed to doing without our buildings for many weeks, we’re now able to look at our church facilities with different eyes. We can see them more as a tool for outreach rather than a cocoon for members.”<sup>56</sup>

There are ministries that are geared to doing in-reach within the church to those who are believers and a part of the church, and then there are the actual programs which are designed to be part of the churches outreach. In-reach is the work of ministering to those inside of the church and/or congregation, while outreach is the work and ministry executed to meet the felt needs of those outside of the church, with the ultimate goal to evangelize. The 21st century pastor and church in the urban context is strongly encouraged to consider the balance between the two.

America has a large and growing population that classifies themselves as having no religious affiliation at all. The church is not only tasked with making disciples and assisting believers to grow in their faith, but also evangelizing to make more disciples. It is the church ministries and programs that can help the church do both. The 21st century church does not have the option of whether to be holistic in its approach, because it serves in communities where the whole person needs to be reached. In each of these categories it is helpful for the church to have clearly defined ways in which it touches and ministers:

---

<sup>55</sup> Interview with pastor, December 2, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges + Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Ministries, 2020), 19.

Children's Ministry is essential. While it is true that every ministry has its own niche in the community, some level of ministry for children should be a part of the churches make-up. Children may be more apt to accept Christ than adults. Children can be more impressionable, and it is very important that church leaders avoid overlooking the needs of children. Rather than neglecting to pour into children, the church should consider its need to target them for the future of the church. Jesus said suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for such is the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:14). Some AAUCs have neglected to build and develop an effective youth ministry and have failed to be intentional in providing consistent and innovative service to this invaluable population. Reasons for the service gap may include the fact that there are few people who are willing to work with children during the Sunday morning service time. This author observed that the model more common at the AWSC is that the children's training and teaching took place at the same time as the adults, which is not as popular with AAUC who traditionally sponsor Sunday morning small group classes prior to worship service.

One pastor from Ohio explained that "one thing which stood out to him was the impact of youth ministry on his church during and after the pandemic. COVID-19 adjustments exposed the fact that the youth ministry at their church was not strong. In response, the leadership increased its focus on youth ministry, and the result was that parents and families began to return to the fellowship."<sup>57</sup>

Noted by the pastor referenced above, as well as many others, a noticeable distinction between the AAUC and the AWSC is the resources available to invest in the

---

<sup>57</sup> Interview with pastor, December 9, 2022.

youth ministry. Entire buildings were observed to be erected or remodeled with the sole intention of attracting and serving children through these ministries in the AAUC.

Interviews with five different African American families who were asked why they chose the AWSC that they attended revealed that the children's ministry is what drew them to affiliate with these congregations. The fact that they all either left or deliberately did not choose AAUC in favor of AWSC communicates a clear message. If the AAUC is to continue to attract potential members, it can become more intentional at developing and marketing its children's ministries.

In addition to specialized youth ministry, it is strongly recommended that the AAUC has a clearly defined approach to help all members of the church grow spiritually. Christian Education is foundational to a churches structure. How the church spiritually educates children and adults is essential to a church's effectiveness in carrying out Jesus' mission. If the church is not making disciples, it is not fulfilling Christ's commission.

Spiritual formation can occur in several contexts. Pastor Larry Osborne, nationally recognized for his pioneering work with small group models and multisite church development, teaches that sermon-based small groups allow disciples to benefit from the knowledge and support of other Christians, while remaining faithful to the study of scripture. He writes: "The ultimate goal of a sermon-based small group is simply to velcro people to two things they will need most when faced with a need-to-know or need-to-grow situation: the Bible and other Christians."<sup>58</sup> Suggestions for Christian Education programs include:

---

<sup>58</sup> Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 26.

Bible study: Ongoing bible studies in the traditional sense are valuable, but also bible studies where people can grow in relationship with others and build prayer partners and accountability partners they can discuss and share and fellowship with house to house as we see in Acts 2. Post-Secondary Christian education: Any strategy to help the church become a pipeline for Christian colleges and universities, and helping to grow and develop pastors, elders, preachers, teachers, ministry leaders, missionaries, as well as a biblically educated church, is strongly recommended.

The Cell Groups of the church are small groups of no more than 15 members who engage in small group discussions of the sermon on a weekly basis. Cell Groups are open to members and non-members alike. Osbourne provides several examples of the efficacy of this model.

Similarly, Growth Groups (also called Life Groups or Care Groups, depending on the congregation) provide opportunities wherein people can develop spiritual camaraderie with one another as a way of developing deepening spiritual relationships. A Growth Group is different from a Cell Group in that it is organized around a particular demographic that its members share, and there is no defined size limit for the group. Additionally, Growth Groups traditionally meet less often than the typical Cell Group (bi-weekly or monthly), and balance activities as well as relationship building discussions amongst its members. Cell Groups, by contrast, are more often diverse in composition, limited in size, and meet frequently with a focus on scripture study. “Specialty groups that meet around special interests or ministries are strategic, but their goal is not to

balance the five biblical purposes (fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship) to create healthy individuals and groups.”<sup>59</sup>

For example, men need safe spaces where they can talk through and discuss some of the unique challenges that men face and difficult things they deal with as men in society. The difficulties inherent in the urban setting make this particularly important in the AAUC. Leaders can glean several critical principles from Jesus’ example of recruitment and training, particularly as it pertains to the dynamics of demographics in the congregation. A Religious Landscape Study by Pew Research Center identifies that “the percentage of adults identifying as Evangelical Protestant is 55% female and 45% male. The same study identifies that in the Historically Black Protestant religious group, 59% of the respondents who identify as religious are female versus 41% that are male.”<sup>60</sup> These numbers reflect the observable difference in the makeup of many local church congregations across the United States. Notably, a 2022 study by Christianity Today “recognizes that the gap in the difference between numbers of men and women who identify with religion is not only decreasing with Generation Y and Generation Z in comparison to older generations but has essentially flipped.”<sup>61</sup> The surveys indicate that there are now higher percentages of women who do not identify with religion than men; however, the study concludes that this shift may not be attributable to increases in male

---

<sup>59</sup> Steve Gladen, *Planning Small Groups with Purpose: A Field-Tested Guide to Design and Grow Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2018), ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>60</sup> Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study,” accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>

<sup>61</sup> Ryan Burge, “With Gen Z, Women Are No Longer More Religious than Men,” Christianity Today, July 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/july/young-women-not-more-religious-than-men-gender-gap-gen-z.html>.

affiliation with the church or religious tradition. Rather, it identifies that the number of American women who identify with Christian, Protestant religious group is decreasing. Rather than identifying that the need to focus on efforts to evangelize and disciple men has decreased post-pandemic, the combined research underscores the need for the church to focus on ministering to men.

While the scriptures are filled with countless references to the critical importance of women in the redemptive story of mankind, as well as ministry in the early church, including Miriam, Rahab, Deborah, Esther, Ruth and Abigail in the Old Testament, and Mary, Mary Magdalene, Elizabeth, Anna, Bernice, Priscilla, and Eunice in the New Testament, the record regarding God's call to men is distinct. From God's personal interaction with Adam, Abraham, and Moses, to Jesus' personal recruitment and training of Peter, James, Judas, Andrew, John, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon, Thomas, Philip, Matthias, Thaddeus, and James, God has specifically, intentionally, and directly developed and deployed men. In like fashion, it is recommended that the senior pastor in the AAUC is directly involved in ministry to men in the post-pandemic congregation.

During and immediately following the time period in which the church building was not available for corporate worship, New Direction Church experienced a significant shift in personnel. Key leaders resigned their positions and left gaps on the executive team, and many previously active and engaged ambassadors vacated their roles. These chasms in ministry functionality included several men who no longer fulfilled essential assignments. Public relations liaisons, administrative executives, audio-visual professionals, operations officers, and internal security ministry members, to name a few examples, were no longer in place as needed. The Senior Pastor immediately began to



delegate and direct recruitment activity for new ministry team members. The leadership team effectively engaged some new leaders, and assigned additional responsibilities to other leaders, to include strategic assignment of those individuals who were newer to the congregation. However, after several months of placing and replacing certain roles, and recognized inability to fill others, the Senior Pastor realized a need to shift the approach to mobilizing men in the congregation. Utilizing the example set by both God the Creator and God the Savior, he began to work directly with men in the church to discover, develop, and deploy them for service.

After initiation of a series of once weekly meetings held for an hour prior to bible study, the Senior Pastor was able to attract dozens of men in the congregation. The first priority was Discovery—identification of the men, their skills, talents, interests, passions, and areas of calling. Through purposeful interaction with the Senior Pastor, not only was the church able to discover the men, but the men were able to discover themselves.

The second priority in men's ministry was Development—purposeful and intentional topical discussions, interactive by design, allowed the Senior Pastor to train the men directly. Training in the church model and make-up; training in Christian character and lifestyle choices for disciples; clarity of New Direction's mission and vision as well as standards for ministry execution in the church; and methods for establishing and maintaining brotherhood were all led by the Senior Pastor. The weekly meetings were effective in preparing the men for new roles in ministry.

The third priority was Deployment. By asking that the active participants prayerfully select and volunteer for positions related to Ministry (to support the needs of the congregation, both in spiritual leadership and in operations execution); Maintenance

(to oversee and bring to fruition tasks concerning the building and grounds at each campus); and Mentorship (to initiate and cultivate relationships with young men in the community, in partnership with a sister church congregation), the Senior Pastor successfully activated a number of men at New Direction Church. The impact was noted almost immediately after the seniormost leader asserted himself directly into the process of mobilizing the manpower in the church.

An extensive review of models of ministry to men was provided because of the critical nature of male participation in the local church. Men bring families to church, which in turn strengthens the church and its community. Strong communities beget strong cities, strong cities beget strong states, strong states beget strong nations, and strong nations impact the world for the cause of Christ. Men are effectively attracted to ministry when they see reflections of themselves in said ministry. Religious groups like The Nation of Islam and the Hebrew Israelites are attracting African American men due to men's clear and visible function in those traditions. In stark contrast, Christian Protestant congregations continue to reflect a predominantly female group of disciples. Growth Groups for men, as explicate earlier in this work, can birth out strong men in ministry who can effectively draw more men to the congregation and its mission.

It is recommended that Growth Groups include the following, at a minimum:

- Women's Group, for female members, seekers, and guests ages eighteen and over
- Men's Group, for male members, seekers, and guests ages eighteen and over
- Teen Group, for youth ages thirteen to seventeen
- Couples' Group, for married couples, and even engaged couples
- Singles' Group, for adults who have never married, or are widowed or divorced

- Seasoned Saints Group, for members, seekers, and guests ages fifty-five and over
- Young Adult Group, for members, seekers, and guests ages eighteen to thirty-five.

The following is a suggested list of ministries to be addressed in the program model of the church. It is strongly recommended that all ministries, cell groups, and growth groups are each led by a Trifecta to include a Servant Leader, Co-Leader, and Secretary in order to effectively share the leadership responsibilities of the group. It is further recommended that each team report to a Ministry Coordinator who will serve as liaison with the senior leadership team and assist leaders to adhere to the expectations and standards of the ministry.

### **Ministry List**

- Altar Advocate Ministry-Staffing the altar for invitation to discipleship, prayer, and/or offering
- Assimilation Ministry-Connecting visitors and members of the church
- Worship Arts Ministry-Praise team(s), choir, dance, and drama teams
- Greeter Ministry-Welcoming members and guests to the building
- Usher Ministry-Guiding and supporting the logistics of the worship experience
- Audio-Visual Ministry-Photography, videography, and sound technicians
- Security Ministry-Overseeing gatherings and working with contracted police/security officers to maintain safety
- Emergency Response Ministry-Planning, implementing, and monitoring crisis intervention activities

- Parking Lot Ministry -Welcoming members/guests to the campus and guiding parking logistics
- Culinary Ministry-Planning, preparing, and serving meals
- Pantry/Community Needs Ministry-Procure items to distribute to the community
- Extended Hands Ministry-Provide comfort and support to the sick, bereaved, and those in crisis
- Community Connections Ministry-Facilitate partnerships with community businesses
- Intercessory Prayer Ministry-Lead consistent, effectual prayer efforts on behalf of the ministry
- Pastor's Partners Ministry-Lead the congregation to honor and support the Pastor and his family
- Ministerial Team-Licensed/Ordained and/or Ministers-In-Training for pulpit ministry
- Resource Ministry-Staff the Resource Areas and assist to connect members of the church and community to internal/external resources

Individual, marriage, and family counseling are also essential programs for the AAUC to consider. Living through a worldwide pandemic has exacerbated the trauma experienced by members of the African American community. While the church must guard itself and be very specific regarding the types of counseling services it provides, grief recovery, trauma, marriage/family, and biblical counseling are all categories of professional services that should be available through the AAUC. Mental health hubs on the church campus allow for people to experience accessing answers to life's difficulties

through the local church, which speaks volumes as to its relevance in the community.

“Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide and rates have increased over the past decade.”<sup>62</sup> Individual churches must assess what they have available in terms of mental health practitioners in the congregation and perhaps form an in-house counseling team or explore partnerships with local providers to serve the community from an office at the church address. Isolation in our homes and the large number of people who lost their lives to COVID-19 has also caused mental anguish on adults and adolescence.

Additional programmatic opportunities that speak to the felt needs in the urban African American community include educational (connection to secondary, post-secondary, and/or vocational training opportunities), benevolence (provision of basic life necessity or the resources to acquire them, e.g., food, housing/utilities, clothing, medical expenses, funeral costs). Due to the scope of medical concerns experienced by African Americans, often related to stress, hypertension, poor nutrition, long-term trauma response and the like, scheduled nutrition and exercise classes as well as health check stations are also priority offerings. The church has credibility within the community, and it is important that the trust be leveraged to help people become upwardly mobile. This objective is met through providing the assistance, as well as making accessible resources

---

<sup>62</sup> Health & Human Services Press Office, “U.S. Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic,” December 7, 2021, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

leading to home ownership, entrepreneurship, personal development workshops, and practical career development coursework.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are nonprofit organizations that are created to support and revitalize communities, especially those that are impoverished or struggling.<sup>63</sup> As the AAUC's continue to invest in communities and community members, it is beneficial to create CDCs as a buffer between the church and the work that it does. To align themselves with the work that churches are leading in the community, potential funders will review mission, vision, structure, and other indicators of success and sustainability. Having the most appropriate legal structure will allow the AACU to remain competitive for a scope of funding sources (examples: foundations, government entities, corporate sponsors, etc.). More about these relationships will be discussed in a later section.

---

<sup>63</sup> Howard Husock, "Don't Let CDCs Fool You," City Journal, Summer 2001, <https://www.city-journal.org/html/don%E2%80%99t-let-cdcs-fool-you-12175.html>

## FAITHFUL CHURCH FINANCES AND STEWARDSHIP

As discussed in an earlier section, making a profit for any individual, or even for the corporation, is not the church's primary goal. However, due to its purpose to generate income that is reinvested into the ministry activity, the church should use creative means to raise funds as well as steward its properties and financial resources in the best ways possible. Although the church's legal structure may differ in many ways from other business types, it can glean from the structure of successful nonprofit and for-profit organizations alike.

Effective pastors and churches do not merely operate by faith, but they also have a business model which has some characteristics of a for-profit corporation. Churches are not exempt, for example, from having audits to verify their financial viability and responsible use of resources. Churches can structure their finances and financial departments in such a way that the church does not operate at a deficit but at a surplus. The AAUC has various physical needs it must address based upon the communities in which it serves. The local church can have a clear plan as to how to not just be sufficient, but to build reserves and surplus.

In fact, there is a direct correlation between the economic challenges experienced in most urban African American communities and the local AAUC. The people who live within the community and attend the neighborhood AAUC come with needs more often than resources. Similarly, the AAUC has more economic needs to meet and fewer resources with which to meet them, in comparison to its suburban or even rural counterparts. The AAUC, then, must become more intentional and cleverer regarding ways it can generate additional revenue through development of supplemental streams of

income. The AAUC has traditionally relied on tithes and offerings alone to meet its financial obligations; however, with lower attendance numbers in many American churches, the AAUC may begin to think of other ways in which it can sustain itself.

In addition to the record low attendance, there have been recent events that have the potential to undermine the message of tithes and offerings. For example, a high-profile Black televangelist recently denounced the principle of tithing, calling it unbiblical for the New Testament church. His teaching may have caused some Christians to question the way to give to God. The common phenomenon of a small percentage of the members doing most of the giving is threatened to become even more a stark reality in which the majority benefit from the contributions of the few.

Survey results (from which survey) indicated that 36% of pastors of AAUC stated that they do not have an additional stream of income outside of their church's regular tithes and offerings. 38% indicated that they have 1-2 sources of income outside of tithes and offering.<sup>64</sup> An African American pastor from southern Indiana shared the strides that the church's community development corporation has been able to make over its twenty-seven year history. The CDC was able to build fifty new multi-family apartments during the COVID-19 pandemic, to add to the commercial retail property, daycare center, and other housing developments already flourishing under his leadership.<sup>65</sup> This is a powerful illustration of the functionality of a CDC for an AAUC.

As listed in a previous section, a key position in the modern not for profit organization is a skilled and effective grant writer. The church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no

---

<sup>64</sup> Interviews by pastor, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Interviews by pastor, December 1, 2022.



exception. Churches that can be effective in this hour are those churches that have learned to align themselves with foundations and other funding partners who can help finance the work that the churches seek to do or are already doing. It is vital in this age that pastors and church leaders collaborate and plan how they can offset their budgets and engage partners to help fund the work they also prioritize.

One pastor in Atlanta shared in an interview that “his church was successful in securing \$1 million dollars to assist them in the ministry and the community work that they do. He explained that, early in the pandemic, he employed a unique strategy. He gathered all his paid staff and they began to meet for four hours each week with the sole purpose of working on grant applications. In the absence of a grant’s professional, this pastor utilized the human resources that he did have on his team to leverage the opportunities being made available at that time.”<sup>66</sup>

This model is an excellent example of an innovative method of expanding funding for the extensive ministry needed in the AAUC. Senior pastors can consider modifying the roles of every single staff member, particularly those who are paid, to include the function of researching and/or contributing to the completion of grant applications. An additional concept is to have the team members focus on finding resources to fund their particular ministry and for their particular role. The collaborative nature of the interviewee’s plan may have extended their ability to be creative in identifying potential sources for the individual applications.

A further consideration is to set an expectation that each ministry in the church can become self-sustaining, with the responsibility to continually seek resources to

---

<sup>66</sup> Interview by pastor, December 15, 2022.

subsidize the church budget in their particular ministry sphere. This model serves to give additional revenue to the church because the church is able to save and/or reallocate its resources for other required purposes, while the programming is able to be funded by other additional streams of income.

New Direction Church rests in the heart of a predominantly African American community on Indianapolis' northeast side and has been a model of economic empowerment in the metropolitan area. The church has two physical campuses and operates a day care center on each campus, as well as a barber/beauty salon on the main campus. The businesses have afforded an opportunity to hire staff and contractors, and the childcare services led to eligibility for several grant awards awarded during the pandemic. In addition to the businesses located on the church campus and property, New Direction leases out its facility for funerals and weddings throughout the year, as well as utilizing the fellowship hall as an event space available for rental. These examples of revenue streams that meet needs in the local community serve as an example for the AAUC nationwide. It is advisable for leaders of the AAUC to assess every portion of space in its facility for potential leasing opportunities.

The 21st century AAUC can create the position of a competent Chief Financial Officer (CFO) who helps to oversee the entire financial department. This individual not only oversees the accountant and manages the bookkeeper, but also develops and leads a fundraising team to ensure that each ministry strategically identifies, generates, and sustains methods of generating income for its initiatives. Strategic planning and oversight of fundraising events, grant applications, individual giving campaigns, partnerships with corporations, investments, and knowledge of benefits of the legal structure for the church

as well as subsidiary organizations are just a few examples of activities under the charge of the church's CFO. Grant writers, event planners, and financial planning subject matter experts are amongst the roles that the AAUC may activate to go forward in the 21st century and be the institution God has intended for it to be.

## IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

The AAUC in general has always been a target of hate crimes and a target for attacks. Beginning in the period of reconstruction, Black churches were burned, and Black people were terrorized even while they worshipped. The church was a place where African American people learned to read and write by studying the Bible and creating Bible bands. The Black church was the place where Black families developed. Cornell William Brooks, president of the NAACP, had this to say in an article for CNN, published shortly after the mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. “For centuries, African American churches have served as the epicenter of survival for many in the African American community. Consequently, these houses of faith have historically been the targets of violence. against Black people in the south but Black institutions mainly the Black church.”<sup>67</sup> According to a 2015 article in The Washington Post, “225 Black churches were targeted between 1995 and 1998 alone. The author explains that Black churches have always remained a symbol of hope in the darkness of American racism, and a source of leadership...in the African American community.”<sup>68</sup>

Not only have African American houses of worship historically been targets of racial hatred, but Black ministers have also been victims of attack. Two prominent

---

<sup>67</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Henry Louis Gates’ New Book Traces the Institution’s Role in History, Politics, and Culture,” The Harvard Gazette, March 9, 2021, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/>

<sup>68</sup> Sarah Kaplan and Justin Moyer, “Why Racists Target Black Churches,” The Washington Post, July 1, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/07/01/why-racists-burn-black-churches/>

pastors who were victims of attack include Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968 and Rev. Clementa Pinkney in 2015, the latter of whom was among eight parishioners murdered in church during Bible study, there is evidence of the need for security and protection for Black pastors and houses of worship. Not only have AAUC and ministers been targets of racial attacks but America itself has become a dangerous and violent place. A recent report published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation examining the trend of violent crime in America indicates “that violent crimes are occurring at a rate of 398.5 for every 100,000 people, the highest since 2011.”<sup>69</sup>

The unfortunate reality is that urban cities of America contend with violent crime taking place daily, even aside from racially motivated attacks or mass shootings. It is imperative that the AAUC take seriously its responsibility to protect its congregation members and guests. In this age, it is also important that parishioners see the church as a safe place where they can bring their families with reasonable assurance that their well-being is a priority.

Scripture provides according to Acts 19 that “Paul gives a warning to the Ephesian elders about savage wolves coming in to destroy the flock. In this passage Paul is speaking as a shepherd who wants to ensure that the flock that has been entrusted to his care is protected. The role of a pastor is to be a shepherd, and God expects for the shepherd of His sheep to take special care, not just spiritually and emotionally but also physically.”

---

<sup>69</sup> FBI: UCR., “Crime in the United States – Violent Crime, 2019,” <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/violent-crime>.

The first discussion point in physical protection strategy is in security personnel. Of the surveyed African American pastors leading in an urban context, 56% said that they never use security personnel, and 34% indicated that they use security personnel at “some events.” The remaining 10% responded that they use security personnel at all events.<sup>70</sup> While security may not be regarded as a necessary expense for churches with limited financial resources, crime and violence statistics indicate that such an expense should be strongly considered for the well-being of the attendees at urban churches.

There are options regarding security personnel, the first being police officers. It is preferable to hire uniformed police officers to maintain a vigil in the church building. Uniformed officers provide a great optic and act as a deterrent to would-be attackers. Hired police officers tend to be more professional and sensitive to a church’s needs. They come with a patrol car, are licensed to handle weapons, and are trained to handle themselves should a security threat arise. It is important that the people inside and outside of the church building see clearly that it is a place that is protected by fully qualified law enforcement officers as opposed to individuals who have less training.

An alternative to contracting police officers is use of a private security firm. If church leaders’ contract with a security company, it is recommended that the firm be carefully vetted and determined to be reputable and dependable with personnel who are professional and sensitive to the mission and vision of the church. It is further suggested that church leaders meet with the firm’s management to clearly define the expectations for service. Just because a person is licensed to carry a gun does not mean that they are a good fit within a particular church’s ministry. It is also important to ensure that the

---

<sup>70</sup> Multiple Pastors completing survey from November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

persons reflect the demographics of the congregation, or at least are culturally sensitive to the demographic make-up of the AAUC. It may have a detrimental effect if the hired security exudes an intimidating presence; it will cause parishioners to feel unwelcome and possibly even threatened by the persons hired to guard the church.

In addition to contracted, professional security officers, it is recommended that the church creates and establishes its own internal security team. This is true for several reasons. First, it is imperative that there are people serving in this capacity who have a sense of ownership of the church and its attendees. These members see and know the importance of the church work and are committed to helping the church carry out its purpose. Second, it allows people within the church to see familiar faces and individuals they know and trust in position of protection during ministry activities. Third, formation of this team provides additional opportunity for men and women to participate in the ministry of the church, serving as buffers between hired officers and the congregation to always act in the church's best interest. Internal security ministry members are present to greet people and make them feel comfortable as well as secure, protected as well as at ease.

Armor Bearers are internal security personnel who are especially assigned to the pastor of the church and provide an additional layer of security for the senior officer in the building. Pastor Terry Nance drew from his decades of experience in church leadership to author God's Armor Bearer, an instruction manual for the armor bearer in the church. The Armor Bearer is required be alert, punctual, protective, discreet, and discerning, covering the pastor spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically as well as

physically. Armor Bearers must be specially vetted individuals from the internal security team within the church.

In addition to personnel, security equipment and systems can also be in place in the urban church. Security equipment enables church leadership to steward over the people of the church as well as the property of the church. It is a sad truth that houses of worship are no longer respected as sacred as they once were. People are now known to steal church equipment and supplies according to their whims. Theft of air conditioning units, audio-visual equipment, automobile parts, tools, kitchen appliances/supplies, or even defacing the church through acts of vandalism are more common than ever.

Activating state of the art systems that are monitored through a company is imperative for the 21<sup>st</sup> century AAUC. New Direction Church has not only experienced thefts of church property as listed above but is also located in an area wherein crimes happen right outside of the sanctuary doors. Security footage helps police to identify suspects and deter future crimes.

An alarm system is an additional essential for the security of the AAUC. It is recommended that the alarm system operates through the monitoring system to protect the church building and assets. It is also important that everyone who has a key to the building has their own individual alarm code so that the church can monitor and track who is coming in and out of the facility, and who is responsible for the protection of the church.

Prioritization of the protection of the church and its resources include establishment of after-hours protocols. Whether they are ordained deacons, building trustees, or operations officers, there should be an identified team of individuals who are



assigned as the guardians of the house of God. Their primary purpose is the protection of the church property and possessions. These individuals respond when there is notification of a breach in security, be it an actual break-in or a compromise of the functionality of the system (e.g., a battery in the system needs to be replaced or a camera needs to be relocated). These duties can be assigned to the internal security team; as previously stated, the importance deputizing an internal team is that they maintain protection over the entire church facility, equipment, and supplies.

Systems and policies for security can also include check-in systems for youth in ministry. In this age, children are at greater risk of abduction and the related threat of human trafficking. The church can ensure the safety of its children during the time of youth ministry events. Part of the internal security team should be assigned to monitor the children from the time they are checked-in by their parent/guardian for a ministry event or activity, until the time they are retrieved by that same individual(s). The security check systems used at daycare centers for parents, students, and teachers can easily be transferred and used at churches for youth check in and security. These systems give parents comfort in knowing their children are safe while in the church's care.

Training sessions for all who attend the church are another aspect of safety in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. In the current age, it is critical any organization housing groups of people at any one time have active shooter training for members of its community. As previously stated, mass shootings are occurring with never-before-seen frequency and appears to be accepted as part of the world's reality. Churches may not be so naïve that they forego active shooter training drills for their entire congregations and community. 39% of survey respondents indicated that they had not conducted active shooter training

at their churches.<sup>71</sup> It is important that members and guests of the church know that their church has considered these risks, and that church leaders are not so heavenly minded that they have lost touch with earthly reality when it comes to the possibilities of harm around them. Jesus said that His people should be wise as serpents *and* harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16, emphasis added); it can be critical that the AAUC completes scheduled training in active shooter response for the well-being of the body.

With the number of technological advancements and widespread use of smart devices in this society, there is the ever-present risk of susceptibility to hackers who are accessing church systems and wreaking havoc for all impacted. Whether it be the church's social media accounts, active website, ministry event records, or giving platforms attached to financial files, it is important that the church protects the entire scope of its online assets. Since the pandemic, much of the charitable giving to the church is done online, as well as engagement of people for marketing, promotion, corporate worship, and digital discipleship. People can be harassed and or stalked in the cyberspace, or even have the security of their personal information compromised.

Members and guests of the church should be made to feel that if they are investing in their local church, they are investing in a safe and secure place, where there are individuals employed who are adequately skilled in cybersecurity. It is incumbent upon the church leadership to either look for individuals within the congregation to be providers in this area of security or outsource the role if necessary. It is essential for the church leadership to recognize this opportunity to develop persons within their church,

---

<sup>71</sup> Interviews by pastor, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

perhaps those who already serve on the technical support team and position them to protect people from online threats.

Another area of protection that the AAUC can consider is protection from litigation. In a culture that seeks to limit the exercise of religion and redefine the truth of God in favor of advancing the philosophies of a person or group, the church must protect its ability to worship God in spirit and in truth in all areas of ministry. The church's policies should clearly delineate its position on marriage as well as hiring practices for those living a lifestyle not condoned by the church. According to an article in Christian Headlines:

While the Presbyterian Church (USA) has determined it will add a third gender option for “nonbinary/genderqueer” people when it collects data about its members in what is the latest example of the leftward drift of the mainstream denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention has passed a resolution that reaffirms its stance on the definition of marriage.<sup>72</sup>

The AAUC can recognize that established policies of the church are critical. Written and accessible bylaws that adhere to the philosophies and values of the local church are designed to protect the church from being forced to take or accept actions that are contrary to its beliefs. The church constitution and faith statements signed by all team members are also important aspects of church governance. The church can be careful not to only preach about what the bible says about various matters of life, but also must have written policies that clarify those positions in the scope of the churches operations.

---

<sup>72</sup> Michael Foust, “Presbyterian Church (USA) Adds 'Non-Binary' 3rd Gender Category for Members,” Christian Headlines, October 27, 2022, <https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/michael-foust/presbyterian-church-usa-adds-non-binary-3rd-gender-category-for-members.html>

Policies are equally important to preaching when it comes to management of the local church.

How a church is governed and structured will determine its strength. It is the foundation and structure of a building which determines how well it will stand up under pressure that arises. Churches in America have found themselves under intense pressure, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Various pressures to conform to certain social norms and even laws such as same sex marriage and a host of other issues have presented themselves, and the AAUC must know how to navigate the choppy waters of change. As the society becomes more diverse and inclusive, and less Christian, it is imperative that the AAUC has clearly defined how its body is governed and what its specific policies are regarding the work that takes place within the church but also how the church interacts with the government and society at large.

Often faith-based institutions are governed to separate politics and religion, but the reality is that politics are sometimes a part of religious institutions. The hierarchy of power, the defined decision-makers, representation, and the processes of navigating the environment of that institution can all be defined as politics. It is very important that the policies and politics of a church be spelled out and made clear.

There are cases where the people who seem to have power do not actually have influence. Conversely, those who are perceived not to have power and influence actually do. There are several governing systems in American churches. For example, there are churches under elder rule, where a group of elders guide the decisions of the church, and also churches under congregational rule where the board holds authority to define and approve church activity. There are also pastor-led churches where the senior pastor has

more freedom and flexibility to govern the direction of the church, and in some cases little accountability. Whatever the case, the church needs to clearly define how the church operates and ensures that all leaders and stakeholders are aware of the structure.

These church operations can also include definitions of practices for how the church governs itself with politics outside of the church. How to engage with local, state, and national politicians as well as divisive political issues is another essential area where the AAUC should carefully consider and codify its conduct. The AAUC relationship with the mayor and councilpersons has critical ramifications for attracting resources to the church, and these relationships must be strategically managed. Also, however, it can be problematic for the AAUC to appear as if it is leaning too heavily toward one political party, political candidate, or political position, any of which can cause conflict with civic leaders or call into question the legitimacy of the church's biblical position. These are all areas that the AACU may assess very carefully on a continual basis to be effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Jesus provides a noteworthy example of how to respond in challenging political situations. The Pharisees on multiple occasion sought to entrap Jesus to display that His activity or teaching was inappropriately at odds with the Roman government. On one occasion they ask Jesus whether taxes should be paid to Caesar or to God. Jesus strategically responded in a manner that honored both His position in God as well as His position as a member of a municipality with influence over others in that structure.

## MARKETING AND ADVERTISING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

As discussed previously, in this age it is of vital importance for the church to keep the product of the gospel of Jesus Christ before people's eyes. Effective strategies for promotion of the gospel and the niche ministries of the local church are essential for the AAUC. Since attention spans are shorter, methods of promoting God's message must be calculated to achieve His goals for ministry. In the past, television and radio broadcasts were the most sought after means of exposing a wide audience to the Churches or preacher's Christian content. Stations such as Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and later Daystar—in addition to hundreds of US-based radio stations—were sought after venues to introduce and build a national or global following.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, ministers can create content and promote it on social media, without the need for a financial commitment or meeting standards of decision-makers at the influential networks of the past. In similar fashion, the AAUC must promote its content using available platforms and intentional planning to get and hold the attention of its target audience. The church can no longer take for granted that people will show up to participate in its worship services; instead, the church must go where people are and keep the Churches message before them. The AAUC must saturate the market with its mission and vision, according to a viable strategic plan.

In scripture, John the Baptist was known for his constant promotion of God's message, as was Jesus Christ Himself. Messages about the kingdom of Heaven fill the content of the gospel accounts, providing a prime example of consistency in communication across the scope of the community. The AAUC cannot assume that

people know about its existence and purpose in the neighborhood or even society in general; it must constantly market its message to make disciples.

As it relates to marketing, there are several key considerations. The first one for the AAUC is money. As with any other business, the church must have funds set aside for marketing, a percentage of the budget that is earmarked for this investment. 5-15% of the operating budget is average for marketing expense for a nonprofit organization.<sup>73</sup> Earmarking funds for marketing purposes is a new concept for most AAUC, whose budgets are often exhausted by fixed costs and ministry expenses. However, to establish and maintain its voice in the community, the church must invest in an intentional and consistent marketing concept.

The second key is a well-thought-out marketing method. The AAUC can have a specific approach to marketing, based on researched best practices considering the context of the church. The method should be multi-faceted and multi-layered; it should include marketing from various platforms such as social media, radio, television broadcast, and strategic messaging on church grounds, and multiple layers within each platform. For example, strategic messaging on the ground can include signage as well as verbal announcements, and social media strategy should include more than one platform as well as various aspects of any given platform. Not only is use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and TikTok fundamental to a successful marketing strategy, but use of some strategic combination of the Facebook page, Facebook group, Facebook Live and Facebook Events is also recommended.

---

<sup>73</sup> Alyssa Conrardy, “Seven Deadly Nonprofit Marketing Budget Sins: Part One. Prosper Strategies,” August 10, 2020, <https://prosper-strategies.com/nonprofit-marketing-budget-part-one/>.

The AAUC may compromise its ability to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the world Acts 1:8 if it fails to extend into all aspects of the social media marketplace. These platforms provide access to a sea of people of all backgrounds, a suitable illustration of the dragnet that Jesus presents in Matthew 13:47-50. The AAUC can extend beyond its immediate locale to reap the harvest that God intends.

A third key to effective marketing is the appointment of a dedicated team to carry out the strategy. The church must have multiple people who work under the direction of a qualified marketing specialist to implement, evaluate, and adjust the marketing plan on an ongoing basis. The term ‘dedicated’ highlights the fact that the AAUC must assign people whose sole purpose is to promote the church, from online interaction to communications going forth on the grounds. One such team member is a content creator. Content creators are closely attentive to the ministry experience and activities to identify and capture moments that can be produced and promoted to AAUC, particularly the fact that it is a dedicated responsibility for multiple people, as opposed to a secondary or add-on responsibility for one or two individuals.

While the forgoing conversation identifies key marketing concepts that are critical to the effectual promotion of the post-pandemic church, none of those strategies are a replacement for the original and foundational marketing strategy of word of mouth. Mobilizing people to use word of mouth to promote the activity, agency, and applicability of the church is part of the very fabric of the Christian faith. From the presentation of the law to the pronouncement of the prophets, and from the declaration of the gospel to the foolishness of preaching, God has used the voice of the elect to communicate faith unto salvation.



Even with the addition of technological tools and virtual vestiges, the responsibility of the church leadership to encourage people to share their faith and invite people to church every week remains as strong as ever. It should be the goal of every pastor to attract people to church and mobilize the members to do the actual marketing. Too often, church members get complacent with the status quo and fail to prioritize the call to witness; however, evangelism is required for the future of the church. The church in general, and the AACU specifically, signs its own death certificate when it fails to consider the ways and means of building the next generation. The prescription for church growth has never changed: those who have come into a saving knowledge of Christ are commissioned to share their faith through the word of testimony, and to invite the unsaved to hear from a preacher through what God speaks unto salvation. The commission also includes the continual teaching of God's word to contribute to the growth of committed disciples. Particularly in an age wherein the integrity of the Christian is constantly under attack, promotion of the church through word of mouth is fundamental to the growth of the body.

In addition, it is important that the work of urban pastors is seen and heard. There are so many criticisms against African American pastors that it is of vital importance that the work they do to shift the narrative to the good work they are doing is consistently shared. It also must remain apparent that there are those within the urban communities who are pushing back the darkness and addressing the issues plaguing their neighborhoods. Jesus Himself was masterful at maximizing moments. He made sure that when He healed someone or touched someone it went viral. He created such a buzz that it became difficult for Him to move around without people watching to see what He would

do next. One final priority for the AAUC is the need to build relationships with news outlets and reporters so that they can assist to shape the narrative of the urban pastor and the work of the church. The urban pastor should know and make themselves known to local reporters and anchors. Local news stations and publications should be contacted to share press releases about the church's events and initiatives. A professional public relations associate is the team member who can lead the planning and implementation of this aspect of marketing. Relationship with these lead communicators in the city is essential to obtaining and maintaining a presence in the community.

## BUILDING ALLIANCES AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

While this project focused on exploration of imperative shifts in the culture of the AAUC as opposed to specifying and highlighting the contrasts between the AAUC and the AWSC some differences between the two are as readily identifiable as the distinctions between the Black community and the white community, and the urban versus suburban experience.

For example, a recent report from the Peter G. Peterson Foundation indicates that” the median household income for Black-led households in the United States was \$48,297, while that of their white counterparts was \$77,999.”<sup>74</sup> Per a study by Pew Research, “urban areas in the United States have a population that is 44% white and 17% Black while suburban areas have a population of 68% white and 11% Black.”<sup>75</sup> The income disparity is a huge dilemma in the United States. The wealth gap makes it a challenge for African American families to

The income disparity between Black heads of household and white heads of household, and the higher instance of White Christians attending a White-led church and Black Christians attending a Black-led church, is representative of the resource difference experienced between The AAUC and the AWSC. The AAUC can work to fill in the gaps by building intentional, strategic partnerships in the community. Partnerships can aid in bringing the much-needed resources whether tangible or intangible that are lacking

---

<sup>74</sup> Peter G. Peterson, “Income and Wealth in the United States: An Overview of Recent Data,” November 9, 2022, <https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2022/11/income-and-wealth-in-the-united-states-an-overview-of-recent-data>.

<sup>75</sup> Pew Research Center, “Faith Among Black Americans.”

amongst African American communities. African American families can receive the same high quality services when given the same opportunities and advantages that they normally cannot afford or is out of their reach. For example, when COVID-19 vaccines were available, many Black families in the inner city did not have transportation to go to the testing and vaccination facilities. Some churches, including New Direction Church stepped in and partnered with Indygo, the local city bus and with various hospital networks around the city and provided a place for the community to come to receive vaccines.

The African American pastor has never been able to stay within his silo or within his church and carry out his work without involving other community members; there has always been effort placed in building relationships that allow him to extend his work beyond his reach. Pastor Leonard Grimes led the Twelfth Baptist Church for 27 years. He worked with the Underground Railroad as well as other partners in the fight to abolish slavery. He worked with other leaders to campaign against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, organized community members to raise funds to purchase the freedom of an escaped slave and was part of a successful agitation to change federal policy so that Black soldiers could participate in the Civil War.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, was very strategic about building relationships so that the work of the civil rights movement, both inside and outside of his own community, could be accomplished. He partnered with people who did not necessarily share his culture, religious identity, ethnicity, or even all his political beliefs; they needed only to come together based on a common objective to achieve a successful partnership.

Similarly, it is essential that African American pastors identify organizations, institutions, foundations, corporations, and/or individuals with whom to collaborate on a particular shared goal. There are a number of organizations which do similar work as the urban church or are committed to funding the work that the urban church prioritizes in the community. It is, therefore, incumbent upon churches to look for ways in which they can build relationships that can help to advance their philanthropic efforts.

Of the urban African American pastors surveyed, the majority 39% indicated that they had collaborated with three to five partners in the past year, and 20% indicated that they had partnered with one or two. 12% reported participating in either six to eight or nine-plus partnerships in the last year, and 8% indicated that they had participated in no partnerships at all.<sup>76</sup> While it is very encouraging to note that most AAUC participated in some sort of collaboration, it is essential for all leaders in the AAUC to prioritize a strategic design for parachurch partnerships and commit to its consistent implementation in this post-pandemic age.

The AAUC should develop relationships with both church and parachurch organizations whenever possible, to address the extensive issues that burden the Black urban community. Such partners can be other congregations in the area; businesses that want to invest in the area; mental health treatment centers; mentoring organizations; volunteer organizations; local colleges/universities; social welfare and/or social justice organizations; state/local political entities; food suppliers; vocational training organizations; and health/wellness organizations.

---

<sup>76</sup> Interviews with pastor, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

A pastor from North Carolina shared that” his church partners with Duke University to provide a range of health education and outreach services in the community. A pastor and civic leader in northern Indiana adds that it is of high priority to think not only of churches and non-profits as community partners, but to also investigate partnering with the city to maximize outreach efforts and quality for funding to support initiatives.”<sup>77</sup> When the church takes the additional step of aligning its vision with that of the city in which its located, it positions the church for increased opportunity to impact the community. This is critical when we see such a need with rising food costs and food insecurity in various African American neighborhoods.

A visionary senior pastor in Michigan shared “about the mobile clinic with which his church partners each week to serve people with mental health diagnoses. He was also able to pay off \$1M in medical debt by partnering with a relief agency; rehabilitate three single family homes; sponsor vaccination clinics, financial literacy courses, and more, by virtue of strategic partnerships.”<sup>78</sup>

New Direction Church has entered several strategic partnerships during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. One has been a large food bank, which not only has provided low-cost/no cost food for the New Direction food pantry but has assisted to purchase additional supplies and major appliances to increase the church’s capacity to serve others in a food desert. New Direction was also able to partner with both Eskenazi Hospital and Indiana Immunization Coalition to provide COVID-19 vaccination clinics for community members each month of the pandemic.

---

<sup>77</sup> Interview by pastor, December 2, 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Interview by pastor, December 2, 2022

The Lilly Foundation partnered with New Direction not only to provide funds for shelter cost emergency assistance, but also collaborated with the church's new community development corporation to provide vocational training scholarships for justice involved men. Additional partners for vocational training include the 1150 Academy Cybersecurity certification program, and The Vocational College for barbering and cosmetology. The Bridge Initiative is also a partnership program that allows students to enroll in Indiana Wesleyan University at a reduced tuition rate, while also serving at New Direction in exchange for college credit. Finally, IU Health has invited New Direction into a new partnership wherein the church will serve IU Health patients by connecting with them through weekly follow-up calls for check-in and relationship building after hospital discharge. Beginning in February 2023, the program will help to ensure that IU Health's patients have the wrap-around support they need after inpatient and/or outpatient procedures, while New Direction is able to encourage their participation in the church and its connective ministries.

Two other priority partnership opportunities are neighborhood associations and local school districts. Neighborhood associations are important allies when it comes to the churches event calendar that may involve gathering large crowds in the community, impacting traffic flow, and/or contributing to increases in noise during the festivities. Alliance with neighborhood associations can help with support of the church's events and demonstrates common courtesy and Godly affection so that the church's good deeds are not seen in a bad light due to residual impacts to neighbors. Such relationships also afford the church an opportunity to learn about the neighborhood's assets, needs, and priorities, and discover ways it can be a great neighbor. Finally, local school systems naturally share

goals/objectives with churches, due to their support of the holistic well-being of students and their families. Since the family's relationship with the school is compulsory, the church's partnership with the school may provide access to several families it may not otherwise meet, and relationship with the church can be a byproduct of the partner connection.

To fully realize the benefits of partnership in the urban context, this author was instrumental in establishing the Indianapolis Urban Pastors Coalition (IUPC) in 2021. Due to the coalition's relationship to implementation of key essentials that have been described, a summary of the coalition and its activity is appropriate to include. The IUPC is a "nondenominational bipartisan group of religious and community leaders who are working to combat problems affecting urban neighborhoods and residents."<sup>79</sup>

The coalition meets biweekly and monthly to discuss various issues affecting urban churches. The purpose of each meeting is to involve various community pastors, leaders, corporations, and funders to discuss the current and future needs of the community. The coalition is comprised of an Executive Board, Committee Chair members, Community Partners, and Members. The IUPC started "after gathering for the Peace Walk with Councilor La Keisha Jackson during the summer of 2021. A group of concerned clergies brought together by Anthony Beverly of Stop the Violence Indianapolis, decided to formally organize for the sake of addressing violent crime and other social ills within the Far Eastside of Indianapolis".<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Indianapolis Urban Pastors Coalition, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.iupc.net/>.

<sup>80</sup> Indianapolis Urban Pastors Coalition, "About Us," accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.iupc.net/about/>.



In September 2021, this author was elected as the first President for the Indianapolis Urban Pastors Coalition and, and currently leads coalition and its executive board. The entire team meets monthly to discuss various issues that our community is facing. The president also meets with various defined and/or ad hoc subgroups of the coalition on a bi-weekly basis.

One of the main programs that was established at New Direction Church related to its participation in the coalition is the Hope for Life program. Hope for Life assists adults who are dealing with alcohol and chemical addiction. This group incorporates the 12-Step Recovery Model while also incorporating faith-based objectives into the program. This program is free to everyone interested and is confidential. The main goal of this program is to maintain sobriety while understanding areas that may cause a participant to relapse or trigger negative behaviors. This is a notable example of how partnerships can impact programming in the AAUC.

The IUPC works with residents in the City of Indianapolis in underserved areas where the median income is lower, and a large portion of these residents are single-parent households. This coalition also works with at-risk youth and adults. One of the major goals is to work with minorities who need assistance after being incarcerated with a successful transition to the local community. Indianapolis Urban Pastor Coalition has four main core objectives:

1. Violence Prevention, Intervention, and Reduction
2. Mental Health and Wellness
3. Social Justice

#### 4. Community and Economic Development<sup>81</sup>

The primary aim of the coalition is to help the growth and development of urban churches that are smaller in size and have a smaller budget. The goal is to connect these churches with political power to get connected and to get plugged into resources that will empower each church. The coalition also prioritizes collaboration on ideas as well as the sharing of resources and best practices for all churches in urban areas.

This coalition is helping churches apply for grants that will allow them to better service their neighborhood and the surrounding communities. Many of the urban churches within these areas do not have outreach programs. The coalition is assisting with closing the gap to provide resources that may be offered in the community and at the local churches within this community. The goal for the coalition is to assist them with developing their outreach program and getting the funding to be able to support these programs.

The young adult population has the greatest need. There are ideas that are emerging in this season of the church that involves a young adult life group targeted to attracting the demographic between the ages of 18-22. The key opportunity for the IUPC is for churches to work together in partnerships to improve the current conditions in the communities. The coalition serves to address issues of violence, food insecurity, mental health, and other crises that occur within the urban communities in the metropolitan Indianapolis area.

It is imperative that the AAUC creatively considers the partnerships that will be most beneficial considering its location, its niche in the community, and the challenges it

---

<sup>81</sup> Indianapolis Urban Pastors Coalition

faces. Collaborative entities such as the IUPC are ideal models for idea and resource sharing for any urban church. Such groups take the benefits of partnerships and propel them to another level due to the number of voices and perspectives available through that one commitment. The advantages of relationships with several faith-based, community, and civic leaders are all realized in one single partnership.

It is important to note that while partnerships are essential to the effectiveness of the AAUC, it is important for leaders to choose partners carefully. Navigating spaces that are not faith-based will facilitate some encounters with people who are not naturally inclined to loving and respecting faith leaders, or whose beliefs in areas unrelated to the common goal may be out of alignment with the church's position. In these instances, there is no substitute for seeking God for discernment in how to facilitate the relationship, or whether to enter that relationship at all. As an aspect of the research for this work, the author completed a case study on an African American church in San Antonio, TX. This study provides an illustration of the impact of the essentials discussed in the sections.

The church is an energetic church located in San Antonio, Texas. "The church is predominately African American and is a non-denominational Christian church. The Bible is our final authority. At the church they are driven by a desire to make disciples - and make sure that everyone we encounter knows Jesus and accepts Him as Lord and Savior."<sup>82</sup> The church's theme for the year is Innovate. The theme changes every year depending on what the Holy Spirit's direction with the church leadership and focus for the people. Due to the COVID-19's pandemic, the church went through a series of

---

<sup>82</sup> Vertical Church, "About Us," accessed July 15, 2021, <http://wearevertical.church/about/>.

necessary changes that forced the ministry to be innovative and still thrive outside the walls of the church.

In May of 2021, this author began consulting with the senior pastor to discuss the challenges that his church has faced during the past year. Prior to COVID-19; the author visited his church in person and enjoyed the energy, aesthetics, and most importantly the presence of God. Once COVID-19 hit America, the pastor had to shift to virtual services. During our meetings, we focused on the following topics: innovation, life groups, reopening plan, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church and community involvement. The author met with the leadership team and ministry leaders to discuss the initiatives and goals. For four Sundays in May and June; the author watched the Vertical Church service online. New Direction Church resumed in person worship on June 20<sup>th</sup> and Vertical Church resumed in person worship on June 27<sup>th</sup>.

The theme for Vertical Church is Innovation. The focus started with the shift of in-person worship to enhancing the online experience. The internet does not limit God. Vertical Church's concentration was to modernize online ministry with the aim to bless anyone and still target the Millennial Generation and Gen X. The church literally transformed into a television, film, and recording studio.

The media team focus was on developing the skills necessary to execute the innovative strategy of online ministry required professional development or specialized training for the staff. During COVID-19; the equipment and software was upgraded. The leadership team did a great job with training in regard to filming video, editing video, sound, mixing, mastering content, and lighting. Members can gain considerable

experience as well as young adults when working in the production field, and the church can be a great start to learn an additional skill set.

The next focus was with shifting to virtual giving. “Stories of generosity are beautiful examples of the way God’s church should respond in difficult situations. Instead of hoarding what we have with an inward-focused mindset, we can give with rich generosity, looking around us for opportunities to serve.”<sup>83</sup> Vertical Church hosted orientation classes via Zoom and that allowed all partners to transition to online giving platforms called EasyTithe or Subsplash. The author was able to view one of the recorded training sessions. The training was very informative, and the church did an excellent job of executing this transition. This is a best practice that I have discussed with my leadership team.

The last focus was shifting all ministries to a virtual environment.

One area that the author feels will enhance the member experience is participation with life groups. Larry Osborne said: “What matters is not the size of the church or the slickness of the programming. What matters is that those who come find a ministry and relationships worthy of spontaneous word-of-mouth recommendations.”<sup>84</sup> I enjoyed hearing and watching the organization of these groups and the ways that these groups were activated virtually. The Connect Groups are led by their leadership team. Most of the content was taken from messages or series that leadership has taught and preached. Other times the church brought in speakers that provided professional insight and

---

<sup>83</sup> Church Marketing University, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/17ASrZBo57wYh8Bj-jGkaMtdv8cwLTgTH7qICUsqE-Rk/edit>.

<sup>84</sup> Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 5.

training. The leadership team also used the sermon notes are developed into smaller lessons from Pastor Bond that was taught in 35-minute sessions.

A sample Connect Group class agenda was presented as follows. The first step was to have each participant complete a Pre-Assessment. During this step, the leader discovers what the participants already knows regarding the subject matter. Next the leader provides a mini lesson then an activity which allows the participants to work as an individual or in groups. After the activity, all participants had a chance to show proficiency and explore best practices from other sources. The final step is called the Exit Ticket. During this step, the main question is submitted, and everyone needs to answer individually to show competence.

Vertical Church reopened for in-person worship services on June 27, 2021. With church leadership still dealing with the effects of the pandemic, the church has decided to provide in person and online worship. The author discussed how some churches have stopped having online services once they opened, but the leadership of Vertical believes that online worship is necessary. The author also discussed the challenges with sound from the music ministry and how the quality may be diminished. Vertical Church made the decision to pre-record praise and worship, announcements, promotions, offerings, and invitation for the online audience. The only part of the service that is live is the sermon. For the live audience, they experience live praise and worship, pre-recorded announcements, and promotions, but the offering and invitation is live after the broadcast. The strength from this set-up allows the church to control the content initially seen by the online audience and allows the in-person worship experience to be timely.

Pastor Bonds provided a few suggestions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church. The first is to continue hosting online and in-person services. The author discussed the uncertainty of what's next and how to continue this focus. The author also discussed the number of new members that joined outside of Texas that may never attend in person. Having an online presence is the future of evangelism. It takes more energy to oversee both worship service types, but it increases the church's reach. People who may not believe in a traditional place of worship can listen and watch the services in private and be discipled that way.

The next suggestion was to develop ministry staff positions that center around production of video content, film, editing, mixing, mastering, and lighting. Hiring the best organist in town may not be the way of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church. The author discussed how the focus can be centered around content, people, and production. The third suggestion provided is to develop processes or standard operating procedures to lead your staff effectively then connect the proper software to support your process. Lastly, it is suggested that the church employs software that allows access to data and metrics that monitors multiple areas (ex: attendance, giving, and Connect group growth). This is a key tool in learning trends and patterns of the congregants as well as visitors. Also, members and visitors alike can communicate amongst each other without having to be available physically.

We discussed what is working well for Vertical Church. The online service has been a tremendous blessing because it has allowed a small church like Vertical Church to spread the gospel to people all over the world. When Vertical Church opened on June 27<sup>th</sup>; they had over 30 visitors that had been watching their online program and listed that

as the reason they visited their campus. Giving has also increased for Vertical Church. “Now more than ever, nonprofits need to ensure that they are spending times and resources perfecting the implementation of their Web 1.2 campaigns.”<sup>85</sup> The platforms that were activated have helped Vertical remain relevant regarding how people give weekly. Professional Development for staff has assisted the church in this season. Learning new software programs like Planning Center Live, Microsoft teams, etc. have helped ensure processes are managed effectively.

It was also discussed what is not working well for Vertical Church. One area that Pastor Bond wants to improve is developing a specific strategy regarding reaching the community. He also wants to secure more space that would allow the church to consistently run the food bank, clothing exchange, and programs that empower the community. Another weakness is developing or finding the right people to run these programs and possibly getting funding to ensure longevity and effectiveness. “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”<sup>86</sup> At Vertical Church there is a consistent priority on seeking volunteers and potential staff members to help grow the ministries in an effort to impact the Kingdom of God.

The foregoing study provides a beneficial illustration of the particulars of redevelopment and shifting strategy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The subject of the study effectively demonstrates the consideration and implementation of the

---

<sup>85</sup> Heather Mansfield, *Social Media for Social Good* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2012)

<sup>86</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2007).



essentials for AAUC in the post-pandemic era. A comprehensive strategic Plan, non-traditional Personnel,

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion was intended to highlight ten essential areas wherein they can shift its approach to be effective in the 21st century post-pandemic age. The is an institution that has stood for decades. It is important that the African American church pivots in this time to be able to meet the spiritual needs of in the community, but also be an institution that has a response to physical needs. The AAUC has always had to do more with less, there has always been a resilience in the church which allows it to stand the test of time. God has always sustained the AAUC over centuries of hardship in the community, and as the church continues the transition post-pandemic the number one essential to implement is asking more help from Almighty God.

The business of the church includes the strategic, but the spiritual must be engaged more than ever. It is most essential for the church to turn back to seeking after God in prayer.

The innovative leaders who joined in this conversation were able to pivot during and after the pandemic to maintain their churches and even move them forward into a new normal. Eighty percent of the pastors interviewed reported that that most of their members have returned to the sanctuary for in person worship, but approximately thirty percent have chosen to remain online. The pastors interviewed were optimistic, but all of them shared that during and after the pandemic they were forced to examine their own leadership and they adjusted in areas that were necessary.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

One pastor from Indianapolis shared that the “pandemic helped strengthen his hand within his church in terms of decision-making. Initiatives he had previously shared with his traditional congregation are now more easily accepted and embraced. He added that the COVID-19 crisis taught his church and key leaders that they needed to be ready should another unexpected global emergency occur.”<sup>88</sup>

The AAUC is at a pivotal point in history, and there are things that the church must do immediately to ensure its survival. Adjusting the approach to the Plan, Personnel, Product, Processes, Production, Programs, Profits, Protection, Promotion, and Partnerships as they relate to the Great Commission as well as Jesus’ ministry to the oppressed is not a mere suggestion; the shift in approach and adoption of new practices can be essential to the church’s survival. In an age wherein we see so much distrust with institutions from banking to education, from political to healthcare, there exists the same spirit of opposition to organized religion and the institution of the church. God expects for those who are stewards of His church to occupy until He comes, to understand the fierce urgency of now. Now is the time to implement the things that are necessary to move the church forward and to be attuned with the trends that are impacting the way we engage community members inside and outside of the body of Christ.

It would be beneficial to the average AAUC to connect with AWSC church and build relationships with AWSC leaders as a means of genuine bonding and brotherhood, as well as to learn and discover how the AAUC can function more effectively and efficiently. It would also be honorable and commendable for the AWSC to partner with

---

<sup>88</sup> Interviews with pastors, November 2, 2022 to December 20, 2022.

an AACU to assist the church and pastor to implement updated practices to impact the trajectory of their ministry in the Black community.

The AWSC's have access to more resources than the average African American Urban Church, by virtue of the significant wealth disparities between Black and White families.

As a case in point, in Indianapolis one of the suburban churches there is a church that looked to expand and purchase a property that was being sold for \$2 million and one member stepped forward to purchase that property. While any enlargement of the church of God is a win for the kingdom and worthy of celebration in the entire Christian community, this type of expansion begs the question: how far could even a portion of that gift go, as an investment in the ministry of several AAUC's engaged in ministry in the urban setting?

Partnership of this nature is preceded in the record of the early church. In II Corinthians 8, Paul implores the church at Corinth to contribute to a fellow congregation that did not have the same level of resources, even noting that they have given in the past. He even recognizes the church in Macedonia, which made a significant donation to the church at Jerusalem even out of their poverty they gave to the church. Their actions are commendable because they wanted to assist other believers who did not have what they had. If the Macedonian church could give out of their poverty, how much more should church that have massive prosperity contribute to those AAUC churches that have had too historically do more with less? The AWSC should be intentional with seeing urban America as a mission field and supplementing their support of foreign missions with support on the other side of town. After all, the same issues that exist in some war-torn

countries around the world—food insecurity, poverty, lack of housing, desperation, violence, and blight, to name a few—also exist in cities across the United States.

This approach would not only be seen as a benefit to the AAUC, but it would also be a great witness of reconciliation to the world. Currently, the expansion of AWSC satellite locations into urban spaces is a threat to the survival of existing—even historical—AAUC, potentially leaving African Americans without true defenders of their community. As discussed previously, it is the voice of the African American minister which has historically stood in the gap and fought for the Black community. The required level of advocacy has not been available from White faith leaders on a massive scale, so their community does not serve as a substitute for that of African American preachers.

The voice of the African American pastor is so important because it is the voice that speaks on the subjects that many Caucasian faith leaders avoid or have gotten wrong. In the tradition of the prophets, the proclamation in this age—and particularly as an advocate for those in the African American community—may be bold and even confrontational. It is exactly this kind of approach that pastors and faith leaders can take to advance the cause of the AAUC and community. Though it may come at a cost in some instances, it is incumbent upon Black faith leaders to partner with White evangelical leaders to share the importance of justice, humanity, and bring true balance to our Christianity and help them to represent a more comprehensive interpretation of the scriptures in regard to the kingdom of God.

The African American church and its leaders are the ones who have spoken truth to power, defended the widows and orphans and the vulnerable within our community. It is evident in this society that so many are disconnected from the local church.

Additionally, the multi-location, multicultural model of many large AWSC is beginning to draw people who would normally go to African American churches, which diverts those resources out of African American churches and communities to other churches where those resources are not needed. That phenomenon then widens the economic gap between African American churches in the urban space and suburban churches who already have resources as well as members who already are more well to do than their Black counterparts.

Maintaining its cultural values and practices while also embracing a new approach to ministry that will attract both members of Generation Y (millennials) and Generation Z. A reversal of this exodus from the church is a key component of protecting the viability of the AAUC in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Reconciliation may be prioritized for the church to function as designed, including collaboration between the AAUC and the AWSC. As a function of the collaborative work, African American and Caucasian leaders can be willing to do the challenging work of confronting the history of racism in the church. This is a centuries-old truth.

Historically American denominations approved, advocated and accepted slavery. The American church was built on segregation. From the pre-Civil war era when Blacks would go down by the river side and have church in private and Black ministers would preach through storytelling and learn by way of what we call the African oral traditions, to the barring of Black Christians from the floor seats in churches in the north, African Americans were forced to form their own denominations. Even after the Azusa Street revival in the early 1900's when Pentecostalism was established, churches like the

Assemblies of God were established to maintain segregation among the races. Christian colleges like Bob Jones University did not change its discriminatory practices until 1983 after a Supreme Court decision. Blacks could be on campus, but no interracial dating was allowed.

In 1995 The Southern Baptist Conference released an apology for its apathy during the Civil Rights Era and its stance on slavery during Civil War, a century and a half after the issue split the Baptist church between the North and the South.

The church in America in general, has condoned segregation, slavery, splitting up of families, lynchings, torture, and brutality against African Americans since the birth of the nation.

Any conversation about collaboration and can also include a consideration of the need for racial reconciliation. It is important to recognize that the roots of racism run extremely deep within the American church.

Many of the Black pastors polled and questioned and surveyed do not have the resources, contacts and friends in high places larger White churches have. That is why it is incumbent upon the White churches who are in essence benefactors of racial systems that created disparity for African Americans and privileges for Whites to be the ones to close the divide.

An investment into the African American community is evident in urban areas with various sectors of society and companies. Many corporations are reinvesting in underserved urban communities as a way in which to address the issues in urban areas. There is ample space and opportunities for larger White churches to do the same.

After the murder George Floyd at the hands of a White police officer in May 2020, the entire world was awakened to the gap and the divide within the country of America. This moved many companies to invest in underserved areas.

In the 46218 area of Indianapolis where New Direction Church is located, Cook Medical (which is one of the largest companies in the state of Indiana) invested in building a brand-new Goodwill Commercial Services manufacturing facility less than one mile away from the church campus. The facility, which will be a manufacturer of Cook Medical devices, will provide jobs for men and women who may have had a previous encounter with the justice system. This has provided 100 jobs to the area and encouraged others to invest in the community.

In addition, Cook Medical partnered with two young Black men who had a very small market in the area. The team will now own and operate a 14,000 square foot grocery store, which Cook is building and an Indianapolis funding partner is supporting with startup capital. Cook Medical could have built a grocery store that would have competed with the small grocery store these two African American men had established. But, instead, they thought it was best to invest in them and strengthen them in the work they were doing. American White Suburban Church can take cues from this model in relationship to the AAUC in their vicinity.

This is a chance for the church to rise and demonstrate that it is one under God. The church should not have to follow the world as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The church should be leading the way. The church should be showing that it is willing to make sacrifices and those who have more are willing to go the extra mile.



The AAUC can be intentional about becoming all it needs to be to become the kind of church it can become, which includes establishing partnerships with the AWSC in the area. However, it is imperative that the AAUC does not solely look outside of its context to gain resources for the work that God has called it to do; it is God who birthed the AAUC and allowed it to survive this long. The AAUC and the African American community have always had the supernatural ability to do more with less. Without question, God will continue to provide His church with what it needs to meet the current challenges she faces and the challenges that lie ahead. This manual is a tool to begin essential conversations to that end, and additional resources with further specifics will help the AAUC realign itself so that it can continue to be a beacon of hope for the urban community it serves.

## ADDENDUM

### *Interview Questions*

1. What is your church's ethnic make-up?
2. How would you describe the impact of the COVID-19 impact on your church?
3. What strategy have you used to re-establish the ministry since the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What changes have you observed in your church/ministry post-pandemic?
5. What new needs have you noticed in the church and community as a result of the pandemic?
6. What needs have you identified for urban churches have that are different than suburban churches?
7. In hindsight, what is the most important aspect of your ministry that was found lacking during/after the pandemic?
8. Are there any ministry aspects that you have identified as needed but have not yet implemented? What is the plan to initiate?
9. What key ministry personnel roles have you initiated or updated post-pandemic?
10. What aspect of your ministry is thriving post-pandemic?
11. What ministry aspect has changed the most about your church/ministry post-pandemic?
12. What additional changes do you see for the future of your congregation and community?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Robert. *The Effective Pastor*. Chicago, IL. The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1985.
- Armstrong, Jacob. *The Connected Life: Small Groups That Create Community*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Barna Group. “41% of Black Church Churchgoers Favor a Hybrid Church Future.” Barna, July 15, 2021. <https://www.barna.com/research/tibc-hybrid-future/>.
- Barna Group. “Trends in the Black Church. Celebrating its Legacy and Investing in a Hopeful Future.” Barna Group, 2021.
- Bartner, Amy. “Megachurch Launches Downtown Location with \$2.7M Building Purchase.” *Indy Star.com*. August 19, 2016. <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2016/08/19/megachurch-launches-downtown-location-27m-building-purchase/88963678/>.
- Billingsley, Andrew, and Barbara Morrison-Rodriguez. “The Black Family in the 21st Century and the Church as an Action System: A Macro Perspective.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 1, no. 2-3 (1998): 31-47.
- Bradley, Anthony B. *Why Black Lives Matter*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020.
- Bryson, John R et al. “COVID-19, Virtual Church Services and a New Temporary Geography of Home.” *Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 111, no. 3 (2020): 360-372. doi:10.1111/tesg.12436.
- Burge, Ryan. “With Gen Z, Women Are No Longer More Religious than Men.” *Christianity Today*, July 2022. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/july/young-women-not-more-religious-than-men-gender-gap-gen-z.html>.
- Burton, Bob. *The Spiritual DNA of a Church on Mission*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2019.
- Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.
- Chipidza, Fallon E., Rachel S. Wallwork, and Theodore A. Stern. “Impact of the Doctor-Patient Relationship.” *The Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders* 17, no. 5 (2015), DOI: 10.4088/PCC.15f01840.

- Church Marketing University. Accessed July 12, 2021.  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/17ASrZBo57wYh8Bj-jGkaMtdv8cwLTgTH7qICUsqE-Rk/edit>.
- Conrardy, Alyssa. "Seven Deadly Nonprofit Marketing Budget Sins: Part One." Prosper Strategies, August 10, 2020. <https://prosper-strategies.com/nonprofit-marketing-budget-part-one/>
- Cooper, Anthony-Paul, Samuli Laato, Suvi Nenonen, Suvi, Nicolas Pope, David Tjiharuka, and Erkki Sutinen. "The Reconfiguration of Social, Digital, and Physical Presence: From Online Church to Church Online." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 77, no. 3 (2021): e1–e9.  
<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i3.6286>.
- Crary, David. "Share of Americans with No Religious Affiliation Growing." AP News. October 19, 2019. <https://apnews.com/article/us-news-ap-top-news-reinventing-faith-religion-christianity-35bd96fbecce4cdeb191392a58ebdc2e>.
- DeVries, Mark, and Scott Pontier. *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry: Making It Work, Making It Last*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Economic Times. "Technology Addiction: Check Out The Perpetual Influx Of New Technologies In Our Lives." India Times, January 13, 2018.  
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/technology-addiction-check-out-the-perpetual-influx-of-new-technologies-in-our-lives/articleshow/62490769.cms>.
- Faughnder, Ryan. "Pacific and ArcLight Theaters Will Not Reopen After the Pandemic, Company Says." Los Angeles Times. April 12, 2021.  
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2021-04-12/pacific-and-arclight-theaters-will-not-reopen-following-the-pandemic-company-says>
- FBI: UCR. *2019 Crime in the United States – Violent Crime*. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/violent-crime>.
- Fluker, Walter Earl. *The Ground Has Shifted*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.
- Foster, Ricard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2007.
- Foust, Michael. "Presbyterian Church (USA) Adds 'Non-Binary' 3rd Gender Category for Members." Christian Headlines, October 27, 2022.  
<https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/michael-foust/presbyterian-church-usa-adds-non-binary-3rd-gender-category-for-members.html>.

- Gates, Jr, Henry Louis. "Henry Louis Gates' New Book Traces the Institution's Role in History, Politics, And Culture." *The Harvard Gazette*, March 9, 2021. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/>
- Ginzburg, Ralph. *100 Years of Lynchings*. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1962.
- Gladden, Steve. *Planning Small Groups with Purpose: A Field-Tested Guide to Design and Grow Your Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Harris, Antipas L. *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion? How the Bible Is Good News for People of Color*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- Health & Human Services Press Office. "U.S. Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic." *Health & Human Services*, December 7, 2021. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>.
- Huang, Paulos. "Three Challenges and Opportunities for the Christian Church in Twenty-first-century China." *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 15, no. 4 (2015): 289-304.
- Husock, Howard. "Don't Let CDCs Fool You." *City Journal*, Summer 2001. <https://www.city-journal.org/html/don%E2%80%99t-let-cdcs-fool-you-12175.html>.
- Indianapolis Urban Pastors Coalition. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.iupc.net/>.
- Jakes, T.D. *Don't Drop the Mic*. New York: Faith Words, 2021.
- Kaplan, Sarah and Justin Moyer. "Why Racists Target Black Churches." *The Washington Post*, July 1, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/07/01/why-racists-burn-black-churches/>.
- King, Jr. Martin. *Why We Can't Wait*. First Signet Classic. New York: New American Liberty, 2000.
- Kite, James, Grunseit, Anne, Li, Vincy, Vineburg, John, Berton, Nathan, Bauman, Adrian, and Freeman, Becky. "Generating Engagement on the Make Healthy Normal Campaign Facebook Page: Analysis of Facebook Analytics." *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 21, no. 1 (2019): E11132.
- Lehr, J. Fred. *Becoming a 21st-Century Church*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017.
- Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. London: Duke University Press, 1990.

- Mansfield, Heather. *Social Media for Social Good*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2012.
- Mason, Eric. *Urban Apologetics Restoring Black Dignity with the Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021. Kindle.
- McKnight, Scott. "The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited." *Trinity Journal*, 34, no. 1 (2013): 95-97.
- McMickle, Marvin. *Preaching to the Black Middle Class. Words of Challenge. Words of Hope*. Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 1999.
- Meacham, Jon. *Henry Louis Gates Jr. on African-American Religion*. New York Times, February 16, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/books/review/henry-louis-gates-jr-the-black-church.html>
- Meyer, Holly. "What New Lifeway Research Survey Says About Why Young Adults Are Dropping Out Of Church." *Tennessean*, January 15, 2019. <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2019/01/15/lifeway-research-survey-says-young-adults-dropping-out-church/2550997002/>.
- Miller, Maureen A. "I Knew it, But I Didn't Know It: Black Church Lay Leaders and Perspective Transformation." PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2020.
- Moore, Mark. "Midweek Check In." February 2, 2023, YouTube video, 2:44:09, <https://youtu.be/qtdo2VaxqrA>.
- Nance, Terry. *God's Armor Bearer Volumes 1 & 2: Serving God's Leaders*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2003.
- Osbourne, Larry. *Sticky Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Pada, Orvic. "The Impact of Gentrification on Faith-Based Organizations." *Justice, Spirituality & Education Journal*, no. 5 (2015). <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jsej/vol2015/iss2015/5>.
- Peterson, Peter G. "Income and Wealth in the United States: An Overview of Recent Data." Peter G. Peterson Blog, November 9, 2022. <https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2022/11/income-and-wealth-in-the-united-states-an-overview-of-recent-data>.
- Pew Research Center. "Religious Landscape Study." Pew Research Center. Accessed February 12, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>.
- Pew Research Center. *Faith Among Black Americans*. Pew Research Center, February 16, 2021. <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/02/16/faith-among-black-americans/>.

Quote Investigator. *If You Are Not at the Table Then You're Probably on the Menu*.

Quote Investigator. November 11, 2020.

<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2020/11/15/table-menu/>.

Ranney, Megan et al. "What Are the Long-Term Consequences of Youth Exposure to Firearm Injury, and How Do We Prevent Them? A Scoping Review." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 42, no. 4 (2019): 724-740. doi:10.1007/s10865-019-00035-2.

Reformed Church in America. "Ministerial Excellence Fund." Reformed Church in America. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.rca.org/benefits/financial-health/ministerial-excellence-fund/>.

Robertson, Campbell. "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches." *The New York Times*. March 9, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>

Shapiro, Thomas. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American. How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Stokes, Vincent E., II. *With a Strength Not of His Own: The Christian Background of Rev. Nat Turner and Its Impact on the Black Baptist Church in the 21st Century*. Asuza, CA: 2016.

Stückelberger, Christoph and J. N. Kanyua Mugambi. *Responsible Leadership-Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2009.

Vernon, R.A. *Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry From Micro to Mega*. Victory Media & Publishing Company, 2011.

Vertical Church. *About us*. Vertical Church. Accessed July 15, 2021, <http://wearevertical.church/about/>.

White, Peter, and Benjamin O. Acheampong. "Planning and Management in the Missional Agenda of the 21st Century Church: A Study of Lighthouse Chapel International." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1-8.

Whitesel, Bob. "Mission and Are You Writing a Statement or Living in Mission?" *Church Health*, May 13, 2016. <https://churchhealthwiki.wordpress.com/2016/05/13/mission-are-you-writing-it-or-living-it/>.