MISSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: USING PREACHING AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION AS A MECHANISM TO EXPAND MISSIONAL THEOLOGY AND BUILD MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ORANGEBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

by

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MISSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: USING PREACHING AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION AS A MECHANISM TO EXPAND MISSIONAL THEOLOGY AND BUILD MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ORANGEBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

KRISTOPHER DANIEL AARON
MISSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: USING PREACHING AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION AS A MECHANISM TO EXPAND MISSIONAL THEOLOGY AND BUILD MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ORANGEBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA
Under the direction of ROBERT N. NASH, Ph.D., Supervisor

The congregants of First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina, are like many in churches across the United States. While they believe in the importance of local mission efforts, they view their work primarily as charity to a different group in their community. For more robust and effective efforts, however, the minister must encourage his or her congregation to develop relationships with those they serve. This project explores the importance of relationships in mission. The goal was for those who volunteer in the soup kitchen to develop mutually beneficial relationships with those they serve, to understand their efforts as more than just charity, and to view their efforts as ministering with people in their own community rather than ministering to people in a different community.

This project is a qualitative study that combines interviews, small group reflection sessions, and sermons to expand the congregation’s view of the importance of relationships in mission. Interviews were held before and after the sermon series with church
member volunteers. Group interviews were also held with non-member clients. In addition to interviews, small group sessions with corresponding activities were held following the sermons for volunteers. Finally, after all the interviews and sessions, preliminary results were shared with volunteers.

Participant responses indicate that they do understand the importance of relationships in mission. Participants also indicate that they view their efforts as more than charity and that they appreciate the need to empower those they serve if they hope to serve alongside them. Further study is needed to see how these changes to empower clients are implemented and how it affects the health and vitality of the ministry.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Background

I was called as the Associate Pastor for Students and Family Life at the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg (FBCO), South Carolina in the summer of 2015. During my first week on staff, the pastor told me about the church’s soup kitchen ministry and how members of the ministerial staff rotate leading a devotional for the clients prior to each meal. He then instructed me to join him on Thursday, so I could see the ministry in action. I entered the church’s fellowship hall a little before 1 PM that Thursday, expecting to see tables full of people and church members working diligently to provide a good meal for people that needed it.

And I did see all of that, but I also saw a few things that surprised me. First, I did not expect to see people who were not affiliated with the church helping prepare and serve food. I soon learned that several leaders in the community were so impressed by FBCO’s efforts that they volunteered their time even though they went to church elsewhere because they considered it a worthwhile cause. I was even more surprised to learn that a young African-American woman helping serve food had herself been a client at the soup kitchen just a few years prior. She was one of the first people served when the ministry began. Hearing just a bit of her story caused me to think more deeply about the ministry as a whole. I wondered how her role had shifted from one who was being served to
one who was doing the serving, and why she was the only person who had made such a shift. I wondered how she was viewed by the clients and the other volunteers. And I wondered if she could provide a model for how the soup kitchen ministry might continue to grow, give dignity to, and empower those it sought to serve. Most importantly, I wondered if her example could impact the church’s other local mission efforts, and if it might provide a guide for other churches who seek to minister with instead of ministering to those in their respective communities.

Ministerial Context

When I was called to the First Baptist Orangeburg, one of the first things that struck me was how little the racial make-up of the congregation I was serving reflected the racial make-up of the larger community. FBCO is overwhelmingly white, with only three African-American members and only one African-American family that visits frequently. The city of Orangeburg, on the other hand, is approximately eighty percent African-American.¹ The congregation of FBCO differs from the larger Orangeburg community both educationally and socio-economically as well. At least ninety percent of the adult members of First Baptist Orangeburg have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, but only 25.3% of adults in zip code 29115 and 48.1% of adults in zip code 29118 do.² Consequently, the congregation at FBCO is much more affluent than the majority of those in


² Ibid.
the Orangeburg community. One of the ways in which the church has sought to give back to the community and to be a good neighbor has been to develop a robust local missions program. The crown jewel of this program is the church’s soup kitchen ministry.

Every Thursday throughout the year, church members, along with a small number of volunteers from the community, cook a meal for approximately 150 people and serve them in the church’s Fellowship Hall. This number increases to nearly 200 people around Thanksgiving, Christmas, and during the summer when children are out of school. Rather than soup and sandwiches, however, people are served large, filling meals. While the menu varies from week to week, church members regularly make homemade desserts, grilled chicken and pork chops, and fresh vegetables. Consequently, the soup kitchen meal is one of the best in town. Local businesses have taken notice of the time and effort put in by volunteers. The local Chick-Fil-A and Wal-Mart regularly make donations and allow their workers to take time off so they can help serve in First Baptist’s soup kitchen.

The Larger Soup Kitchen Problem

While the soup kitchen ministry does a wonderful job of serving good meals to any who walk through door, there is one significant challenge. Due to the racial and socio-economic differences between those serving and those being served, many members at FBCO view their local mission efforts as offering charity to a different community rather than ministering together with people in the larger Orangeburg community. There are some notable exceptions, but most church members who serve in the soup kitchen do not have relationships with those they serve, do not know their stories, and, in many cases, do not even know their names. In similar fashion, those who are served rarely
know the names of those who are serving them, either. In the rush to feed as many people as possible, there is little time given to developing any meaningful relationships between these two groups. The focus becomes efficiency rather than ministry, and the conversation between these groups rarely moves beyond the stage of general pleasantries. This lack of meaningful relationships reflects a larger problem within First Baptist Orangeburg’s local mission efforts. The church’s local missions programs focus on immediate, short-term fixes rather than long-term solutions. While this, in and of itself, is not a bad thing, many in the congregation regularly express their desire to do more but remain unsure on the best course of action. This uncertainty directly connects to the fact that those serving know little about those being served. And until time and space is given for relationships to be formed between church members and those they serve in the larger Orangeburg community, the church’s local mission efforts will continue to be hampered and be less effective than they could be.

Research Methods

Structure

The primary pursuit of this project revolved around one goal: to help expand the missional theology of the congregation of First Baptist Orangeburg, and specifically, to encourage church members who volunteer in the soup kitchen to develop mutually beneficial relationships with those they serve. Seeking to accomplish this task, I completed a multi-stepped process in which I gathered qualitative research data through ethnographic analysis. The project combined interviews, sermons, and small group reflection sessions.
Beginning on Monday, May 21, 2018, I conducted interviews with adult church members who regularly volunteer in the soup kitchen. These interviews, conducted prior to the preaching of any sermons related to the project, established a baseline of data that provided a general sense of the volunteers’ ideas about mission, charity, community, and why they spend their time volunteering. Beginning on Sunday, May 27, 2018, I preached a three-week sermon series in which I explored Paul’s collection for Jerusalem. The sermon series concluded on Sunday, June 10, 2018. Each sermon had a specific theme: offering, honor and shame, and beloved community. Following each sermon, interviewees gathered for a Sunday afternoon reflection session that lasted between an hour and a half and two hours. At the end of the sermon series and after the three reflection sessions had been held, I conducted post-sermon series interviews to see if there had been any change in how church members viewed missions, charity, and community.

In addition to interviewing and holding small group sessions with church members who volunteer in the soup kitchen, I held two group discussions for adults who are served at the soup kitchen. These group discussions lasted approximately an hour. In these discussions, I asked people to give their thoughts on the soup kitchen ministry, to discuss how things might be improved, and to reflect on how well they knew those who served them. These group discussions were held on Thursday, May 31, 2018 and Thursday, June 7, 2018, respectively.

Finally, after all the interviews, group discussions, and small group sessions were completed, I gathered the interviewees who were members of the congregation together to discuss the preliminary results I had gathered from those who are served in the soup
kitchen. This discussion took between an hour and a half and two hours also. Church members eagerly listened for what those served had to say and expressed a general openness to making changes to the ministry.

Participants

There were two groups of participants in this project. Group One consisted of adult men and women who are church members at FBCO and who regularly volunteer in the soup kitchen ministry. These participants were interviewed prior to and after the sermon series, were present for at least two of the three sermons in the series, and were present for at least two of the three small group reflection sessions after the sermons. They also attended the final group discussion in which preliminary results were shared. Group Two were adult men and women who are not members at FBCO and who regularly eat at the soup kitchen.

Limitations and Delimitations

This project examined the differences between members of First Baptist Orangeburg and the larger Orangeburg community. Race and socio-economic differences continue to be inextricably linked in the United States, and the connection between them is abundantly clear in the soup kitchen ministry at FBCO. Overcoming differences and engaging in justice-making activities can only occur as diverse groups of people enter into relationship with one another. Because of this, the primary focus of this project was to transform attitudes about the importance of relationships in mission and enhancing missional engagement rather than long-term missions planning. The project focused strictly
on First Baptist Orangeburg’s soup kitchen ministry and did not include any of the other local mission efforts in which the congregation engages.

I solicited volunteers over the age of eighteen for both groups. For Group One, there was no requisite for age, ethnicity, or socio-economic level; however, the church members who volunteered were all white and middle class to upper-middle class. Much like Group One, there was no requisite for age, ethnicity or socio-economic level for Group Two. These volunteers were nearly all African-American and on the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

One particular limitation affected the success of this project. The interviews, sermon series, and small group reflections all took place during the summer when attendance for worship is lower. While each participant was present for at least two of the three sermons and small group reflections, the majority of them were not able to be present for all of them. Consequently, some interviewees changed their perspectives more than others.

Terms and Assumptions

Certain terms will be used frequently throughout this project. They are defined below for the sake of clarity and consistency. These terms are defined in ways that support the assumptions of the project.

Terms

*Charity*: Acts of charity are good deeds a person does to help other persons. Anderson defines charity as “not just a good deed *but a declaration of belief about the world*
and the God who created it.” The problem with Anderson’s definition is that such good deeds can bring with them increased prestige and honor for the person doing charitable acts. The potential then arises for ulterior motives. While this project addresses potential motives for charity, the term refers strictly to the acts themselves.

**Solidarity:** Solidarity encompasses actions, attitudes, and feelings. It refers to ways in which people act so that they and all the other people they encounter may feel included and valued. It is relational and deeply connected to both equality and justice. Rebecca Todd Peters writes that “an ethic of solidarity is a transformative ethic, rooted in the principles of sustainability and social justice that requires first-world citizens to work simultaneously on transforming personal habits and lifestyles as well as global economic and political structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice.” Solidarity serves as a major theological theme in this project, but the development of a disposition of solidarity on the part of the congregation is a long-term goal that extends beyond the project’s scope.

**Missional Theology:** Darrell Guder writes, “Missional theology is not universal theology, but always and essentially ‘local,’ that is, working out of and in critical interaction with a particular strand of Christian tradition in a particular cultural context.”

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local focus for this missional theology project is First Baptist Orangeburg and how con-
gregants, particularly those who serve as volunteers in the soup kitchen ministry, connect
their mission efforts to their own personal theologies.

Mission: David Bosch writes, “We may, therefore, never arrogate it to ourselves
to delineate mission too sharply and too self-confidently. Ultimately, mission remains un-
definable; it should never be incarcerated in the narrow confines of our own predilec-
tions. The most we can hope for is to formulate some approximations of what mission is
all about.” Consequently, the definition for mission is not intended to be all-encompass-
ing, but rather specific for this project. Mission is leaving the walls of the church and go-
ing out into the world to participate with God in doing Kingdom work. This Kingdom
work includes caring for all of creation, particularly that which affects human life and
welfare, and proclaiming the gospel with love and compassion through both word and
deed.

Missions: Mission differs from missions. Bosch defines missions as “particular
forms, related to specific times, places, or needs, of participation in the missio Dei.” Simply put, missions are specific missionary ventures of the church.

Patronage: Patronage refers to a social relationship between individuals or groups
of individuals of unequal social and/or economic status. Patrons are those persons who

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are socially and economically privileged. Clients are those persons who do not enjoy such privilege.

Poverty: Amartya Sen writes, “There are good reasons for seeing poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely as low income. Deprivation of elementary capabilities can be reflected in premature mortality, significant undernourishment (especially of children), persistent morbidity, widespread illiteracy and other failures.”

This project limits Sen’s definition to low-income persons and families who lack economic opportunities. This low income and lack of opportunity manifests itself in the food insecurity of those who are served at the soup kitchen.

Justice: Doing justice is at the heart of this project. Gushee and Stassen describe the dimensions of justice when they write:

If we look carefully, we discover that justice has four dimensions: (1) deliverance of the poor and powerless from the injustice that they regularly experience; (2) lifting the foot of the domineering power off the neck of the dominated and oppressed; (3) stopping the violence and establishing peace; and (4) restoring the outcasts, the excluded, the Gentiles, the exiles and the refugees to community.

Because this study focuses on the importance of relationships, the fourth dimension of Stassen and Gushee’s definition is most relevant for its purposes.

Assumptions

This project made several assumptions. First, it assumed that a person’s participation in mission efforts is a tangible, outward expression of his or her theology. Second,

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this project assumed that people’s motivations for service were genuinely good and not grounded in guilt or paternalism; it did not attempt to determine any potential ulterior motives of those who serve in First Baptist Orangeburg’s soup kitchen. Third, it assumed that people are willing to engage in conversation around socio-economic and racial differences. Fourth, it assumed that mission efforts that address both immediate needs and long-term needs are beneficial. This project did not attempt to alter the church’s current local mission efforts, but rather to encourage volunteers, specifically soup kitchen volunteers, to see the importance of relationships in ministry and how knowledge gleaned from those relationships might open additional opportunities for service. Fifth, it assumed that mutually beneficial relationships between people of differing socio-economic levels and races are not only possible, but also good. Finally, this project assumed that solidarity is theologically preferable to charity, that guided small group discussion can cause people to reimagine the work they do, and that preaching can affect hearers’ theology.

Purpose and Significance

By studying the response to these three sermons and small group reflections, I wanted to see if congregants’ missional theology could mature. It was my sincere hope that the importance of relationships in missions would become more apparent and that volunteers would begin the hard work of developing deep, meaningful relationships with those who differ from them. This project affected more than just those church members who volunteered, however. It increased the dignity of those served because it gave them some input in future decision making. Furthermore, the congregation has now begun con-
versations in which they are looking to move beyond the status quo of charity and increase their missional engagement in the community. More effort is being made to move towards long-term solutions. And while the concept of solidarity has yet to be explicitly discussed, an ad hoc committee of the church regularly meets to discuss how the church can develop more intimate relationships with its neighbors and give them dignity while serving them.

For me, this project reflected the type of minister I want to be, and it also addressed an issue that has gripped me since childhood - how a person’s faith connects to action. I continue to believe that the church should view itself in solidarity with those it serves and that mutually beneficial relationships are not only possible, but preferable. While solidarity remained beyond the scope of this project, First Baptist Orangeburg now appears to be more open to such a possibility. As I transition to serve another congregation as its Senior Pastor, I will look for ways to encourage it to be open to such a disposition.

This study encouraged those who currently serve in the church’s soup kitchen to appreciate the impact of their actions. It also allowed them to reimagine the church’s role in the larger community. While the research focused on the soup kitchen at the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, South Carolina, the importance of relationships in missions is not confined to a particular locale. It remains a foundational principle for all churches who seek to better know their neighbors and serve those around them with dignity and respect.
CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The place where churches most clearly put their faith into action is in the work of mission. While churches typically have numerous mission efforts, one can especially capture the congregation’s imagination and become a point of pride. At First Baptist Orangeburg, that point of pride is the soup kitchen ministry. The struggle, however, is that over time these mission efforts become opportunities for charity rather than tangible expressions of a congregation’s faith. The connection between spiritual concerns and practical matters becomes tenuous, and a scriptural basis needs to be re-established. For many, Paul’s letters provide this foundation because Paul so frequently connects spiritual and theological concerns to practical matters. Whether discussing the appropriateness of eating meat offered to idols, settling disputes between church members, or addressing the teachings of those he considers to be false teachers, Paul consistently advocates for a faith that is tangible and real, a faith that is not just an internal matter of the heart or an intellectual matter of the head, but one that can be lived out in practical ways. Paul’s collection for the church in Jerusalem is a significant example of that tangible faith. The church in Jerusalem is more poverty stricken than many of the churches throughout the
Roman Empire, so Paul asks primarily Gentile congregations to give money to help these saints.¹

This collection has social, theological, and practical ramifications for the congregations that contributed to it and for the church today. Paul understands the social divide between Gentile congregations and the Jewish one in Jerusalem. He also understands the economic difficulties these Gentile congregations face. Yet, Paul still encourages these congregations to give joyfully and generously to his collection. In doing so, the congregations are encouraged to look past social barriers and instead see what unites them. Paul also creates a system that opposes the common conventions of his day. Rather than patronage or charity, Paul advocates for solidarity between congregations with social, racial/ethnic, cultural, and economic differences. And it is the concept of solidarity rather than charity that remains vitally important for congregations today.

An Historical Look at Socio-Economic Levels of Individuals Living in the Roman Empire

Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem functions as a contextual response that is also culturally, biblically, and theologically grounded. Jeremy Punt writes that:

New Testament authors could not and did not escape the ubiquitous and overwhelming impact of their social contexts which were suffused in relations, systems and structures defined by unequal power relations. The texts abound with instances and sometimes glimpses of attempts to move beyond various aspects and

¹ While Paul mentions this collection frequently, for the purposes of this project Paul’s references to this collection in Romans and 1st and 2nd Corinthians will be the only ones explored. This is due to the fact that it is these passages that will serve as the scriptural basis for the sermon series that will be preached and discussed in further detail elsewhere in this project.
notions of a far-reaching and all-encompassing socio-political network of domination and submission.²

Thus, the context of the Roman Empire is vital in understanding Paul’s letters along with the rest of the New Testament.

Characteristics and Economy of the Roman Empire

First, and foremost, the Roman Empire advanced through imperialism. This imperialism had both positive and negative economic side effects. Edward Said defines imperialism as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory.”³ In his work The Roman Empire: Roots of Imperialism Neville Morley explores the dynamics of Roman imperialism and the economic impact of the empire. He writes that “imperialism is seen to operate, deliberately or accidentally, as an agent of modernization providing the resources and political will to overcome impediments (whether material, institutional or cultural) to full economic development.”⁴ He also writes that “the consequence of imperial control, it is argued, is that the colonized region is locked into a subordinate position within the world economy, prevented from

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⁴ Neville Morley, *The Roman Empire: Roots of Imperialism* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 70.
modernizing fully so that it continues to supply raw materials to the industrialized nations rather than competing with them in the production of higher-value goods.”

While imperialism brought with it the positive economic side effect of modernization, it also locked colonized regions into subordinate economic positions and led to a type of regional patronage that was beneficial to Rome.

Though the wealth of the empire resided in Rome and its other prominent cities, most of the empire’s population lived outside these metropolitan centers. In his book The Roman Empire and the New Testament, Warren Carter writes that “the Roman Empire was also an agrarian empire. Its wealth and power were based in land. The elite did not rule by democratic elections. In part, they ruled by hereditary control of the empire’s primary resources of land and labor.” Imperial elites owned vast tracts of land and/or had positions of prominence within the Roman government. In fact, land ownership and prominent political positions often went hand in hand. These elites, however, were a very small portion of the overall population. The majority of the empire’s citizens were very poor. This was also the case for those in the early church. Morley adds that “the vast majority of the population therefore worked on the land and lived close to subsistence level, producing a low level of surplus beyond the needs of their family and so able to support only a small level of demand for manufactured goods.” Because surpluses were so small,

5 Morley, The Roman Empire, 71.


7 Morley, 73.
the primary economic motivation became avoiding risk rather than trying to maximize profit. Upward economic mobility was highly unlikely.

Surpluses were also a tax source. Morley points out that “Roman taxes were relatively low, perhaps 5% of gross produce, partly because the state offered little in return and partly because it was necessary to leave a sufficiently large share of the peasants’ surplus for the local elites.” In addition to taxes, peasants and other tenant farmers had to give large portions of their surpluses to local elites who either owned the land that was used for farming, transported the goods, or provided some other service to make such farming possible. In *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* Gerhard Lenski writes that such “confiscation must have proved even more profitable than foreign conquest.” Thus, the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer. Maintaining this economic status quo only widened the gulf between the haves and the have-nots. Describing agrarian societies like the Roman Empire, Lenski concludes “one fact impresses itself on almost any observer of agrarian societies, especially on one who views them in a broadly

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8 Morley, 76.

9 While most of the population of the Roman Empire worked on and lived near land for farming, Paul’s ministry was primarily done in urban areas. This does not change the fact, however, that the Roman Empire was primarily agrarian, and it also does not change the fact that the majority of the empire’s citizens, whether residing in urban or rural areas, were poor.

comparative perspective. This is the fact of marked social inequality.”¹¹ This social inequality manifested itself most clearly through economic inequality. There was no such thing as a middle class during the time of Paul. There were varying degrees of poverty and varying degrees of wealth with little in between. This economic reality is significant when considering the purpose of Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

Socio-Economic Levels of those in the Early Church

Most work by New Testament scholars has focused on the social status of members of the early church rather than their economic status. A much-needed corrective occurred in 2004 with Steven Friesen’s article entitled “Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus.” Friesen writes, “Poverty is rarely discussed in the study of Paul’s assemblies. This should make us suspicious since economic historians tell us that most of the Roman Empire’s inhabitants were poor.”¹² Friesen’s most important contribution in this article is the poverty scale he creates. Friesen writes, “My goal here is more modest (but difficult nonetheless): to propose a scale for measuring poverty in the cities of the Roman empire that will be useful in describing the economic resources of Paul’s congregations.”¹³ While acknowledging the difficulty of such a task and the ambi-


¹³ Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” 337.
guity of some of his percentages, he creates a scale that reduces confusion when discussing ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in the Roman world and gives some sense of scope to the problem, a worthwhile endeavor that even his critics appreciate.\textsuperscript{14}

Friesen’s scale, which can be found below, is split into seven different levels. The first three levels (PS1-3) consist of those who would be considered elite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSI Imperial elites</th>
<th>imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty, a few freedpersons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PS2 Regional or provincial elites</td>
<td>equestrian families, provincial officials, some retainers, some decurial families, some freedpersons, some retired military officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS3 Municipal elites</td>
<td>most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some freed persons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS4 Moderate surplus resources</td>
<td>some merchants, some traders, some freedpersons, some artisans (especially those who employ others), and military veterans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS5 Stable near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)</td>
<td>many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, some farm families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS6 At subsistence level (and often below minimum level to sustain life)</td>
<td>small farm families, laborers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (esp. those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop/tavern owners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} See Peter Oakes “Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society: A Response to Steven Friesen’s ‘Poverty in Pauline Studies’” or John Barclay’s “Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Steven Friesen.” Both of which can be found in the same \textit{Journal for the Study of New Testament} edition as his article.
Below subsistence level | some farm families, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, disabled, unskilled day laborers, prisoners

Figure 1. Poverty scale for the Roman Empire

Friesen begins by looking at the entire Roman population before looking specifically at the larger cities where Paul’s congregations took root. He writes, “The top three categories of the poverty scale (PS 1-3) together comprised a very small percentage of the population, totaling approximately 1.23% of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire.” He then points out that “we can safely estimate that in cities like the ones where Paul tended to work (i.e. those with a population of 10,000 or more) the super-wealthy made up around 2.8% of the population.” Ninety-five percent of the population in cities where Paul tended to work had at most a modest surplus of resources. The numbers become less certain when Friesen attempts to assign percentages to each of the seven levels on his poverty scale. The levels that cause him the most problem are PS4 and PS5. He concludes, however, that just under 70% of the population of the cities Paul tended to work in were at or below subsistence. The overwhelming majority of those in Paul’s congregations sought daily to have enough to survive.

15 Friesen, 341.
16 Ibid., 340.
17 Ibid., 342-43.
18 See Friesen’s Figure 3 on p. 347.
Friesen arrives at three conclusions. First, Paul’s letters provide no evidence that any of the members of his congregations were extremely wealthy. Second, for the individuals about whom we do have some economic information, there are only a few that could be considered as having a moderate surplus of resources. Friesen speculates that it is a maximum of seven. And third, “most of the people in Paul’s congregations - including Paul himself - lived near the level of subsistence, either above it or below.” All the congregations to which Paul was related were quite poor, even though some were more financially secure than others.

Friesen addresses the importance of Paul’s collection for Jerusalem in light of this evidence, while also contrasting it to common practices of the day. He writes, “These instructions provide a stark contrast to the contemporary practices of benefaction by patrons: rather than an individual or family giving a large sum of money, all in the group are asked to set aside on Sundays whatever they can spare. Conversely, the text makes no provisions for large gifts.” Friesen goes on to write that “all of this suggests that Paul was portraying the Corinthian saints in terms that reflect a majority in category 6 of the

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19 Friesen, 348.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 351.
poverty scale; that is, urban poor who faced the prospect of sliding into economic crisis.” Yet, Paul still asks them to give to those in Jerusalem. This requires a closer examination of Paul’s words themselves.

A Biblical Examination of Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem

Three particular letters, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans, provide the scriptural foundation for a sermon series highlighting the collection and its contemporary theological implications. While Paul himself describes this collection, he does not describe the delivery of it. Helmut Koester writes that:

For the course of events after the writing of Romans, the only source is the Book of Acts. Occasionally it uses reliable sources, but Luke shapes the narrative according to his own purposes and, most remarkably, treats the collection for Jerusalem only in an aside (Acts 24:17). No doubt, the journey described in Acts 21-22 is indeed the journey of Paul and of the delegates from the Gentile churches for the delivery of the collection.

Therefore, only Paul’s words will be considered in this project and not any passages from the book of Acts.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

As Paul concludes his first letter to the Corinthians he mentions the collection for the saints. Paul writes:

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22 Friesen, 351.


24 This project will not engage in form criticism that argues that Paul wrote multiple letters to the church in Corinth that were later pieced together to form 1 and 2 Corinthians. Rather, each letter will be taken as it is presented in the New Testament and discussed as such.
Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Paul notes that these instructions are ones he has given to the churches in Galatia. The Corinthians are to put aside whatever extra they earn on the first day of each week. These smaller offerings preclude the need for a larger offering to be taken up later. Paul also plans to give letters of recommendation to those the church selects to deliver this collection, and claims that he will accompany them, if need be. It is a brief passage with short, straightforward instructions. Paul gives the Corinthian congregation further instructions in 2 Corinthians.

The question becomes why this collection is so important for Paul. The congregation of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem is undoubtedly poor, but so are the Gentile Christians in Corinth, Galatia, and the other congregations Paul asks for money. Scott Nash gives four potential reasons. The first potential reason is that there was a tangible need and Paul felt obligated to respond. Nash writes that “the perpetual poverty of a region systematically fleeced by the Roman administration, however, was aggravated by the tension between the Jewish followers of Jesus and other Jews, a tension that deprived those

25 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. All translations unless otherwise noted are from the New Revised Standard Version.

followers of any support available from the synagogues.”

A second possible reason is that Paul wanted Gentiles to appreciate their inclusion with and connection to the people of Israel. Gentile congregations collecting money for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would serve as a tangible expression of such gratitude. Nash’s third possible reason is that Paul hopes Jewish believers will accept their Gentile brothers and sisters. Finally, Nash points out that Paul may have viewed his collection for the saints in Jerusalem as a type of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies where Gentiles come to Jerusalem bearing gifts. All of these principles emerge from a conviction that churches should be in solidarity with the marginalized, a theological concept that goes beyond the ancient division between Jewish and Gentile congregations.

Nash implies that Paul is criticizing the work of the Jewish synagogue in Jerusalem and the Roman government in Palestine by creating a system in which congregations take care of others. More important than criticism, this collection system subverts the larger Roman economic system of patronage. Richard Horsley writes, “And the collection of 1 Cor 16:1-4 indicates economic solidarity, horizontal reciprocity, and an ‘inter-

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29 Nash, 440-41.
tional political-economic dimension diametrically opposed to the tributary political economy of the empire.”30 The instructions at the end of 1 Corinthians are short and straightforward, but they contain much depth.

2 Corinthians

Paul spends more time referencing the collection to Jerusalem in his second letter to the Corinthians. The majority of 2 Corinthians 8 and 2 Corinthians 9 is Paul describing the collection and its importance. Mitzi Minor writes that “relations between Paul and some of the Corinthian believers had become strained as we have seen. That strain appears to have taken a toll on the Corinthians’ zeal for the collection.”31 Paul begins 2 Corinthians 8 by telling the Corinthian congregation about the generosity of the Macedonian churches, churches who were even more financially limited than them.

Bringing up the generosity of the Macedonian churches highlights one of the driving forces behind Paul’s efforts for the collection. Describing the division between Gentile and Jewish Christian communities, Minor writes, “There is consensus among scholars that Paul’s desire to reconcile these groups was likely the greatest impetus for his decision to pursue the collection project. It became for Paul a symbol of the restored unity between Jewish and Gentile believers that was itself an enactment of God’s new creation.”32


32 Minor, II Corinthians, 154.
F.F. Bruce writes, “The solidarity of Jewish and Gentile Christianity, in particular the strengthening of fellowship between the church of Jerusalem and the Gentile mission, was a major concern of Paul’s, and his organization of the relief fund was in large measure designed to promote this end.” This practical, tangible work of collecting money for those who have less also carries with it theological implications. Paul writes:

10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something even to desire to do something - 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has - not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 34

Paul reminds the Corinthians of their initial zeal to help the saints in Jerusalem and calls them to complete the good work that they have already started. He also provides a bit of a corrective highlighting that such a gift should not lead to an imbalance between the two groups, but what the NRSV translates as a fair balance. Minor translates this fair balance as equality. She also goes on to write:

The economic plight of the Jerusalem church likely stands in the background of Paul’s words, but it stays there while he appeals to the Corinthians’ understanding of equality as further motivation for their participation in the collection. There is a good chance that Paul was working hard to separate the Corinthians’ participation in the collection from their inclination to use financial practices to advance patrons power. We have found patronage, a widespread practice in Roman Corinth, to be an issue in the Corinthian ekklesia already. Paul’s experience with wealthy


34 2 Cor 8:10-14.
Corinthians apparently caused him concern that the Corinthian congregation might see itself as a superior partner giving aid and benefits to the inferior partner (the Jerusalem congregation) who then becomes its client.\textsuperscript{35}

According to Minor, Paul’s urging of the Corinthians to continue giving to the saints in Jerusalem serves not only as an encouragement for them to complete the good work they have started, but also redefines how Christian congregations should interact with one another. Paul argues that churches not engage in patronage, even though it is acceptable in Roman society. The church in Corinth is called to remember the example of Christ, to help those in need, and to realize that one day roles might be reversed and that they will need help.

Paul’s encouragement that the Corinthians continue their collection for Jerusalem comes up again in 2 Corinthians 9. And this time he gives more reasons, both practical and theological, for its importance. He writes:

\textsuperscript{3}But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready as I said you would be; \textsuperscript{4}otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated - to say nothing of you - in this undertaking. \textsuperscript{5}So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead of you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. \textsuperscript{6}The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. \textsuperscript{7}Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. \textsuperscript{8}And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Minor, \textit{II Corinthians}, 160-61.

\textsuperscript{36} 2 Cor 9:3-8.
Minor explains the passage in this way: “Paul faced the possibility of arriving in Corinth with the Macedonian representatives to find some Corinthians estranged from him and creating discontent in the community so that their part of the collection was far from finished despite Paul’s boasts about them. “37 Both Paul and the Corinthians would be shamed in front of the Macedonians if this were to occur. Such an outcome would be particularly devastating for Paul, however. Greco-Roman culture was dominated by concepts of honor and shame. If Paul were shamed publicly in front of the Macedonians, it would make his ministerial efforts even more difficult. It would also remove any credibility the Corinthian congregation had with others. Thus, Paul has practical reasons for continuing to encourage the collection for Jerusalem in addition to theological ones.

Paul appeals to the generosity of the Corinthians and connects it to the generosity of God, giving tangible action theological meaning. The Corinthians should give joyfully and generously because God loves a cheerful giver. Minor points out that “this comment about God’s love allows Paul to return to the theme of this section of the letter, to God’s grace (charis) that undergirds his whole sense of the collection.”38 Minor also notes that God’s grace does not call for some sort of quid pro quo in which the Corinthians are obligated to return in kind. Rather, God’s love, generosity, and grace should inspire people of faith to respond in kind, not out of a sense of moral obligation, but out of love. Generous giving should be seen as an outward, tangible expression of love for those who receive.

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37 Minor, 173.

38 Ibid., 175.
Paul returns once more to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem in his correspondence with the church in Rome. Paul’s letter to the church in Rome is to a congregation he has not yet met, but longs to meet. One of the stated reasons for this delayed meeting is the collection for Jerusalem. Paul writes:

22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; 26 for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in the spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. 28 So, when I have completed this, and have delivered them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; 29 and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Rome often served as a launching point for those who traveled to Spain during Paul’s day. Meeting the Roman congregation while on the way to Spain would be expected. This desire to go to Spain also represents a potential shift in Paul’s work. Charles Talbert writes that “Paul’s plan to go to Spain would be different in one regard from his previous work. In the Aegean area, he had worked in and out of the Jewish synagogues. There is, however, no evidence of Jewish communities in Spain prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In Spain Paul would have to work without the support of synagogues.”

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working without the support of synagogues and writing that he has “no further place for me in these regions,” points to just such a shift in thinking. The collection for the saints in Jerusalem serves as the culmination of his previous efforts, and the delivery of this collection would serve as a launching point, allowing him to move on to other work.

The delivery of this collection also serves as a tangible result of the theology he has espoused to other Gentile congregations. Talbert writes that “all that Paul said here explicitly about the collection is in terms of reciprocity, a controlling principle in almost all Mediterranean relationships.”

This reciprocity would prove that there was a relationship among equals, and Talbert claims that “this doubtless was Paul’s primary aim, whatever subsidiary goals he had as well.” By sharing in spiritual blessings and sharing material things, Gentile and Jewish Christian communities are placed on equal footing where mutually beneficial relationships can exist between them. This is vastly different than the patronage system of Paul’s day. It is also not some form of charity from one group to another, but rather a relationship between equals where solidarity is possible.

Patronage and Charity

The economic realities of the Roman world are not the only influences on Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Societal institutions and interactions are also important, particularly patronage, charity, and solidarity. The differences between charity and solidarity are especially important for the church today.

Patronage

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41 Talbert, 330

42 Ibid.
As practiced during the time of Paul, patronage was a social relationship between individuals or groups of individuals that were seen as unequal with the one(s) in the dominant position being the patron(s) and the other(s) being the clients. Moxnes defines patron-client relationships as:

social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power. The basic structure of the relationship is an exchange of different and very unequal resources. A patron has social, economic, and political resources that are needed by a client. In return, a client can give expressions of loyalty and honor that are useful for the patron.\(^{43}\)

As Morley notes, “Roman society was organized around complex networks of friendship, influence, and patronage, operating through favors, obligations and unwritten expectations of reciprocity and gratitude.”\(^{44}\) It is no wonder then that the Corinthians would assume that Paul’s collection for Jerusalem would make them the patron congregation for the church in Jerusalem and bring with it all the benefits of such a relationship. This was the way Roman society worked, though patronage could take differing forms.

Another form of patronage that would be applicable to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, at least in the minds of the Corinthians, would be “friendship.” Moxnes writes that “friendship was not so much an emotional attachment as a form of social and even political contract based on reciprocity. Well-placed members of the elite in the cen-


\(^{44}\) Morley, 63.
ter could provide their ‘friends’ or ‘clients’ in the provinces with access to the central administration.”

Whether it was considered outright patronage or “friendship,” the collection for Jerusalem would easily fit within either form. Therefore, Paul’s reasons for the collection and his appeal to “fair balance” or “equality” take on increased importance. Inequality was at the heart of the patronage system. Paul’s appeal to equality shows that he is calling the Corinthians to move beyond the societal norms of the day.

Paul’s rejection of patronage is also closely connected to his desire to overcome the deep divisions between the Gentile Christians communities and the church in Jerusalem. These racial/ethnic divisions also have religious components (whether Gentile Christians have to become circumcised, follow Jewish dietary laws, etc.) and socio-economic ones. By embracing a common societal system that has inequality at its heart, Paul would potentially worsen these divisions rather than overcome them. Therefore, a new model for this collection is a must, for both theological and practical reasons.

Charity

Another approach to the collection that Paul rejects is charity. Paul does not reject it because it exacerbates inequality in relationships, however. Paul calls the Corinthians and the other Gentile congregations who contribute to the collection to move beyond charity and seek solidarity. Charity can be good but can also have self-serving motives. Lenski writes that “the well-to-do in some societies accept certain obligations, such as charity, almsgiving and public service, which yield no obvious returns for themselves.

45 Moxnes, 245.
Again, however, the element of self-interest intrudes. For the very wealthy, philanthropy costs relatively little but usually yields substantial dividends. It is one of the few trustworthy routes to honor and prestige. It is important to re-emphasize that the Corinthians and other Gentile congregations who Paul encourages to give are not wealthy. Paul also does not malign the motives of those who give to charity and claim that it is for self-interest. In this case, however, viewing the collection as a gift to charity would increase the honor and prestige of those who gave to it. This is something Paul is simply not interested in doing. Not only does he avoid the patronage system, but he also seeks to avoid the honor and shame associated with charity. He focuses instead on equality and solidarity.

A Theology of Solidarity and Its Challenges

By seeking solidarity, Paul asks for more than money, and he asks it of both the Jewish and Gentile Christian congregations. Meghan Clark writes, “Solidarity is multifaceted, at once a feeling, an attitude, and a duty, with each of these building to culminate in the virtue. As an attitude, solidarity is descriptive of our feelings and awareness of interdependence. As a duty, it is a normative category rooted in the moral requirements of interdependence; and as a moral category, solidarity turns on the equality of all humanity.” Solidarity connects us to others, is a moral requirement, and places all of humanity on a level playing field. Because equality plays such an important role in solidarity, both

46 Lenski, 29.

Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians must participate and give something up. Clark goes on to write that “the agency of all persons, of all moral agents in a particular context, must be involved in the cultivation of the virtue of solidarity. Active participation is required in order for the equality, mutuality, and reciprocity of human dignity to be present.” With the collection Paul asks Gentile Christians to overcome the barriers that divide them from their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters, so that they can give joyfully and generously to those in need. In receiving money from Gentile Christians, Paul asks the congregation in Jerusalem to overcome their sense of superiority and accept Gentile Christians as part of the church. This is no small feat. Gerald Beyer notes that solidarity “requires the sustained effort to go beyond short-term solutions and temporary aid toward long-term institutional change.” He later writes that it “strives ultimately to enable all people, including the poor and the marginalized, to participate in and benefit from the common good.” This is more than charity because equality, not honor is the focus.

Julien Ogereau notes that Paul frequently uses the term κοινωνία when discussing the collection for Jerusalem. Ogereau writes:

When κοινωνία is thus associated with ἰσότης, the socio-economic dimension of Paul’s collection becomes even more evident. It evokes a certain sense of political

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48 Clark, 30-31.


50 Beyer, 17.
unity and socio-economic equality within the (global) community of Christ-followers to an extent that is observed nowhere else in the NT except perhaps in Luke’s summary depiction of the original Jerusalem community. Ogereau goes on to argue that Paul is concerned about more than alleviating poverty through charitable giving and is instead aiming to reform what he sees as structural inequalities in Greco-Roman society, inequalities that were becoming apparent in the church. He writes that Paul “deeply challenged ancient socio-political theories and dissolved ancient prejudices based on socio-ethnic distinctions” by “fostering socio-economic ἴσότης between Jews and Gentiles and by establishing a global, socially and ethnically inclusive κοινωνία among them.” Solidarity and equality are only possible within the confines of community.

What makes Paul’s collection so radical is that the idea of mutually beneficial relationships between equals is largely foreign to what was found in Greco-Roman society. Even more radical, Paul proposes these relationships between groups that are deeply divided. Christoph Stenschke details just how difficult this proposal is. He writes:

The Gentile Christians had to overcome their understanding of benefaction as serving local patronage and local honor and the prevalent anti-Judaism of the ancient world. In addition, Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was strained and there were influential opponents in the community and from outside. In demanding the Corinthians to participate, Paul also seemed to take a sharp turn in his financial policy which needed explanation. There also might have been previous

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52 Ogereau, 377.
other financial engagement of the Corinthians that made them reluctant to participate in another project. It becomes clear that the reconciliation which Paul sought to procure through the collection came at a high price.\textsuperscript{53}

This financial policy from which Paul takes a sharp turn merits further exploration.

Stenschke points out that Paul has previously rejected benefaction from the Corinthian congregation. He writes:

\begin{quote}
... and since friendship was based on benefaction, not the reverse, to refuse a benefaction was an act of social enmity, for which in Paul’s day an elaborate protocol had been developed. If this social context is taken into account, it is understandable why the Corinthians were upset by Paul’s refusal to accept their financial support: it was a renunciation of their status as a patron congregation (cf. 2 Cor 12:13) and therefore a repudiation of their friendship (cf. 11:11), as well as a regrettable act of self-humiliation.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Paul has already once refused benefaction from the Corinthians by choosing to work rather than accepting their financial support, which is socially unusual behavior that potentially harms his relationship with them. With the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, Paul makes clear that he is not only rejecting their benefaction personally, but that he is rejecting the concept in its entirety and is instead arguing for equality and solidarity with a group that is widely viewed with suspicion by society at large. Therefore, it is understandable, given the context, that the Corinthians’ excitement for this collection would give way to skepticism. Despite this, Paul plows forward repeatedly encouraging the Corinthians to continue to give generously to this collection while he also lets the Romans know about his work. It is with this boldness that Paul encourages congregations to look


\textsuperscript{54} Stenschke, 23.
beyond the social conventions of their day, and it is just such boldness that is needed today.

Textual Conclusions

In seeking a collection for the saints in Jerusalem Paul not only seeks to alleviate the immense financial strain the Jerusalem church was under, but also seeks to bond this congregation with other Gentile congregations showing that common belief in Christ can overcome racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and class divisions. Paul calls the Gentile congregations from which he receives money to envision a world beyond the one Rome has established, a world where one group serves as patrons to the other, and instead to see a world in which Christians, regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile, are on equal footing, a world where they are in community with one another and are bonded together in solidarity, a world where they are inspired by God’s love and grace and act out that example accordingly.

Thus, Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem is not simply charity, but it serves as a tangible example of what love and grace look like in public. It is also a rejection of the patronage system, which was the basis of socially acceptable relationships in Paul’s day. The church should seek a higher standard, a standard set by the example of Christ. This tangible expression of love, grace, and solidarity provides a much-needed corrective for many churches, where local mission efforts are seen as efforts of charity between two unequal parties. In striving for equality Paul sets forth the belief that people from differing racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups can enter into mutually beneficial relationships where faith in Christ serves as the connecting point and where solidarity
with one another is the goal. The money collected for the saints in Jerusalem addresses the tangible goal of helping those in great financial distress, but how it is done and the reasoning behind it serve as the model for churches today. Because Paul has a relationship with people in each group, he attempts to serve as a bridge to connect them. If churches are to follow this model, we, too, must be in relationship with people of differing groups, attempt to serve as a bridge to connect them, and provide a model that shows equality and solidarity are possible.

Since Paul’s letter to the Romans is his last letter, no one can conclude how this collection turns out. While some scholars point to Acts and assume that this collection is delivered, Paul offers no evidence about what happened. Because of the ambiguity of what happens with the collection and because of the high difficulty in achieving solidarity between people of differing ethnic, racial, and socio-economic groups, Paul’s vision remains a difficult one for churches today. History points to the fact that the church becomes majority Gentile by the end of first century CE. While Paul’s missionary journeys are clearly successful based on how the early church grows, questions remain as to whether his goal of solidarity was realized. Regardless of this, Paul’s vision remains an admittedly difficult but worthwhile goal for churches today. Paul’s success matters less than the vision itself because it is this vision that continues to call churches forward to become more like the Christ that we worship.

Ancient Wisdom, Modern Application
Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem highlights the great diversity found in the early church. People across the Roman Empire spoke different languages, had different religious traditions, and had ethnic and socio-economic differences. Despite all of these differences, Paul preached a unifying message in which all are one in Christ Jesus. The notions of commonality and unity in diversity flipped societal norms on their heads. Paul rejected the Roman system of patronage and encouraged socially different groups to develop relationships with one another based on equality, solidarity, and unity in Christ. Some of the differences found across the Roman Empire continue to be found in the United States today. And while few people in Orangeburg regularly speak anything other than English, there are differing religious traditions, ethnic differences, and socio-economic differences throughout the community. These differences are especially stark on Sunday mornings. Consequently, Paul asking Gentile Christian congregations to give money to help the Jewish Christian congregation in Jerusalem is directly applicable to my ministerial setting.

Just like the ethnic and religious tradition differences between the Gentile and Jewish congregations, the differences between those who serve in the soup kitchen and those who are served are stark. Those who serve are primarily white, and the church members who serve are all white, while those who are served are overwhelmingly African-American. The church members who serve in the soup kitchen have a church tradition best described as traditional, structured, and formal, the type commonly found in the First Baptist Church of a county seat, while those who are served either have a church tradition that is much more emotive, charismatic, relaxed and informal or they have no
church background at all. The racial and religious differences only further highlight the socio-economic differences. The church members who serve in the soup kitchen are all either middle class or upper-middle class, while those who are served are clearly from a lower economic status.

And yet, just like his words to the Jewish and Gentile Christian congregations, Paul’s call for unity in Christ and for mutually beneficial relationships between different parties directly applies to First Baptist Orangeburg. It seeks to better serve its neighbors, particularly those who are different, and the development of mutually beneficial relationships between each group directly enhances their efforts while also giving dignity and respect to those they seek to serve. It is a way for the church to reject the socially acceptable relationships all too common across the American South and to seek the higher standard described by Paul and set by Christ. It is also the first step on the path towards solidarity between each group. Paul serves as the bridge between the Jewish and Gentile Christian congregations, and in the same way, those who serve in the soup kitchen ministry can serve as bridges between the clients and the larger church congregation they represent.
CHAPTER 3

MINISTRY CONTEXT, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, AND DATA COLLECTION

Connecting Scripture to a congregation’s daily life is one of a pastor’s most important tasks. This connection can be encouraged in a variety of ways. It can be from the pulpit where preachers seek to deliver sermons that inspire hearers to better love God and neighbor. Such sermons can serve as launching pads for new action by challenging hearers to move beyond their comfort zones and by urging them to develop deeper relationships with their neighbors. This connection can also be established through mission efforts in which congregants are not only urged but given the opportunity to develop relationships with those they serve. Ideally, the formation of such relationships will be the first step towards solidarity between differing groups of people. To begin such a path, however, actionable steps must be taken. Sermons and limited exposure to mission are not enough. People must internalize the stories of Scripture, be spurred to action by them, and realize that the Gospel contains a call-to-action.

This is easier said than done, particularly when serving a well-established congregation. The majority of the congregation at First Baptist Orangeburg are longtime church members, most of whom are from the area. Though most of them are not familiar with the historical context of Paul’s letters, they are well aware of their own community’s reputation and they are very familiar with Paul’s letters themselves. They are also aware of the church’s role in the community. This chapter describes the Orangeburg community,
the congregation of FBCO, and highlights why connecting Scripture to local missional efforts is so important.

Ministry Context

History of Orangeburg, South Carolina

Because of its early founding, Orangeburg plays a larger role in South Carolina history than its size would indicate. Two particular incidents, both with the common thread of racial animus to connect them, continue to affect the local community and the perception of the entire state. In a local history put together by Orangeburg’s newspaper, *The Times and Democrat*, the authors write, “To encourage settlement, the General Assembly of the Province of South Carolina in 1730 organized the area as a township, naming it Orangeburg for William IV, Prince of Orange, the son-in-law of King George II of England.”¹ State historian Walter Edgar confirms the newspaper’s findings, noting that Orangeburg is one of the nine original townships in the state of South Carolina.² Because of the city’s early founding, white politicians from the area played an outsized role in state politics, especially after the Civil War. Edgar notes that by 1860 over two-thirds of the population of Orangeburg County was black, a demographic that remains nearly the

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¹ The Times and Democrat, *Orangeburg County Memories* (Orangeburg: The Times and Democrat, 2016), 7.

same today. More importantly, Edgar writes, “In 1882, the same year that tens of thousands of black Carolinians were disenfranchised, the legislature gerrymandered the state’s congressional districts to cram as many black voters as possible into one district.” Edgar also points out that the person who led the gerrymandering effort and drew the district lines was from Orangeburg. In a practice that became common across the American South, congressional districts were drawn to lessen the new voting power of African-Americans. With its already large African-American population, the congressional district for Orangeburg was heavily gerrymandered. County lines, many of which remain to this day, were frequently drawn to achieve this same goal. By sheer demographics, the ability to diminish the political power of African-Americans in Orangeburg was more difficult. Repeated attempts to do so, however, led to a tension and mistrust that continue to be felt to this day.

Today, Orangeburg is the home of two historically black colleges and universities (HBCU’s), South Carolina State University and Claflin University. South Carolina State University became the location of a more contemporary incident that continues to haunt the community to this day. On February 8, 1968, in an incident now known as the Orangeburg Massacre, three young African-American men, Samuel Hammond, Henry Smith, and Delano Middleton, were killed in the worst example of violence on a college

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4 Edgar, 415.
campus in South Carolina history. Additionally, twenty-seven South Carolina State University students were wounded. All of them were protesting the segregation of the All-Star Bowling Lane, a bowling alley that is now closed but whose building still stands across the street from campus. A thorough, official investigation of the incident has yet to occur, so details remain somewhat in dispute. At some point during their protest, students built a bonfire, and when law enforcement arrived, an officer attempted to put out the fire. While doing so, he claimed that he was injured by a piece of banister thrown from the crowd. In order to disperse the crowd, a state patrolman fired his gun into the air. Upon hearing the gun shot, other officers opened fire into the crowd of students. The officers claimed that the smoke inhibited their ability to see clearly and that they thought they were being fired upon. Nine officers were brought to trial, and all of them were acquitted.

Meanwhile, Cleveland Sellars, a young African-American man who served as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee representative, was convicted and sent to prison for inciting a riot. Two investigative journalists, Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, wrote what is widely considered as the authoritative work on the incident:

On 8 February 1968, a throng of angry, frustrated black-American students faced off heavily armed police on the grounds of their own college campus in Orangeburg, South Carolina. The focus of their demonstration also involved elementary

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justice, for it was aimed against the exclusion of blacks from a local bowling alley. Yet the tense police began firing wildly into the unarmed crowd. In a matter of seconds, there was an American bloodbath.\footnote{Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, \textit{The Orangeburg Massacre}, 2d ed. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), vii.}

Bass and Nelson discovered that the students were unarmed and that most of them were shot in the side or the rear. This reflects the fact that students were fleeing the scene rather than escalating the incident with the officers, which contradicts the initial accounts of the officers and what was reported in the Associated Press. Because of the lack of an official investigation and the finality that comes with it, the Orangeburg Massacre remains an open sore that many white people in the community try to ignore or minimize. Local African-American leaders still work to commemorate the event. A marker has been placed on the campus of South Carolina State University and students there hold a service of remembrance each year.

Orangeburg is the home of the person who initially gerrymandered the state to reduce the political power of African-Americans, and the community remains a heavily gerrymandered area. These facts, in addition to the still unresolved case from the Civil Rights Era, have led to an uneasy, ongoing tension around matters of race. Such incidents have affected the perception of the community, and they continue to impact the city today. The local public schools most clearly show the lasting effects of racial animus and restricted political power.

The state of South Carolina consistently rates near the bottom in state rankings of public schools and the public schools in Orangeburg consistently rate among the worst in
South Carolina. The state is home to what is called the Corridor of Shame and Orangeburg County is located right in the middle of it. The Corridor of Shame gets its name from a documentary made about the state of public schools in rural South Carolina. This corridor, which roughly follows Interstate 95’s route through the state, comprises rural communities that are overwhelmingly African-American. The public schools in these communities have struggled with inequitable funding from the state for years, and they have received declining support from their respective local governments due to a loss of manufacturing jobs, diminishing tax bases, and general regional poverty. Nearly twenty-five years ago a lawsuit was filed against the state asking for more equitable funding. After twenty years, the South Carolina Supreme Court found in the schools’ favor.

Despite the increase in funding, the public schools in Orangeburg and throughout the rest of the region lag behind, creating a continuing cycle of poverty for many in the community, the majority of whom are African-American. Because of the high poverty rates, the poor public schools, and the long history of racial animus, the Orangeburg community has developed a troubled reputation. And that reputation has adversely affected the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, particularly in its ability to attract and keep pastoral staff. While numerous talented and faithful ministers have served at First Baptist Orangeburg, their tenures have been relatively short. In its 160-year history the church has

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never had a pastor serve more than twelve years, an oddity for the church’s size and county seat status.

The First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, South Carolina

Much like people, churches, too, are products of their environment, and First Baptist Orangeburg is no exception. Founded in 1860, the history of the church reflects the historical racial animus found in the community. While the city of Orangeburg and Orangeburg County are overwhelmingly African-American, the congregation of First Baptist Orangeburg is nearly all white. Whereas the city of Orangeburg and Orangeburg County have a high poverty rate, the congregation of First Baptist Orangeburg is relatively affluent with the vast majority of members falling comfortably within the middle class and upper-middle class socio-economic range. There are also several members whose families have great wealth and fall clearly within the upper-class socio-economic range. Consequently, the church primarily serves as a community of faith for the educated, white, affluent people in Orangeburg.

Only recently were intentional efforts made to expand the church’s scope of influence. In fact, a history written for the 150th anniversary of the church notes that non-whites were not allowed to be seated for worship until 1982. In the official church history, Bettis Bryant writes,

In 1982 the deacons also recommended that all persons regardless of race should be seated during worship services. This proposal resulted in a heated discussion during a church conference on January 31, 1982. The recommendation to seat all persons who came to worship was voted on by secret ballot, and the vote reflected
the opposing views. In a close vote, the recommendation passed with 435 members voting to seat all worshipers and 404 voting against the proposal.\(^9\)

The slowly changing attitudes on race that have happened across the country have made their way to Orangeburg. More members now openly acknowledge the racial tension felt within the community and are actively seeking ways to decrease it. Like many places across the American South, progress is slow, but the effort is paying dividends. Nowhere has this been more evident in the life of the congregation than in its local mission efforts.

As previously mentioned, the crown jewel of the church’s local mission efforts is its soup kitchen. Due to its increasing openness to having difficult conversations and addressing past societal wrongs and due to the church’s efficiency in serving a quality meal to a relatively large number of people, I sought to apply concepts from Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem and explore how they might enhance the local mission efforts of First Baptist Orangeburg.

Research Methodology

The intention of this research is to encourage the development of mutually beneficial relationships between those who volunteer in the soup kitchen of FBCO and those who are served in the soup kitchen. The purpose of developing such relationships is to enhance the missional theology of the congregation, to allow the congregation to be a better neighbor to the Orangeburg community, and to better serve those in the community.

\(^9\) Bettis Bryant and Kate Davis, *We’ve A Story To Tell* (Orangeburg: First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, 2010), 85.
This study employed several tools of a qualitative research methodology including individual interviews, observations, small group reflection sessions, and one questionnaire. Individual interviews were held prior to and immediately after a three-week sermon series. Small group reflection sessions were held on the afternoons after sermons were delivered, and a group activity encouraged participants to explore more deeply the main theme of each sermon. Finally, group conversations were held with clients who are served at the soup kitchen. They were asked open-ended questions about their thoughts on the ministry, and to preserve their anonymity so they could speak freely I shared their responses at the conclusion of all the interviews and small group reflections sessions with the participants who are church members.

There were two groups of participants in this study. Group One consisted of adult church members who regularly volunteer in the church’s soup kitchen. These participants were recruited through both an email sent to all church members who volunteer in the soup kitchen and personal requests. Seven participants, five men and two women, agreed to be part of the study. This ratio of men to women adequately reflects the gender dynamic of the larger pool of soup kitchen volunteers. Participants in this group range in age from the early-50s to over 80. All of the participants in this group are Anglo-American and their participation lasted for approximately five weeks. Group Two consisted of adult clients who are served at the soup kitchen. Participants in this group range in age from the early-20s to over 70. Most of the participants in this group are African-American. These participants were recruited through verbal announcements prior to the soup
kitchen meal and through individual requests at the conclusion of each meal. Some participants in this group only took part in one group conversation while others came for both.

Project Structure

Pre-Sermon Series Interviews

Pre-sermon series interviews were held during the week of Monday, May 21, 2018. I asked each participant a series of eight questions designed to discover their ideas on the concept of mission in general and the soup kitchen in particular.\footnote{See Appendix C.} I also asked questions about any existing relationships participants had with clients. Most of these interviews were held behind closed doors in a conference room at the church’s Family Life Center.\footnote{Due to the demanding schedule of some participants, one pre-sermon series interview was held behind closed doors in a conference room at the church campus downtown and another was held behind closed doors in a conference room at one participant’s place of employment. They were unable to come to the Family Life Center as initially planned, but despite the change in location, confidentiality and privacy were maintained.} These interviews were approximately one hour in length. They were audio recorded and I took observational notes.

Sermon 1 and Small Group Reflection 1

All sermons explored Paul’s writings on his collection for the saints in Jerusalem. The first sermon, preached on May 27, 2018, explored 1 Cor 16:1-4 and the concept of “offering.”\footnote{See Appendix E.} It considered the historical context of Paul’s collection, his potential reasons
for it, and the difficulties that existed between the group from whom he was asking money and the group to whom he planned on giving the money. The fact that these two groups had both differing ethnic and religious backgrounds was highlighted in the sermon.

The small group reflection also engaged the theme of “offering.” Each participant began by listing three different things he or she could teach to the group at large. After everyone had an opportunity to share what he or she could teach, each participant listed three different things he or she would like to learn. What was discovered was that many of the things these participants would like to learn could also be taught by members of the group and that what was needed to do so was already present. This connected well to the fact that Paul asked various Christian congregations to donate money for the church in Jerusalem rather than going to some wealthy benefactor outside of the church. At the conclusion of the exercise, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences, how they might connect to their faith, and how their experiences might be applied.

Sermon 2 and Small Group Reflection 2

The theme of the second sermon, preached June 3, 2018, was “honor” and “shame.” It explored 2 Cor 8:10-14 and 9:3-8. The sermon examined Greco-Roman culture during the time of Paul and the role of honor and shame in the larger society since

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13 All small group reflection sessions were held in the church’s Fellowship Hall and were both audio and video recorded.

14 An outline for Small Group Reflection Session 1 can be found in Appendix F.

15 See Appendix E.
honor and shame as social constructs had much to do with Paul’s collection efforts. Because Paul vouched for the Corinthian congregation, their inability to follow through on their collection obligations could have affected Paul’s ability to continue to do effective ministry in that region. The sermon considered the various theological and practical reasons Paul gave for continuing his collection.

In the small group reflection, participants completed a portion of the companion worksheet to Brené Brown’s I Thought It was Just Me (But It Isn’t): Telling the Truth about Perfectionism, Inadequacy, and Power. The worksheet looks specifically at shame symptoms, ideal identities, and unwanted identities. It also explores the perceptions behind them. After completing the worksheet/questionnaire, participants were asked to share their results as they each felt comfortable. After that, they were asked to think about other people to whom they relate, and what their results reveal about their interactions. Finally, participants were asked how the experience connected to their faith and how it might be applied.

Sermon 3 and Small Group Reflection 3

The theme of the third and final sermon, preached on June 10, 2018, was “beloved community.” It focused on Rom 15:22-29. In the Romans passage, Paul specifically mentions that he has been unable to visit Rome because he has been working on the

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16 An outline for Small Group Reflection Session 2 can be found in Appendix G. For a copy of worksheet from Brené Brown, see Appendix H.

17 See Appendix E.
collection for Jerusalem, but that he longs to go to Spain. Some scholars view this as a transition in Paul’s ministry and the congregation was challenged to view what additional possibilities God might have for it beyond the horizon.  

During the third small group reflection session, participants practiced soul collage. Each member of the group was given the theme of beloved community, and then they had the opportunity to collect various pictures to build a collage that represents what they believed to be an image of beloved community. After completing their collages, each participant shared what he or she created and explained how the pictures in their respective collages reflected their idea of what beloved community looks like.

Post-Sermon Series Interviews

Post-sermon series interviews were held during the week of June 11th. Post-sermon series interview questions were the same as the pre-sermon series questions with the exception of an added question in which participants were asked if anything from their experience in the project had caused them to view mission, the soup kitchen, or their volunteer role differently. These questions were intentionally asked a second time to see if there had been any deepening of language or enhancement of missional theology. These interviews were generally less than an hour since some of their answers did not and could

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18 For an example of a scholar who views Paul’s ministry as transitioning, see Charles H. Talbert, *Romans*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. R. Scott Nash (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002).

19 For an outline of Small Group Reflection Session 3, see Appendix I.

20 See Appendix D.
not change based on the questions. All but one were held in a conference room at the church’s Family Life Center with the door closed for privacy and confidentiality.\textsuperscript{21} Like the pre-sermon series interviews, these interviews were audio recorded, and I took observational notes.

Client Conversations

There were two group discussions with adult clients who are served at the soup kitchen. These conversations were held on Thursday, May 31st and Thursday, June 7th, respectively. Both conversations were held in a classroom on the preschool hall of the church’s downtown campus. This location is in close proximity to the fellowship hall where the soup kitchen meal is served, but also far enough away to allow for privacy and confidentiality. Each conversation took approximately one hour. The first client conversation revolved around the relationships the present clients had with others who are served at the soup kitchen and with the relationships they have with those who serve them.\textsuperscript{22} The second client conversation involved a discussion about their experiences at the soup kitchen. Specific questions addressed any dislikes and what they would change if they could.\textsuperscript{23} Both conversations were audio recorded, and I took observational notes.

Small Group Reflection 4

\textsuperscript{21} Much like the pre-sermon series interviews, one post-sermon series interview had to be held at the church’s downtown campus due to the demanding schedule of some of the participants.

\textsuperscript{22} See Appendix K.

\textsuperscript{23} See Appendix L.
After completing all interviews and three small group reflection sessions with participants in Group One, and two client conservations with participants in Group Two, one final small group reflection session was held with participants in Group One. This session was held on Sunday, June 24th. Like the previous three small group reflection sessions, this session was both audio and video recorded. I also took observational notes. This last session provided an opportunity to conclude the project by reviewing everything that had been discussed in the sermons and what had been done in the previous small group sessions. Participants were asked how these experiences might connect to the soup kitchen ministry, and after some brief discussion I shared the responses from the clients. Group One participants were then asked to reflect on the client responses and to brainstorm ideas to enhance the ministry. The client responses led to substantial, involved conversation among the Group One participants. This final session lasted between an hour and a half and two hours.

Data Collection

After the recorded sessions were transcribed, observational notes were applied to provide depth and context, so I could code data and interpret findings. The goal was to see if there was a change in language by Group One participants around the notions of mission, relationship, and identity. To measure this, responses from the pre-sermon series

24 There was a week delay between the conclusion of the post-sermon series interviews and this final small group reflection session because of the birth of my daughter on June 15.

25 See Appendix J.
interviews were compared to the responses in post-sermon series interviews. These responses were also compared to the ones given in the final session with Group One participants.  

As we will see in the next chapter, not all sermons and activities were equally effective. Change was also not uniform across the group. The single biggest factor that led to change in Group One responses was not any particular sermon or related activity but hearing responses from the clients that they serve. After hearing those responses, Group One members who had initially been reluctant in making any changes to the ministry became eager to do so and began to discuss ways the ministry could be changed to give those who are served more ownership and dignity.

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26 Only five of the seven participants in Group One were able to be present for the final session in which client responses were shared.
CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT

The recent history of the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, South Carolina, illustrates clearly that the church is willing to do the difficult work necessary to address and move beyond the community’s troubled racial history.¹ That work does not happen without difficult, honest conversations, and neither does expanding one’s missional theology or developing a mutually beneficial relationship with a person of a differing people group, which was the primary pursuit of this project. Therefore, everyone who participated in the project was assigned an abbreviation and number to protect his or her anonymity. Participants in Group One are identified with the numbers one through seven, and they are given the abbreviation CMV, which stands for church member and volunteer. Participants in Group Two are also numbered, and they are given the abbreviation NMC, which stands for non-member and client.

¹ FBCO has illustrated its willingness to address its own and the community’s own troubled racial history in a variety of ways. The mere presence of a soup kitchen ministry in which white church members primarily feed African-American members from the community is a tangible expression of this willingness. In addition to this ministry, other signs of willingness include the church recently electing the first African-American deacon in its history and church leaders beginning conversations to look for tangible ways to reach out to their African-American neighbors.
Initial Observations

Unsurprisingly, many of the participants were hesitant about the project.² For those in Group One, the majority were fearful that I was somehow trying to change a ministry that they loved and in which they had spent much of their time. Prior to agreeing to be a participant, several questioned my intent. When I asked the soup kitchen clients if they would be willing to volunteer for the project, they were also skeptical. I was repeatedly rebuffed and only found ten willing participants, six women and four men, out of approximately one hundred fifty people. Even out of the ten who agreed to participate, only eight were active participants in the group conversations. The remaining two never spoke a word and were content to listen to everyone else.

Pre-Sermon Series Interviews

Beginning on Monday, May 21, 2018, I conducted interviews with seven adult church members who regularly volunteer in the FBCO soup kitchen ministry.³ All seven members of Group One are white, middle-class to upper-middle-class, and over the age of 50. The questions asked about their thoughts on mission and if it differed from charity, why they started volunteering at the soup kitchen, what their role was, how well they knew the people they served, if their experience had led to any sort of internal, personal change, what they would change about or add to the ministry if they could, and how they

² While there was initial hesitancy, explaining the institutional review board process and the informed consent form helped greatly. See Appendix A for the IRB Approval and see Appendix B for the Informed Consent form.

³ See Appendix C for Pre-Sermon Series Interview Questions.
saw the church’s identity reflected in the soup kitchen. After recording the interviews, transcribing them, and repeatedly reviewing the transcriptions, several themes emerged.

Group One participants gave very similar answers to the first four interview questions. Unsurprisingly, everyone stated that mission was either important or very important to them, but their definitions slightly differed. Six of the seven connected mission to what they described as service or helping. Only one viewed it as a religious command, and only one connected mission to outreach or evangelism. Five of the seven also connected mission to what they described as helping the poor, highlighting an economic component that they repeatedly referenced throughout the project. Most also clearly differentiated charity from mission. Five of the seven claimed that charity referred to giving money to a particular cause, while they viewed mission as more personal and as involving direct action. Only one saw no difference between the two. The remaining member of the group saw little difference but viewed charity as opportunity and connected mission to what he called God’s urging.

Their reasons for volunteering in the soup kitchen were also similar. Five of the seven described feeling the desire to help. Three also mentioned the community they found in their service. Only one mentioned that guilt played a role in his reasoning, but then he added a moving, personal story about how that guilt had affected him positively. Initially, CMV 3 described being pressured into volunteering by a church member who is

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4 All three of the members who referenced community are retired and described now having the time to give back. Of note, six of the seven participants in Group One are retired or semi-retired.
now deceased. Then, he began to tell a story about seeing a former co-worker’s spouse walk to the church to volunteer at the soup kitchen. CMV 3 said, “Twenty years or so ago, I thought why is that idiot going and working at the soup kitchen on Thursdays. And then I went down there, and it almost filled a void in my life. It’s now the highlight of my week.”

Time and time again, all of the participants in Group One stated how much they enjoyed volunteering on Thursdays. And because of that joy, all of them described a flexibility in their role at the soup kitchen. While everyone had particular tasks that usually fell to them, five of the seven stated explicitly that they would do anything that was asked. Their responses underscored the importance that they gave to the ministry, the sense of purpose they found in their work, and the sense of community that they had discovered. The relationships they had developed with one another were in stark contrast to the lack of relationships they had with the clients they served.

Once I asked the participants about their relationships with the clients, their answers began to diverge. CMV 1 knew the names of approximately ten clients, but she was familiar with another ten she had previously helped through one of the church’s other local mission efforts. CMV 2 doubted that she could name any of the clients, though she stated that she recognized faces. She also mentioned that there was not a lot of time for the volunteers to talk with the clients, which was a problem that both volunteers and clients acknowledged repeatedly throughout the project. CMV 3 stated that he knew the name of one client and that more clients tended to recognize him than he did them. He

5 CMV 3, Interview by author, 23 May 2018, transcript, First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, 3.
acknowledged that he had not had the opportunity to get to know the clients better since he mostly worked in the kitchen, but he claimed that not knowing them was his fault. CMV 4 could only name one client, and CMV 5 could only name two. CMV 6 knew the names of four of the clients because they had worked for him for nearly thirty years. Consequently, he knew those particular clients quite well. CMV 7 knew the names of three clients. He graduated from high school with one of them, so he knew him well. All told, none of the participants knew a large percentage of the clients they served, and they generally expressed some shame over that fact.

When I again asked more personal questions, the similarities in the responses returned. When I asked if their experience volunteering had caused any personal change in them, six of the seven stated that it had. Two stated that it had made them more forgiving. Two more claimed that it had made them more thankful. And the final two said that it had encouraged them to be more active in other ministries in the church. When asked about adding to or changing anything about the soup kitchen ministry, two did not recommend any change at all. Two others wanted to change the facility. Two more described wanting to see the soup kitchen become a point of connection for other ministry efforts to help the economically disadvantaged, and the final participant wished the church gave out canned goods in addition to hot meals.

The final question in the pre-sermon series interviews dealt with how the church’s identity was reflected in the soup kitchen ministry. Two of the seven stated that they

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6 CMV 6 was able to tell me the origin of nicknames for some of the clients and tell me about their families.
thought it showed the church’s generosity. Two others connected the ministry to the church’s faithfulness. And the remaining three claimed that the ministry showed that the church wanted to be more involved in the larger Orangeburg community.

Reflection Session 1 – Offering

On Sunday, May 27, 2018, I preached the first of three sermons on Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Each sermon in that series had a theme and each reflection session had a corresponding activity connected to that theme. The activity for the first reflection session emphasized the theme of offering, and in the sermon I highlighted that an offering is more than money, that people can offer their time, their talents, and their treasure. I also noted that Paul challenged the Corinthians to give what they had been holding back from God. Offerings are tangible, practical responses to needs while also being deeply theological acts. In giving joyfully and generously people can look past the things that divide them and see others as brothers and sisters. I concluded the sermon by noting many of the ways people offer themselves in service to the church and how such offering can cause people to leave their comfort zones and experience a deeper relationship with Christ.

7 See Appendix E for all three sermons.
In the reflection session each participant was asked to write down three things that he or she could teach the group. After each person shared what he or she wrote, the participants were asked to write down three things he or she would like to learn. Participants also shared these answers, and then the question was asked if there was anyone in the group who could teach each particular skill. Unsurprisingly, there were several things people wanted to learn that someone else in the group could teach them. Finally, participants were asked how the experience might connect to their faith and how it might be applied in the life of the church.

When describing how the experience connected to their faith, two primary answers emerged. Three of the five participants connected sharing their knowledge and serving to how it made them feel personally. All three described the personal satisfaction that came with offering your knowledge or skills to help someone else. The other two participants were much more goal-oriented in their responses. One highlighted the goal of self-sufficiency, noting that sharing one’s knowledge and skills with others could make them more self-sufficient and less likely to be dependent on help in the future. The final participant, CMV 5, noted that “most of the things you do or participate in are connected

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8 Not all participants were able to be present for this session. Participants in Reflection Session 1 were CMV 1, CMV 2, CMV 4, CMV 5, and CMV 6.

9 See Appendix F for an outline of the session. How the experience connects to one’s faith and how it might be applied in the life of the church are what is most relevant to the purpose of the project, so only answers to those questions will be expounded upon in the text of the chapter.
to faith only as much as you want it to connect to faith.”¹⁰ He then told a brief story about various projects the church had done for over fifteen years, but that only recent organization had made them more successful. For him, there had to be a goal in mind before people would be willing to offer their time and skills.

When describing how the experience might be applied in the life of the church, three of the five participants highlighted the notion of growth. Two of the three saw the offering and sharing of skills and knowledge as ways to grow the church, while the third thought that mission efforts could grow because more churches would be likely to join in and participate if knowledge and skills were being shared. Then, the conversation about church application shifted to how it connected to the sermon from that morning. Participants noted that the offering was more than just money, and they again highlighted their own personal satisfaction in giving. Interestingly, CMV 1 stated, “when you see somebody who needs help, you can come to somebody at the church and something can get done.”¹¹ This comment led to conversation about how gifted many of the church members were and how fortunate the church was with its resources. I used the flow of conversation to discuss asset mapping, a concept with which some of the participants were already familiar. This, in turn, led to a discussion about how to best utilize assets. Then, primarily through body posture and facial expressions, participants began to give non-verbal clues that they were dreaming about new potential mission efforts for the church.

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¹⁰ CMV 5, 27 May 2018, 12.

¹¹ CMV 1, 27 May 2018, 12.
The clearest non-verbal clues were far off looks that typically connote someone is deep in thought.

Reflection Session 2 – Honor & Shame

On Sunday, June 3, 2018 I preached the second sermon in the series. The theme for this sermon and the corresponding reflection session was honor and shame. In the sermon I connected honor and shame to notions of abundance and scarcity. I noted that shame often keeps people divided and that shame is frequently accompanied by the fear of not having enough. I encouraged the congregation to reject such fear, to remember the call Christians have to do Kingdom work, and to remember that God is a God of abundance.

For the reflection session activity, participants completed a portion of Brené Brown’s companion worksheet to *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn’t).* After they were given time to finish the worksheet, participants were asked to share their answers as they felt comfortable. Then, they were asked what their results might reveal about their interactions with others. Unsurprisingly, participants were less forthcoming in this reflection session than in the previous one. CMV 5 stated that “everything that I do when I

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12 Participants in this reflection session were CMV 1, CMV 3, CMV 4, CMV 5, CMV 6, and CMV 7.

13 See Appendix H for the portion of the worksheet.
meet somebody is governed by how I want to be perceived.”14 When asked how the experience might be applied in the life of the church, three participants connected shame to guilt. CMV 4 stated, “we should feel shame if we aren’t helping fulfill needs in the community.”15 CMV 3 again shared his story of how he was guilted into volunteering, arguing that guilt does not always have to be bad.

Shame dominated most of the discussion. Finally, CMV 5 observed that we had not mentioned honor at all, and he wondered when we were going to discuss it since we had spent so much time on shame. I replied to his comment by stating that some of the clients at the soup kitchen felt shame and asked how volunteers might be able to give them honor.16 That question spurred more conversation. CMV 3 stated, “Near Thanksgiving last year, we asked people if they wanted us to serve them instead of them going through a line, and the behavior has been better since then. People have been more responsive since we started serving them. Every time they get a plate, they say thank you.”17 Two other participants agreed and connected the clients’ thankfulness to being served and treated with respect. CMV 3 also mentioned that clients took up a collection after two different volunteers passed away as a sign of respect. CMV 6 noted that people

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14 CMV 5, 3 June 2018, 17.

15 CMV 4, 3 June 2018, 17.

16 One of the clients in the group conversations mentioned that her husband refused to join her on Thursdays because he would not eat at the/a soup kitchen. This episode is detailed further in the section on Client Discussion 2.

17 CMV 3, 3 June 2018, 17.
had begun dressing better since they switched to serving people at the table rather than them walking through a feeding line. The session ended with participants describing ways in which the church could give honor to people through other local mission efforts.

Reflection Session 3 – Beloved Community

On Sunday, June 10, 2018 I preached the final sermon in the series. The theme for this sermon and the corresponding reflection session was beloved community. In the sermon I referenced Desmond Tutu’s work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa making the point that only restoration and forgiveness can allow people to become whole and allow for beloved community to be built. I concluded the sermon with a personal story highlighting the opportunities people have to move past polarization and division by listening to understand someone different than themselves. And that in such listening, the seeds of beloved community can be planted.

I began the reflection session by explaining the concepts of beloved community and soul collage.\textsuperscript{18} Participants then built soul collages around the theme of beloved community.\textsuperscript{19} After giving ample time for everyone to complete their collages, each person was given the opportunity to share what he or she created and explain how his or her creation reflected the idea of beloved community. In sharing their collages, the participants

\textsuperscript{18} The outline for Reflection Session 3 can be found in Appendix I.

\textsuperscript{19} Participants in this session included CMV 1, CMV 2, CMV 3, CMV 4, and CMV 7.
directly acknowledged the troubled racial history of Orangeburg. CMV 3 went first. Using pictures of packs of animals, his collage started with no unity and no family. The next group of pictures showed people in community, and the final group of pictures showed items that he argued brought people into community. He stated, “Orangeburg was a very racist place in the 60s when I was growing up. The youth sports league was the one thing in town that was integrated, and people didn’t have a problem with that. There were still separate water fountains for blacks and white, but kids could play sports together. Sports have helped us make great strides in this community.” CMV 3’s final photo was of church, and he concluded by stating that church gave people from different groups the opportunity to come together.

CMV 7 went next and started off by sharing a picture of the colonial period. He said, “Here are people from Europe and the Indians. The Indians tried to help, but we blew it. Think about the Trail of Tears. Indians were called savages.” He continued to move through the pictures of his collage before finally showing a picture of a circle of plastic. He said, “They were things that were discarded that were turned into art, and they were brought all together.” CMV 4 also connected beloved community to the ideal of overcoming racial divisions by showing pictures of people of differing races. He then talked about the importance of the two HBCUs in Orangeburg. CMV 1 showed a picture

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20 CMV 3, 10 June 2018, 23.

21 CMV 7, 10 June 2018, 23.

22 CMV 7, 10 June 2018, 23.
of a woman who adopted seven different children of seven different nationalities. All but one of the participants directly mentioned overcoming racial divisions as a way to create beloved community.

Like every reflection session, I asked the participants how their experience might connect to faith and how the experience might be applied in the life of the church. All of them highlighted the importance of how people are treated. CMV 2 stated, “It will make me think more about when I see someone in town that’s not like me to be a little less afraid and do more than say hello.”23 When others began to mention the role of church in bringing people together, CMV 4 noted how unfortunate it was that church continues to be one of the most segregated institutions in America. When I asked the final question about how it might apply to the life of the church, the group began to discuss how the town’s only homeless shelter closed. They also discussed the importance of seeing faith in action. The session concluded with me telling them the next steps in the project, including the post-sermon series interviews and the final reflection session.

Post-Sermon Series Interviews

Post-sermon series interviews were conducted between June 11, 2018 and June 21, 2018. Responses to questions about the role of volunteers in the soup kitchen ministry and motivations to volunteer saw no real change. Responses to the questions that addressed mission, change to the ministry, church identity, and change in perception did

23 CMV 2, 10 June 2018, 24.
show change, however. CMV 1 showed little change in her answers. The notable exceptions were around changes to the ministry itself and changes in her perceptions. Her definition of mission did not change, nor did she differentiate it from charity. After initially wanting to make changes to the facility where the soup kitchen ministry is housed, she stated that she would not make any changes to the ministry. When asked if there was anything from the project that had caused her to view mission differently, the soup kitchen differently, or her volunteer role differently, she stated, “This project has made me realize I need to be more outgoing and discuss things more with people. I haven’t really and truly gotten to the point that I know how to discuss the Bible the way it’s supposed to come out, but I feel more comfortable now.” CMV 1 also stated that she had enjoyed the project and that she had never been involved in something like it before.

CMV 2 connected mission more to personal action in her post-series interview than she did previously. Initially, she wanted to change the ministry by giving away canned goods but in her post-sermon series interview, she discussed the importance of building better relationships with clients. CMV 2 continued to believe that the soup kitchen ministry reflected FBCO’s generosity, but in her post-sermon series interview she focused more on the fact that she believed the name “soup kitchen” was a misnomer.

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24 A general overview of the results for the post-sermon series interviews will be given here. A visual comparison for the changes in each participant’s answers can be found in the section on Interpreting the Results.

25 CMV 1, 12 June 2018, 31.
When she was asked whether she viewed mission, the soup kitchen, or her volunteer role differently after the project, she stated:

I think all of it made me think more about what I’m doing when I go down there. And of course, I think listening to your sermons has given us a biblical message for how it should be and how we should treat people who are different from us. It’s made me more aware of what I do. It’s made me more aware of the needs and why I’m there and why I want to continue for as long as I can.26

CMV 3 elaborated more on his definition of mission, adding that he now thought mission was more important. CMV 3 initially did not want to make any changes to the ministry, but he stated that the project had opened his eyes to the needs in the community. He hoped that the soup kitchen could serve as a launching pad for other local mission efforts. His answers around the identity of the church did not change, but he stated that he viewed mission and his volunteer role differently. He again claimed that the project had made him more aware of the needs in the community and that he viewed his volunteer role as an opportunity that he did not want to waste.

Neither CMV 4 nor CMV 5 changed their answers on their definition of ministry, but both changed their answers on other questions. CMV 4 initially wanted to make changes to the facility used for the soup kitchen, but by the end of the project he wanted more interaction between volunteers and clients. He also wondered if additional research by the volunteers themselves could lead to some slight re-organization so that they could do their jobs better. Throughout the project CMV 5 hoped that the soup kitchen ministry could serve as a connection point or launching pad for other local mission efforts. That

26 CMV 2, 12 June 2018, 29.
did not change in his two interviews. While both CMV 4 and CMV 5 both initially thought that the soup kitchen reflected the church’s faithfulness at the beginning of the project, they were both less optimistic in their respective post-sermon series interviews. CMV 5 described the need for more volunteers and stated that he thought the church at large viewed itself as a sponsor of the soup kitchen rather than as an active partner and participant in it. The distinction bothered him greatly. He also described the need for more volunteers so that clients and volunteers could have more interaction with one another. CMV 4 used similar language when answering the same question. When asked if the project had made any change in how he viewed mission, the soup kitchen, or their role as a volunteer, CMV 5 said that the project had made no change. CMV 4 noted that the project had made him pay closer attention to what he called the scriptural mandate for mission work.

CMV 6 had few changes in his answers. There was no change on his definition of mission or how he distinguished it from charity. He expressed no change in how he thought the church’s identity was reflected in the soup kitchen. He also stated that the project had made little to no change in how he viewed mission, the soup kitchen, or his role there as a volunteer. The only notable change in his answers is found on the question having to do with changes to the ministry itself. Initially, CMV 6 did not want to change anything about the ministry and stated that all of the changes that needed to be made had been made. After the sermon series, however, he described the need for a better facility for the ministry. He also expressed concern about its financial future since the wealthy
church member who had so generously donated large sums of money to purchase was aging and beginning to have serious health problems.

Arguably, the participant who saw his answers change the most from the first interview to the second was CMV 7. In the first interview CMV 7 struggled to differentiate mission from charity so he was quite eager to answer that question a second time. He stated:

That bothered me that I couldn’t distinguish that much between them, so I googled it. One thing that popped up that was quite interesting – with missions it’s tied to the gospel. Missions ought to have a gospel objective and a charity does not. That’s a pretty distinguishing factor between the two of them. All the other questions I felt good about, but that one kept coming back to me and coming back to me. It kind of hit me.27

When asked about changes to the soup kitchen ministry, CMV 7 initially saw it as a connection point where people could learn about other services for which they might qualify. By the end, however, he was open to whatever suggestions the clients had. He wanted to be flexible and serve them the best way possible. While he saw little difference in the church’s identity as it related to the soup kitchen, he did see several differences in how he thought about mission and how he viewed his role as a volunteer. He stated that he learned more about Scripture and the scriptural basis for mission. Most interesting, however, was the change in how he viewed his role as a volunteer. He said, “I see my role as

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more of a missionary now. I didn’t see it that way before. Soup kitchen was just something I wanted to do so I could serve.” The change in how CMV 7 viewed his role as a volunteer gave his work added meaning.

Client Group Discussion 1 – Client Relationships

The first client group discussion took place on Thursday, May 31, 2018 and focused primarily on the relationships the clients had with other clients and on the relationships they had with the volunteers who served them. There were seven participants, three men and four women. These clients were initially asked about their relationships with the others who joined them for the meal. NMC 2 mentioned at the outset that she did not know the volunteers who served the food, but that she had gotten to know the people who regularly sat with her and that she had known another one of the participants since he was a small child. NMC 3 told a brief story about befriending someone from the soup kitchen and taking him home when he needed a ride. NMC 4 noted some of the other clients were her neighbors. Generally, all seven of the participants in the first group conversation knew at least some of the other clients.

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28 CMV 7, 11 June 2018, 27.

29 See Appendix K for the outline to Client Group Discussion 1.

30 One of the client participants, NMC 1, actually volunteers at the meal and then goes to eat with the other clients. She is the person I referenced in the introduction to this project.
The conversation about relationships, however, quickly shifted to the socialization aspect of the meal. NMC 6 stated, “It’s a way for me to interact with people. I’m basically a loner. One of my main hobbies is sleeping. This is my way of coming out and sharing and I look forward to it.”

NMC 4 added, “I think the soup kitchen can help people with mental issues, emotional issues. I started coming because of my aunt. She got Alzheimer’s and needed social interaction. For a lot of people in my neighborhood, this is their group of family that they can interact with. It’s a blessing to socialize.”

NMC 6 chimed in that the meal should not be a called a soup kitchen because it was simply a gathering at a church. This led to an extended conversation about changing the name of the meal. In fact, that portion of the conversation took up approximately half of the first client session. NMC 4 stated, “The name should be changed to something nice like a community meal or fellowship meal. You don’t serve soup. You serve a complete meal. Everybody in Orangeburg knows where this church is on Thursday.”

NMC 1 and NMC agreed.

The clients also shared how they started coming to the meal. Three of the seven participants stated that they initially heard about the meal from a neighbor. A fourth participant, NMC 1, stated that she had been volunteering at another church when she heard

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31 NMC 6, 31 May 2018, 14.

32 NMC 4, 31 May 2018, 14.

33 NMC 4, 31 May 2018, 15.
about the meal. In what became a theme in our discussions, the conversation again returned to the name of the meal. When NMC 3 mentioned that she would bring her sisters who came to visit her from out of town, someone again highlighted the importance of changing the name. NMC 1 asked me directly if I could talk with the pastor to get the name changed. I replied by telling her and the rest of the participants that at the end of my project I would share preliminary results with those who volunteer and that I would properly convey their concerns.

After asking about their relationships with other clients and watching the conversation veer slightly off topic, I asked the clients about their relationships with the volunteers who serve and prepare the food. Unsurprisingly, everyone knew Jon, a church member at FBCO who organized and ran the ministry, but who did not take part in the project. Also unsurprisingly, NMC 1 knew the names of all the regular church volunteers. NMC 4 knew two people who volunteered with the ministry because she regularly saw them elsewhere in the community, and NMC 2 mentioned that she knew Melvin, an African-American church member who had recently been elected as a deacon in the church. With the exception of NMC 1, the seven participants did not know the people who were serving them each week.

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34 This was unsurprising due to NMC 1’s role as both a volunteer and a client. Equally important, NMC 1 briefly came up in conversation with the Group One Participants, but none of them viewed her as a client because she helped them with the process of preparing and serving the food.
I concluded our group discussion by asking the Group Two participants what they thought could be done to further develop or strengthen the relationships they had with the volunteers. I also asked if they considered strengthening and developing such relationships as a valid goal. Their answers were surprising. First, their responses echoed some of the responses of the volunteers in Group One. They also brought up the lack of time that people had since the volunteers were trying to serve so many. NMC 6 said, “I’m being served, but I don’t even know these people. I’d love to interact with them, but there’s no time to talk. Maybe you should go back to letting people go through the line so they could interact with others.”35 The other clients quickly disagreed with going back to a serving line, but they did bemoan the fact that there was not enough time for them to get to know the people who were serving them. NMC 1 brought up how much smoother things had run since they moved to serving people at their tables. NMC 7 concluded, “The way things are going now is working.”36

I was surprised by several of the clients’ responses. One surprise came when the clients discussed the importance of humility. NMC 4 repeatedly brought up the notion that those being served needed to humble themselves and be thankful when accepting a free meal. The other participants seemed to agree with her, and the quality of the meal was repeatedly referenced throughout the discussion. While not necessarily reflective of the clients as a whole, the Group Two participants regularly used “church language.” The

35 NMC 6, 31 May 2018, 16.

36 NMC 7, 31 May 2018, 16.
concepts of humility, service, and grace were a common refrain in their answers. NMC 1 also repeatedly brought up the notion of judgment, specifically stating that the Bible said people were not supposed to judge one another. Initially, I thought she was stating that the volunteers should not judge the clients, but I quickly realized that she was concerned about the clients judging one another. This topic also seemed to be important to the group. Finally, the clients spoke in glowing terms about the volunteers even though they did not know them personally. They all described appreciating the warmth and friendliness they received in addition to the meal.

Client Group Discussion 2 – Client Experiences

The second client group discussion took place on Thursday, June 7, 2018 and focused primarily on the experiences the clients had at the soup kitchen.37 There were seven active participants, two men and five women, some of whom also participated in the first client group conversation.38 The first question asked them to describe their experiences at the soup kitchen. Their experiences were overwhelmingly positive. NMC 8 stated that she liked being served at the table rather than having to go through a food line and thought that the small changes made over the years were beneficial. NMC 3 mentioned that she liked the fact that senior citizens and children were recognized and served first. NMC 9 stated, “I started coming because of my sister. What I like is that before the

37 See Appendix L for the outline to Client Group Discussion 2.

38 For the sake of consistency, those who participated in the first client group discussion and were given identification markers kept those markers for the second discussion.
meals, y’all have some Scripture and read the Bible. I like the devotion.” 39 Two different participants stated that because their experiences had been so positive each of them had brought ten to twelve people to meals over the years. The participants also compared their experiences at FBCO to other soup kitchens. Three of the participants mentioned hearing questions as to whether they qualified at other locations. All three were pleased that everyone was welcomed at First Baptist. This response about all being welcomed to eat also mirrored responses from the Group One volunteers.

According to the clients, the name led to confusion about whether someone had to qualify before they were fed, and this started another round of discussions on the name of the meal itself. NMC 6 stated that he started dressing up more for the meals because of their quality and that a better meal required nicer attire. The name had caused him to think the meal was simply soup and cornbread and he had previously worn more casual clothing. NMC 4 stated that the name had been an impediment for members of her own family. She stated, “I’ve brought over ten different people to this Thursday meal over the years and I can’t even get my own husband to come. He won’t come because he says that he’s not going to eat at a soup kitchen.” 40 Even though it did not keep them from coming or bringing people to join them, the clients overwhelmingly felt that the name “soup kitchen” was not only a misnomer for what the church was serving, but that it kept others away.

39 NMC 9, 7 June 2018, 19.

40 NMC 4, 7 June 2018, 20.
I also asked the clients if there had been anything negative about their experience with the Thursday meal. Multiple participants highlighted the changes that had been made over the years to address the things they disliked. Being served at the tables instead of going through a food line and better organization for people as they enter the building were the top changes mentioned. Instead of describing negative experiences, however, the bulk of the conversation around this question actually included positive suggestions from the clients to make the experience even better. Two participants mentioned how much they liked the devotional but wanted to know if music could be added. NMC 4 and NMC 6 were particularly adamant about the benefits of adding music. Other suggestions that gained traction with the group were more interaction and discussion between clients and volunteers, decorations for the tables, training for volunteers so they could better serve the clients who suffered from mental disability, and giving clients the opportunity to give back. The group became particularly animated when describing changes they would make to the ministry. It was clear from their responses that many in Group Two had been coming to the Thursday meal for years. It was also clear that they wanted to take ownership of the meal and that they viewed their time on Thursday as a sort of worship service. While initially skeptical, the clients ended up becoming very excited by the project, and they were eager for me to share their responses with the church volunteers.

Reflection Session 4 – Hearing from the Clients

After completing the pre-sermon and post-sermon series interviews, the three reflection sessions, and the two group discussions with clients, I gathered together the
Group One volunteers on Sunday, June 24, 2018 to discuss preliminary findings.\(^{41}\) I started the session by reviewing the themes from each sermon and previous session. Then I asked the participants how these previous experiences might connect to the soup kitchen.\(^{42}\) The conversation did not really come alive, however, until I shared some of the responses from the clients. I told the participants that I had transcribed the client conversations and that I had reviewed the transcriptions to identify major themes and topics of conversation that came up repeatedly. I told them that I had transcribed the reflection sessions and reviewed them to identify major themes as well. While stressing that all of the findings that I was sharing were initial and not finalized, I highlighted the points that I thought were most salient. I mentioned that the clients did not view the meal as a soup kitchen, did not like the name, and that it kept other people from coming.

I also mentioned that the clients spoke highly about their experience, the quality of the food, the amount of food, and the friendliness of the volunteers, particularly when compared to the other churches in town. Only half of the Group Two clients stated that they went to meals at other churches. I shared that they overwhelmingly liked the addition of a devotional and that they hoped music could be added as well. Worship service language was used by the clients for the Thursday meal experience. I also shared that the

\(^{41}\) As previously mentioned, there was a slight gap between the delivery of the last sermon and the final reflection session. This is primarily due to the birth of my daughter and the need for family time.

\(^{42}\) Participants in this final session were CMV 2, CMV 4, CMV 5, CMV 6, and CMV 7.
clients wanted a way to give back, had suggested adding decoration to the tables and wanted to look for more ways to foster interaction.

Moving to responses from the volunteers themselves, I noted that several of them had mentioned now seeing a stronger connection between mission and Scripture since the project had begun. I also stated that they were unanimous in wanting more involvement from the community, both church members and city leaders. They said that they wanted more interaction between the clients and volunteers, but they were unsure of how to make that happen without more volunteers. The Group One volunteers all mentioned how impressed they were with the other members of the group and that they had a positive experience participating in the project. After sharing all of these responses, I asked them how their experiences and the clients’ responses might change the soup ministry. Finally, I asked them to brainstorm ideas together to improve the ministry.

Hearing the responses from the clients made the volunteers more animated and excited than they had been through the entirety of the project. There was overwhelming openness to making changes to better serve those they fed. CMV 4 suggested buying flower arrangements and appointing some of the clients to serve on a committee to be in charge of table decorations. CMV 2 offered to donate vases. The conversation then shifted to changing the name of the ministry and to soliciting more volunteers. All five of the participants were more than willing to change the name of the meal. After some discussion, the general consensus was calling it Community Lunch at First Baptist. The name change would reflect that the meal was more than soup and cornbread, that socialization was a large part of the experience, and that businesses in the community regularly
donated food. The First Baptist in the name would simply denote the location of the meal. CMV 6 even offered to get new aprons made once the name change was approved. The participants all agreed that the church needed to do a better job of advertising the ministry. The participants committed to asking others to join them and suggested that the need for volunteers be mentioned by the ministerial staff during announcements, in sermons, and in the church newsletter.

After their initial excitement, the group then began to think of ways to make these changes a reality. They agreed to talk with Jon, the church member who organized and led the efforts, and asked that I mention something to the pastor so it could be brought up in a Deacons’ meeting. They also suggested contacting the generous church member who spent large amounts of his own money to pay for the food for the meal. They wanted the blessing of all of these groups before contacting the local businesses who made donations to inform them of any name change. When we all left the final session, there was group cohesion and consensus. The participants were more than willing to make the changes that had been suggested and to contact the necessary persons so that everyone could move forward together.

Interpreting the Results

In this section I have provided visual representation to show the change in the Group One volunteers’ answers on questions about mission, change to the ministry, and congregational identity. Their responses were coded for overarching themes, and those themes are listed in the charts below. I have also summarized any changes described by
the participants in their post-sermon series interviews. It is important to note that the importance of relationships in mission was discussed frequently and that many of the volunteers expressed a willingness to develop relationships with those they served. Over the short tenure of the project, however, none of them had actually gotten around to meeting new clients or getting to better know the ones they recognized. They also expressed the need for more volunteers, so that relationships could be given the attention they deserve.

**Question 1: What does mission mean to you? Is it important, and if so, why?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-Series Response</th>
<th>Post-Series Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMV 1</td>
<td>Knowledge, Helping, Poverty</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 2</td>
<td>Giving</td>
<td>Helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 3</td>
<td>Outreach/Evangelism, Helping, Poverty</td>
<td>More important, Expanded, Multi-Faceted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 4</td>
<td>Volunteering, Poverty</td>
<td>Volunteering, poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 5</td>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 6</td>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>Helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 7</td>
<td>Helping, Poverty</td>
<td>Gospel Objective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Question 1 Pre-Series and Post-Series Responses**

In both sets of interviews, all participants stated that mission was either important or very important to them. Consequently, that portion of the question is not addressed in the chart above. It is clear from the chart though that only CMV 3 and CMV 7 gave significantly different answers about what mission means to them. Three of the recipients
did not change their answers at all. And the remaining two recipients only slightly amended their answers.

*Question 7: If there was something you could add to or change about this ministry, what would it be?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-Series Response</th>
<th>Post-Series Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMV 1</td>
<td>Better Facilities</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 2</td>
<td>Canned Food</td>
<td>Better Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 3</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>More Community Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 4</td>
<td>Connection Point for Other Ministries</td>
<td>Connection Point for Other Ministries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 5</td>
<td>Better Facilities</td>
<td>Better Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 6</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>Better Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 7</td>
<td>Connection Point for Other Ministries</td>
<td>Changes Should Be Client Dependent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Question 7 Pre-Series and Post-Series Responses

With the exceptions of CMV 4 and CMV 7, the participants initially wanted to make no changes or only make structural changes to the ministry such as better facilities or giving away canned food in addition to cooked meals. In the post-sermon series interviews, however, four of the seven participants changed their answers to focus more on the relational aspects of the ministry. CMV 4’s answers remained the same, but CMV 2
and CMV 5 highlighted the need for improved relationships between clients and volunteers. Indirectly, CMV 3 did as well, highlighting the need for community involvement for both additional local mission efforts and for developing relationships with clients. Interestingly, CMV 7 remained open to making any changes as needed based on the response of the clients. CMV 6 wanted to make structural changes after initially wanting to make no changes. And CMV 1 was the only participant who decided that nothing needed to be changed.

*Question 8: How do you think the church’s identity is reflected in the soup kitchen ministry?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-Series Response</th>
<th>Post-Series Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 3</td>
<td>Good Neighbor/Community</td>
<td>Good Neighbor/Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 4</td>
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<td>Sponsor, Not Neighbor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Sponsor, Not Neighbor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMV 7</td>
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Figure 4. Question 8 Pre-Series and Post-Series Responses
Participants’ initial answers reflected one of three themes: generosity, faithfulness, and good neighbor/community. They thought that the soup kitchen either showcased the church’s generosity, its willingness to be a good neighbor and an active participant in the community, or its faithfulness. Four of the seven participants did not change their answers. CMV 1 stated the church’s ministerial staff and the congregation better reflected the church’s identity than the soup kitchen did. CMV 4 and CMV 5 had the most interesting responses. While they both initially saw the soup kitchen as an example of FBCO’s faithfulness, they came to view the lack of more participation in a negative light. Simply put, the project forced them to reflect more on the needs of the community, and they became disillusioned that more congregants would not get involved and help.

*Question 9 – Is there anything from the sermons or small group reflection sessions that has caused you to view mission differently, the soup kitchen differently, or your volunteer role differently? If so, what was it? What changed?*

<table>
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CMV 5 | No | N/A | No | N/A | No | N/A
CMV 6 | No | N/A | No | N/A | No | N/A
CMV 7 | Yes | Scripture | No | N/A | Yes | Missionary

| Figure 5. Question 9 Post-Series Responses |

In the chart above, I differentiate the three parts of the question. The first column represents whether or not the project caused the participants to view mission differently, and the second column records those changes. The third column identifies whether or not the project caused the participants to view the soup kitchen ministry different, and the fourth column records those changes. The fifth column represents whether or not the project caused the participants to view their role as a volunteer differently, and the final column records those changes. All of the participants stated that the project had not caused them to view the soup kitchen ministry differently, but it is important to note that the post-sermon series interviews were held prior to the volunteers hearing the clients’ responses. As previously mentioned, the client responses drastically changed the participants’ willingness to make needed changes to the ministry, and the responses also changed how the volunteers viewed the ministry itself.

CMV 1 stated that she had previously viewed mission efforts as something that was done overseas, but the project had taught her the importance of local missions. This was surprising considered CMV 1 has long been involved in local mission efforts. She stated that she previously considered volunteering, and she had distinguished volunteerism from doing mission work. She also noted that the project had caused her to engage in
self-reflection and that she saw the need for her to make personal changes by becoming more outgoing if she hoped to be a better volunteer. CMV 2, CMV 4, and CMV 7 all stated that the project had made them more aware of the scriptural basis for mission work. CMV 3 said that the project’s focus on mission made him more aware of the needs in his local community. CMV 5 and CMV 6 stated that the project had no bearing on their views of mission. Concerning their views of their roles as volunteers, CMV 7 stated that he now saw himself as more of a missionary. CMV 2 recognized that her work was going to meet what she considered a real need in her community. And CMV 3 stated that the project made him reflect on the volunteer opportunities that he had and made him acknowledge his desire not to waste them.

Data Conclusions

Overall, Group One participants showed a greater interest in developing relationships with those served and thought it should become a priority for the soup kitchen ministry moving forward. They acknowledged that their jobs in the ministry may prevent them from being the ones to develop such relationships, but that it was important for volunteers to do more to get to know the people they were serving. Their solution to the problem was to get more volunteers. The initial conflict and fear that I might change “their ministry” had dissipated and they were overwhelmingly in agreement about making the changes needed to empower the clients, give them dignity, and give them ownership. Group Two Participants were equally excited about opportunities to give back and
appreciative that their concerns were being heard. They were unanimous in their appreciation for the ministry and the volunteers themselves. Trust was built among the groups, and both were hopeful that additional changes could be made soon.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to see if the missional theology of congregants could mature in response to sermons and small group reflections. I hoped that the volunteers who participated in this project would better appreciate the importance of relationships in their mission efforts and would then begin the hard work of developing deep, meaningful relationships with the clients they serve. The previous chapter describes the responses of both church member volunteers and non-member clients. The data suggests that overall the project was a success, but the success had less to do with the sermons and accompanying activities than it did with the volunteers hearing from the clients. This chapter summarizes the project and its results, begins to explore avenues for further research, and addresses the potential impact this study can have on ministry.

Project and Results Summary

Initially, many of the participants were hesitant about this project. The church member volunteers in Group One were fearful that I might change a ministry that they loved, and the non-member clients in Group Two were skeptical of change and were concerned about maintaining their anonymity. Fears were assuaged with each group in slightly different ways. I reassured Group One by telling them in the beginning that I was not seeking to make any particular changes to the soup kitchen ministry and that instead I was interested in exploring and hopefully working to enhance the congregation’s missional theology. Interview questions and reflection session activities also helped ease
their concerns. For Group Two, explaining the informed consent form and only audio-recording the sessions helped ease their concerns immediately. Once these varying concerns were eased, both groups quickly opened up to share their thoughts about the soup kitchen ministry.

I held two group conversation sessions with the non-member clients. All who participated were appreciative of the volunteers and the quality of the meal. They liked the devotional prior to each meal and viewed the devotional time as a worship service. In fact, several mentioned repeatedly that they wanted the church’s ministerial staff not to rush through their devotionals and incorporate music as part of this worship time prior to the meal. They talked at length about the social aspect of their weekly gathering. They mentioned inviting friends and family to join them.

Hearing participants describe their experience sounded like church, and in fact, they frequently used “church language.” They talked about the importance of humility, service, and grace. Furthermore, they became animated when they realized that the project was moving towards their empowerment. They had numerous ideas to improve the ministry, particularly with regards to the name, and they wanted to take more of an ownership role in the ministry rather than passively being served. They described wanting to decorate the Fellowship Hall to make it feel more welcoming and friendly. They also saw the importance of knowing the people who had been serving them, though they acknowledged the time constraints that come with feeding a large group of people quickly.

I spent significantly more time with the church member volunteers. They are the ones who heard the sermons in the sermon series. They are the ones who participated in
the small group reflection sessions. And they are the ones I interviewed both prior to and after the sermon series. Because all these volunteers regularly work together, the bond they share was evident in how they acted around one another in our sessions together. It was also clear from the pre-sermon series interviews that the volunteers had been working in the soup kitchen ministry for so long that they no longer spent much time thinking about the larger ramifications of their work. Generally, they struggled to distinguish mission from charity. Many did not want to make any changes to the ministry at all. Through the course of the project, however, things began to change.

After the first sermon, the small group reflection session explored the theme of offering. The activity for the session involved asking participants to write down three things they could teach the group and three things they would like to learn. The participants soon discovered that much of what they wanted to learn could be taught to them by people already in the room. This discovery led to a conversation about the many talents in the church and how the church might best utilize those talents. Through both their expressions and their comments, it became clear that the group was beginning to dream about new potential mission efforts for the church. They had become excited about their participation in the project.

After the second sermon, the small group reflection session explored the themes of honor and shame. And while the activity led to good conversation, Group One’s excitement waned. Shame dominated the conversation. While the session ended with participants describing ways in which the church could give honor to the people it served through local mission efforts, participants were less forthcoming with suggestions.
The theme for the third small group reflection session was beloved community and the activity, creating soul collages, caused the group’s excitement to increase once more. It also led to some of their most honest and transparent conversation in the project. CMV 3 highlighted the troubled racial history of Orangeburg and described how sports had helped heal some of the community’s wounds. CMV 2 described her own fear when she saw someone in town that was not like her, but that the project had taught her to be less afraid and more open. CMV 4 even bemoaned how many churches remained segregated in the United States.

Post-sermon series interviews showed some changes in the volunteers’ answers. More of the group was now open to making changes to the ministry as needed, and more of them could now differentiate mission from charity. They also mentioned that they saw a stronger connection between mission and Scripture because of the project. The biggest change for Group One, though, occurred in the fourth and final small group session when I shared preliminary results from the clients. The energy level and excitement level were extremely high after I told them what I had learned from those in Group Two. They were unanimous in wanting to change the name from soup kitchen to Community Lunch at First Baptist. They also were unanimous in wanting the church to do more to advertise the ministry. They agreed that developing relationships with the clients was important, but they also stated that such work could be done only with additional help. They, too, highlighted the time constraints they felt in serving such a large group of people so quickly with so few volunteers. Finally, the Group One volunteers wanted to make sure that the appropriate people were involved so that they would not be making any changes
unilaterally. Understandably, they wanted other leaders and organizers of the ministry to know and have input for these changes as well. Ultimately, hearing from the clients they were serving was the biggest catalyst for congregant-led change. Because I am no longer on staff at First Baptist Orangeburg, I do not know if all the changes that were discussed have been implemented. Some of the ministry’s leaders have had health problems, which slowed progress. There are some exciting changes that have been implemented since I left, however, and they are described in more detail in the impact on ministry section below.

Opportunities for Further Research

This project has created several possibilities for further research. In many ways, this project served as a catalyst to make changes to the church’s soup kitchen ministry. Consequently, these changes should be accompanied by evaluation to make sure that the ministry remains healthy and to make sure that the changes are reaching their desired goals. For example, when discussing changing the name from Soup Kitchen to Community Lunch at First Baptist, CMV 4 suggested appointing a group of client leaders to serve as a committee responsible for decoration. This committee must function properly and with adequate support. Surveying clients to collect their thoughts on both décor and group empowerment could also provide helpful results.

In addition to the clients, surveying volunteers to see their thoughts on ministry changes and client empowerment would be equally illuminating. Furthermore, one could examine whether or not the changes made in this particular ministry had any bearing on the church’s other local mission efforts. Most importantly, one could interview or survey
both the non-member clients and the church member volunteers to see if more than lip service has been paid to the notion of developing relationships between these two groups. Do the volunteers know more of the people that they serve? Do they know any of those they serve any better than they did previously? Have additional church members volunteered so that they can work on cultivating relationships with clients instead? Do the clients feel as though they know those who serve them better? Have opportunities for empowerment helped facilitate any such relationship? All of these questions have potentially profound results, and they, too, can impact other local mission efforts of the church.

Impact on Ministry

For the Researcher

On a personal level, this research has been an encouraging experience for me as a minister. While I hoped to convey the importance of relationships in mission, I was also interested in how the project stimulated change, excitement, and deeper appreciation for mission without conflict within the congregation. In fact, I now think the project serves as an example of how to lead a congregation through congregant-led change. Personally, I also found the work of the project to be immensely enjoyable. Discussing the ministry with passionate volunteers made their passion infectious. Hearing their reasons for participating and seeing their willingness to change what they do so they can best serve their clients was inspiring and made me more personally interested in the ministry. Seeing the excitement and energy from clients being empowered was equally inspiring. And my hunch that mission efforts can be more effective when differing groups hear from one another and focus on the importance of relationship-building was affirmed.
Since the end of the project, I have moved to another place of service. I now serve as the Senior Pastor at the First Baptist Church of Bristol, Virginia, but my experience with this project has provided me with a model on how to lead my new congregation through change without conflict, and it is a model that I plan to employ. The project has also made me more committed to studying the art of preaching and to studying the use of the pulpit as a catalyst for congregational change. Additionally, it has made me spend more time examining the mission efforts of my new place of service and exploring ways in which we can empower, build relationships with, and give dignity to those we serve.

For the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, South Carolina

The project’s impact on the ministry of First Baptist Orangeburg is equally profound. By the end of the project, the church member volunteers of Group One moved beyond their view of mission as charity and began to see their efforts in a different light. They began to see themselves as local missionaries and that change in how they viewed their work caused them to not only re-double their efforts in the community luncheon ministry but also look for ways in which they could do more with other ministries of the church. They also saw the importance of the relational aspect of their work and agreed that it was an aspect that had been previously neglected. Because of this realization and commitment to relationships, not only has the soup kitchen ministry become more effective, but it has also influenced other local mission efforts.

While I no longer serve at First Baptist Orangeburg, I do remain close to the ministerial staff there and I talk with them regularly. A frequent topic of our discussion is the
changes taking place in the church’s local mission efforts. People are being more intentional about addressing long-term needs for those in the community and that has been, at least in part, a result of the formation of new relationships. Since the conclusion of this study, the congregation has expanded the scope of their food and clothing ministries to include offering financial literacy classes. It is in these smaller settings that relationships have had greater opportunities to form. And because of these relationships, other class-like opportunities are being considered based on the needs of those who come.

For the Larger Orangeburg Community

First Baptist Orangeburg’s local mission efforts have had a direct impact on the larger Orangeburg community as well. Nowhere is this clearer than with the city’s homeless shelter. Prior to this project, the city’s one and only homeless shelter, The Samaritan’s House, closed. The shelter previously had a varied revenue stream receiving funding from the city, local churches, and the federal government. Its closure was of deep concern to many throughout the city, especially members at First Baptist Orangeburg since the church had long been one of the leading local contributors to the shelter. Since the conclusion of this study, church leaders have been vital in working with city leaders to re-open The Samaritan’s House. The church’s missional engagement with the community, while already high, has increased, and this is due in large part to a better understanding of the needs in the community. While solidarity with the larger community remains a work in progress, FBCO has recommitted itself to being a better neighbor in the Orangeburg community. And that recommitment has been an added benefit for all involved.
Final Thoughts

This project worked in conjunction with conversations the church had already begun. Prior to the project’s initiation, the church had already started a long-range visioning process in which it examined the spiritual, missional, and institutional health of the congregation. Though many of the participants were different from those in the visioning process, my project, then, came alongside something the church was already doing, and I think that helped to make it successful. First Baptist Orangeburg is a good church that has long sought to be a good neighbor to the larger community through its local missions programs. These efforts have been complicated, however, due to significant racial and socio-economic differences between the congregation and those they sought to serve. The troubled racial history of the community only complicated matters making the formation of relationships between such differing groups not only difficult, but in some cases unthinkable. Time and hard work done by countless people across the country, including people in South Carolina, have caused attitudes to change for many. And that change has filtered down all the way to Orangeburg. More people now understand the long-standing and lingering effects of racial animus and how it can affect a person’s socio-economic standing.

As previously mentioned, members of FBCO now more openly acknowledge the racial tensions felt within the Orangeburg community and are actively seeking ways to decrease it. And this increased openness to having difficult conversations and addressing past societal wrongs has been tangibly expressed in the church’s local mission programs. Now deeper relationships are being formed. Ministry possibilities beyond providing food and clothing are being explored, and the power of these missional relationships is not
only transforming the congregation but the community as well. The congregation’s missional theology has expanded. Mutually beneficial relationships are being built. And God’s Kingdom work has taken on a new and slightly different form in that community. Thanks be to God for even small changes that shift our perceptions of each other and deepen our relationships.


Bryant, Bettis, and Kate Davis, We’ve A Story To Tell. Orangeburg: First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, 2010.


Project Participants. Members of First Baptist Church. Interview by author, 21 May 2018. Video recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

_____. Members of First Baptist Church. Interview by author, 11 June 2018. Video recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.
_____. Members of First Baptist Church. Reflection Session, 27 May 2018. Video recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

_____. Members of First Baptist Church. Reflection Session, 3 June 2018. Video recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

_____. Members of First Baptist Church. Reflection Session, 10 June 2018. Video recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

_____. Members of First Baptist Church. Reflection Session, 24 June 2018. Video recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

Project Participants. Non-Member Clients of First Baptist Church. Interview by author, 31 May 2018. Audio recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

_____. Non-Member Clients of First Baptist Church. Interview by author, 7 June 2018. Audio recording (Transcript). First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, South Carolina.


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
Monday, May 7, 2018

Rev. Kristopher Daniel Aaron
3001 Mercer University Drive
James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: Misional Relationships: Using Preaching and Small Group Reflection as a Mechanism to Expand Missional Theology and Build Mutually Beneficial Relationships in the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, South Carolina (H1804115)

Dear Rev. Aaron:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 30-Apr-2018 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) 06, 07 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 07-May-2018. The protocol expires on 06-May-2019. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
New student application for a qualitative study using interviews, observations, and a questionnaire to encourage the development of mutually beneficial relationships between those who volunteer in the soup kitchen of First Baptist Church Orangeburg and those who served in the soup kitchen.

NOTE: You MUST report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and ALL accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member
Institutional Review Board

“Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice.”

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone: 478-301-4101 | Email: ORC.Mercur@Mercer.edu | Fax: 478-301-2329
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Missional Relationships: Using Preaching and Small Group Reflection as a Mechanism to Expand Missional Theology and Build Mutually Beneficial Relationships in the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, South Carolina

MERCER UNIVERSITY

JAMES AND CAROLYN MCAFEE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigator
The investigator for this research study is Kristopher Daniel Aaron. Rev. Aaron is the Associate Pastor for Students and Family Life at First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, SC and is a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at the James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University under the direction of Dr. Rob Nash. Rev. Aaron can be reached at 803-534-2960 or at kristopher Aaron@ Mercer.edu.

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to expand the First Baptist Church of Orangeburg, SC congregation's view of the importance of relationships in mission. The goal is for those who volunteer in the soup kitchen to develop mutually beneficial relationships with those they serve and to understand their local mission efforts as more than just charity.

The data from this research will be used to determine if congregants express more of an openness and willingness to enter into relationships with those they serve through local mission efforts, while also allow congregants to hear the thoughts and opinions of those they serve.

The results from this study will allow me to complete my DMin project and allow me to proceed closer to graduation.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to divide into one of two groups. The first group will consist of adult church members of First Baptist Church Orangeburg who volunteer at the soup kitchen. Those in Group One will be interviewed before and after a sermon series, attend at least two of the three worship services where the sermons in this series are preached, participate in at least two of the three small

Mercer IRB
Approval Date: 05/07/2018
Protocol Expiration Date: 05/06/2019
group reflection sessions, and participate in a debrief session at the conclusion of the project. The small group reflection sessions and debrief session will each be approximately one and one half hours and will take place on Sunday afternoons at the church. Group Two will consist of adults who are served by the church soup kitchen. Those in the second group will be asked to attend two small group discussion sessions lasting approximately one and one half hours. These sessions will take place on Thursday afternoons after the soup kitchen meal.

Your participation will take approximately 90 minutes for each session. There will be four sessions that take place over a four week period for those in Group One. There will be two sessions that take place over a four week period for those in Group Two.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
Some participants may find sharing their thoughts in a group format uncomfortable. Guidelines and instructions for each session will be provided to the group to maintain respect and to foster an environment that is safe for participants to share their opinions and perspectives. If you wish to stop participating in this study at any time, you may do so immediately without consequence.

Potential Benefits of the Research
The potential benefits of this study include deepening one's own, personal missional theology and developing healthy relationships with those who differ from you. Through participation in this study, you may develop a deeper knowledge of stewardship, solidarity, and the social differences between differing groups during the time of Paul.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
In notes and in the final study, each participant will be given a number (i.e. Participant 1). Interviews and small group discussions will be audio recorded. Small group reflection sessions will be audio and video recorded. Copies of the transcriptions and all data will be kept of a remote storage device in Rev. Aaron’s personal safe at his home for three years, after which they will be destroyed to protect the privacy of all participants.

Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact Rev. Aaron or Dr. Nash.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Kris Aaron at 803-534-2960 or at kris@fborangecburg.org. You may also contact Dr. Nash at nash.muz@mercer.edu.

Incentives to Participate
Snacks will be provided at each small group reflection session for participants. You must attend the session to receive the snacks.
Audio or Video Taping
Audio and video recording will be used in this study. The recordings will be stored by the investigator for at least three years after project completion in a personal safe in my home.

Reasons for Exclusion from this Study
This project has been approved only for volunteers 18 years of age or older. This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University's IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

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Mercer IRB
Approval Date: 05/07/2018
Protocol: 05/06/2019
Expiration Date: Rev. January 2017
APPENDIX C

PRE-SERMON SERIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
PRE-SERMON SERIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does mission mean to you? Is it important, and if so, why?

2. Does mission differ from charity, and if so, how?

3. Why did you start volunteering at the soup kitchen and why do you continue?

4. What is your role at the soup kitchen?

5. Tell me about some of the people you serve. Who have you gotten to know? How long have you known them? How well do you feel you know them?

6. Has your experience volunteering in the soup kitchen caused a change in you? If so, what was the change?

7. If there was something you could add to or change about this ministry, what would it be?

8. How do you think the church’s identity is reflected in the soup kitchen?
APPENDIX D

POST-SERMON SERIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
POST-SERMON SERIES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does mission mean to you? Is it important, and if so, why?

2. Does mission differ from charity, and if so, how?

3. Why did you start volunteering at the soup kitchen and why do you continue?

4. What is your role at the soup kitchen?

5. Tell me about some of the people you serve. Who have you gotten to know? How long have you known them? How well do you feel you know them?

6. Has your experience volunteering in the soup kitchen caused a change in you? If so, what was the change?

7. If there was something you could add to or change about this ministry, what would it be?

8. How do you think the church’s identity is reflected in the soup kitchen?

9. Is there anything from the sermons or small group reflection sessions that has caused you to view mission differently, the soup kitchen differently, or your volunteer role differently? If so, what was it? What changed?
Sermon 1

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 - Taking Up An Offering

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians are simple. There’s going to be a collection for God’s people, and he wants them to take part in it. The Corinthians are to set aside some money at the beginning of each week and save it, so Paul doesn’t have to take up a collection once he arrives. They’re supposed to give according to their income. Paul tells them that once he arrives he’ll give them some letters of introduction to the people they approve and send them to Jerusalem with their gift. If that’s not enough and Paul needs to join them on the trip to Jerusalem, he will. It’s all rather straightforward, but the simplicity of Paul’s directions belie the difficulty in what he’s actually asking them to do. He’s asking them to take up an offering for the saints in Jerusalem, yes, but, as is often the case in church work, there’s more to it. The reasons and intentions behind actions matter, too. That’s a lesson I learned firsthand when I was a teenager.

Growing up in Hawkinsville, all the local churches had VBS on different weeks so they wouldn’t compete against one another for kids. The local daycare centers sent home letters for the parents to sign giving them permission to drop their child off for the respective Vacation Bible Schools. One week it was at First Baptist, my home church growing up. The next it was at the Methodist church. Next it was at the Episcopal church, and finally it was at Broad Street, one of the more fundamentalist Baptist churches in town. This led to huge numbers for everyone, especially when considering the size of the town. Most years First Baptist Hawkinsville had around 300 kids show up for Vacation
Bible School. One of the things all the churches noticed, however, was that nearly all the children who showed up were white. Very few African-American children came to Vacation Bible School at these white churches, even though the town was nearly 50% black. So, this led leaders at several of the churches to get together to plan the first ever community-wide VBS since none of the African-American churches at that time hosted a Vacation Bible School. It was held outside the Head Start facility, which was conveniently located in the middle of one of the largest and poorest African-American neighborhoods in town. The Music Minister at First Baptist was wrangled into leading the music and he tried to get several people from the church to join him, particularly Youth. I was the only one who took him up on his offer.

We went over to the Head Start facility for that first day and I expected to see people from churches all over town. When we arrived, however, the only volunteers that were there aside from me and Mr. Keith, were from Broad Street. No one from the Methodist church, the Episcopal church, or any of the black churches were there to help. I found the whole thing strange, but had committed to help out, so I did. By the end of the week I had learned what happened. I discovered that the folks from Broad Street viewed the community-wide VBS not as an opportunity to serve some of the African-American children in our town, but rather as an opportunity to save them. Specifically, we white people were going to go into these black neighborhoods to really tell these children about Jesus and get them saved, implying that the black churches in town weren’t or couldn’t. The whole thing reeked of paternalism and completely ignored the good work these black churches were doing in the neighborhood. The leaders from these neighborhood churches
got understandably offended, so they backed out. The leaders from the Methodist and Episcopal churches joined them in a sign of solidarity, but since Mr. Keith had already agreed to lead the music prior to this falling out, he felt obligated to keep his word.

In terms of sheer numbers, the week was an overwhelming success. There were well over 100 kids who showed up every day. The people from Broad Street were thrilled and viewed the fantastic numbers as proof that their method had worked. That Friday Blake, the Youth Minister from Broad Street, delivered a message on humility and service, the irony of which escaped me at the time. As he finished up, he pulled out a basin filled with water and one of the volunteers brought him a towel. We had a foot-washing service. The kids were astonished and weren’t sure how to react. The thought of anyone washing their feet made them visibly uncomfortable. The thought of this young, well-dressed, and well-spoken white man coming into their neighborhood to wash the feet of poor, black kids was just too much. We waited for several minutes, and after much hesitation, kids eventually began to come forward to get their feet washed by this man that they had never seen prior to that previous Monday. I don’t know what effect, if any, the foot washing had on the kids who came forward, but the effect on the volunteers was evident. They had an epiphany. While the people from Broad Street were trying to do a good thing, they realized that they couldn’t serve people if they didn’t know them. They couldn’t serve them if thought they were better than them. Both are useful reminders all of us need to hear from time to time. They realized that while God might use them, it was God who is in the saving business and not them. They realized that there’s a difference between saviors and servants, and they finally understood why the leaders from the black
churches they had spoken with had gotten offended. There was no community-wide VBS the next year, and it wasn’t because volunteers couldn’t be wrangled together or because the event hadn’t been a success. It was because they realized that the work being done by these black churches was good and valid, and that there were better ways to show them support.

Paul is crossing similar racial lines with his collection for Jerusalem. The congregation in Jerusalem, you won’t be surprised to hear, is ethnically Jewish. It’s filled with people who view their belief in Jesus as an extension of their Judaism. They don’t see themselves as having converted to another religion, but that they are interpreting their same religion in new and different ways. The congregation in Corinth is primarily comprised of Gentiles. They do believe that they’ve converted to a new religion, and can’t fully understand the position of these Jewish Christians. There is a high level of mistrust between these two groups and that mistrust spans generations. Their common belief in Jesus doesn’t cause them to think that they are now part of the same group, of the same community. They still see themselves as separate. Equal is nowhere in the conversation.

In addition to crossing these racial lines Paul’s collection also calls both groups to cross social and economic ones. During this time, Greco-Roman society functioned through a system of patronage. Basically, those with means, those with money, those with power would help those with less, but this help didn’t come without strings attached. There were unwritten, social rules concerning obligations and gratitude. Those who received help were to be economically and socially loyal to those who helped them. Help-
ing those in a lower social or economic status was seen as a way to raise your own profile, to increase your own prestige. And the people you helped would publicly attempt to increase your honor as part of their indebtedness. This wasn’t friends helping one another. This entire system was characterized by massive inequality.

Now, truthfully, all the people involved in Paul’s collection are varying degrees of poor. None of them have much money, but the congregation in Jerusalem is even more financially limited than the rest. So Paul asks the Corinthians to set aside some money each week and he knows that this is asking a lot. Many of the Corinthians don’t know where their next meal is going to come from, and Paul is asking them to give part of the little bit that they actually have to a group of people they don’t even like. At least they’ll receive the benefits of the patronage system they think to themselves, until they learn that Paul is rejecting it, too. Now, they won’t even get any of the benefits from their gift. These simple instructions aren’t so simple as they first appear. Paul is asking one group to give out of the extremely limited amount of money they have and give it to another who’s even more poor than they are, when historically, neither of these groups has cared for or trusted the other. That’s a lot to ask.

Now I wish I could tell you that Paul later lays out his exact reasons for why this is so important to him, but I can’t because Paul doesn’t. Scholars looking at the cultural, religious, and economic contexts have come up with a few potential reasons, though. One is that this is simply a tangible way to respond to a need. Paul feels an obligation to help these folks. In his Smyth & Helwys commentary, Scott Nash writes that “The perpetual poverty of a region systematically fleeced by the Roman administration, however, was
aggravated by the tension between the Jewish followers of Jesus and other Jews, a tension that deprived those followers of any support available from the synagogues.” Simply put, everybody’s poor, but the congregation in Jerusalem now no longer has the support they’ve historically had because their faith in Christ has cut them off from others. Thus, they’re in an even more perilous situation than everybody else. A second potential reason, according to Nash, is that Paul wanted the Gentile believers to “appreciate their inclusion within God’s chosen people, Israel.” This is a way for them to express their gratitude. One of the most convincing reasons, however, is when Nash writes that Paul wants the Jewish believers to “accept the equal standing of their Gentile brothers and sisters.” Accepting the financial gift from the Corinthians would imply an acceptance of their equal or superior status. The final potential reason Nash gives is that Paul views taking an offering from the Gentiles to Jerusalem as a type of “fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Gentiles coming to Jerusalem in the last days bearing gifts.” Whether it’s for practicality, gratitude, for equality, or to fulfill the words of the Old Testament prophets, all of these potential reasons emerge from the conviction that churches should be in solidarity with one another, with the poor, and with the marginalized. And this conviction goes beyond any division, be it social, ethnic, or economic.

Paul is taking up an offering, but Paul doesn’t ask for money from a wealthy benefactor. He calls on those in the church to give out of their poverty, and in doing so, Paul teaches everyone involved that God gives us all we need, that what we need can be found within the larger body. In offering up a portion of what we have and giving sacrificially, Paul teaches us to model the behavior of Christ, the one who sacrificially gave of himself
for our behalf. This offering is about more than money. All offerings are about more than money. They’re tangible, practical responses to needs, but they are also deeply theological acts. They’re about making sure we don’t hold anything back from God. They remind us that whether it’s our time, our talent, or our treasure, all of it comes from God. And if we’re giving freely, if we’re giving joyfully and generously, we’ll look past the things that divide us. We won’t see makers and takers. We won’t see moochers and job creators. We’ll see brothers and sisters.

So you see, we don’t just take up the offering before the sermon. We take it up whenever you offer your time and your talents to help this church. We take it up whenever you serve as a nursery worker, youth volunteer, or usher, whenever you serve on a committee or ministry team, whenever you take a meal to a family that’s just lost a loved one or to a friend that’s been sick. We take it up whenever you check on that person you haven’t seen lately and let them know we miss them. We take it up whenever you make that small financial donation that you don’t want anyone to know about or whenever you get involved in the church’s mission efforts. We take it up whenever you remember that we’re all a family of faith and treat each another accordingly. We take it up whenever you remember that everyone you meet is your neighbor and you love your neighbor as yourself. Paul takes up an offering and in this case it’s a financial offering, but he also challenges the Corinthians to give what they’ve been holding back from God and to give it to those they don’t much like or trust because whether they realize it or not, they’re all on the same team. And that’s our challenge, too. We have to figure out what it is that we’d rather hold onto for ourselves, whatever that is, and become willing to give it over
to God. We have to figure out who it is that we don’t much like or trust, those who’ve been on the same team as us the whole time, and begin to see them as equals, begin to see them as brothers and sisters. And that thing we’d rather keep for ourselves, that thing we don’t think we can do without, we have to see if they have need for it and for God’s sake give it away. I admittedly don’t know what that is and we aren’t about to pass around the plates for a second time, but it’s time to take up an offering. Amen.

Sermon 2

2 Corinthians 8:10-14; 9:3-8 - Cycles of Scarcity or Ages of Abundance

“The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” The Scottish poet Robert Burns certainly hit the nail on the head with that one. We all know what it’s like to spend time elaborately planning something only for a wrench to be thrown into the works and everything fall apart. That’s what we see here in our two 2 Corinthians passages for this morning. Paul has been working diligently on his collection for the saints in Jerusalem, and now the whole thing looks like it’s about to fall apart. The Corinthians aren’t quite as excited as they first were for the collection, and Paul now risks being publicly humiliated in front of some members of another church he started. His best laid plans are going awry. It can happen to any of us. And as Clary likes to remind me every year around Valentine’s Day, it happened to me a few years ago.

It was our first Valentine’s Day as a married couple, and I wanted to do things right. I had put this unrealistic amount of pressure on myself, and had been building up the evening with Clary as well. I kept telling her that the whole thing was going to be a surprise and that she was going to love it. Truthfully, it was a good plan. I had gotten her
chocolate-covered strawberries and some nice bubble bath as a gift, but the main event was going to be dinner at one of our favorite restaurants, Pappadeaux’s, a really nice Cajun seafood restaurant not far from where we lived. After dinner and dessert, we were going to watch a movie she had really been wanting to see. I called a few weeks before Valentine’s Day to make a reservation, and learned that Pappadeaux’s didn’t take reservations. I was determined that that’s where we were going to eat, however, so I asked if they had any recommendations on avoiding a long wait. I was told to arrive early.

I didn’t tell Clary where we were going, keeping the whole surprise aspect going, but told her that she needed to be ready by 4. First, we went to go get the movie tickets. This was before Fandango and other online movie ticket sites really took off. She had wanted to go see the movie Valentine’s Day, so that’s what we were going to do. We arrived at the movie theater, made our way through an unusually long line at the ticket counter, and learned that the movie was sold out. The later showings were sold out, too, so we got tickets to see Dear John, a movie based on the Nicholas Sparks’ book of the same name. Disappointed but undeterred, we headed towards the restaurant. Clary quickly figured out we were going to Pappadeaux’s and got excited. She went on and on about how much she loved the restaurant, what a good choice I had made, etc., etc. Despite the movie being sold out, I had done good - or so I thought. We arrived early, just like I was told. We got there between 4:30 and 5, and the parking lot was packed. It was so full, in fact, that I had problems finding a parking spot. The line to speak with the hostess was really long, too. Neither were great signs, so we began to get a little worried. Finally, we made our way up to the front and found out that the wait was two and a half
hours. Strike one. Clary’s disappointment turned to anger. First, the movie she wanted to see was sold out and now this. She wanted to know why I hadn’t made a reservation. I tried to explain telling her that I had called weeks ago and learned that they didn’t take reservations. I tried to smooth things over telling her that it was still early, and that we could find a table somewhere and still make our movie. She remained skeptical, but agreed that it was best for us to eat dinner near the movie theater.

We headed back towards the theater and stopped at an O’Charley’s, which was right around the corner from where our movie was playing. We went inside. The line wasn’t too terribly long, so I took that as a good sign. The problem, though, was that while Pappadeaux’s didn’t take reservations O’Charley’s did. They had over a two hour wait as well. That was strike two. If we would have stayed, we would have missed our movie, which in hindsight, wouldn’t have been the worst thing in the world. Not knowing that, however, we set off again, and I could tell that my best laid plans were spinning out of control. For restaurant number three we ended up at Marlow’s Tavern, a place that had just opened. It looked upscale and modern, so we went inside. I silently prayed that it wasn’t too busy because I was quickly learning that Valentine’s Day is a lot like baseball - three strikes and you’re out. God must have heard my prayer because we were able to be seated right away. Even better, the food was good, really good actually. Not as good as Pappadeaux’s, mind you, but far better than O’Charley’s. They even had Clary’s favorite dessert, creme brulee. The evening was beginning to turn around a little bit. After dinner we went to the movie. We would have been better off waiting at Pappadeaux’s or just skipping it altogether after eating at Marlow’s because both of us thought Dear John was
dear awful. By the end of the evening, we were able to joke about things on the way home. Clary didn’t laugh too hard, though. We learned a few lessons. First, when I plan activities for her birthday or our anniversary, we don’t go anywhere that doesn’t take a reservation. Second, Clary now plans our Valentine’s Day activities every year.

Paul’s plans are significantly more important than a botched date on Valentine’s Day, and the wrench being thrown into them is far more consequential. While we look at two brief passages in 2 Corinthians 8 and 2 Corinthians 9 this morning, the majority of these two chapters is Paul’s description of the collection for Jerusalem and its importance. In her Smyth & Helwys commentary on 2 Corinthians, Mitzi Minor notes that Paul’s relationship with some of the Corinthian believers has become strained, and this strain is directly related to the collection and the Corinthians’ lack of zeal for it. Specifically, his relationship has become strained because Paul is hoping to reconcile the Gentile and Jewish Christian communities, and his advocacy for reconciliation has placed him in the middle of two groups who don’t care for one another. His collection has been an effort to bridge the gulf between the two groups. In fact, Minor writes, “There is consensus among scholars that Paul’s desire to reconcile these groups was likely the greatest impetus for his decision to pursue the collection project. It has become for Paul a symbol of restored unity between Jewish and Gentile believers that was itself an enactment of God’s new creation.” In order to motivate them and get more excited about the collection, Paul begins 2 Corinthians 8 by telling the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonian churches. They, too, are primarily Gentile congregations who have been contributing to
this collection, and these Macedonian churches are even more financially limited than their Corinthian brothers and sisters.

After boasting about the Macedonians, Paul moves to encourage the Corinthians. He reminds the Corinthians of their initial zeal to help the saints in Jerusalem, and he calls them to complete the good work that they have already started. He also provides a bit of a corrective telling the Corinthians that their gift should not lead to an imbalance between them and those in Jerusalem. Rather, it should lead to a fair balance, to equality. Paul, also, lets them know that one day their roles may be reversed and that those in Jerusalem might have to come to their rescue. By encouraging them to complete the good work they’ve already started and to view such work as a step towards equality, Paul is re-defining how Christian congregations should interact with one another.

Paul continues discussing the importance of the collection in 2 Corinthians 9, and it is here that we see more social implications for this collection. Paul has created a situation and needs to save face. He has been bragging on the Corinthians, and is now concerned that his boasting has been in vain. The Macedonians have already completed their portion of the collection and have selected representatives to accompany Paul to Jerusalem. These representatives would naturally join Paul on his way Corinth, so they could pick up the Corinthians’ portion of the collection and their delegates on the way to Jerusalem. If the Corinthians have not completed their portion, Paul is going to be humiliated and all of his work surrounding this collection will go down the drain. In a society in which honor and shame play such a pivotal role, Paul’s public shaming wouldn’t just
bring his collection to an end, but would severely impact his ability to do successful ministry in this part of the world ever again. To avoid such a fate, Paul sends Titus and another brother to serve as a sort of advance team to complete the collection before Paul and the Macedonians arrive. This is why Paul finds it necessary to encourage the Corinthians again, recommending that they, too, avoid humiliation. Minor also notes that Paul’s language “highlights his sense of urgency about the matter: the Corinthians had promised before, so he was sending the delegations before the others, so the collection could be finished before there were greater problems.” Despite all of these potential problems, Paul writes that this collection is a voluntary gift. He also reminds the Corinthians that God loves a cheerful giver, that God has provided them with every blessing in abundance, and that by having enough, they can share abundantly in every good work. While all of them are in varying cycles of scarcity, especially those in Jerusalem, God provides them with an age of abundance. The Corinthians have two choices: they can operate out of a sense of scarcity, in which case the Corinthians, and especially Paul, will be publicly shamed, or they can be believe that God is a God of abundance. They can believe that because God has abundantly blessed them they can share abundantly in blessing others. They can bring shame upon themselves or they can bring honor to God. It is clear which choice Paul hopes they will make, but it is equally clear that the Corinthians aren’t the only ones with such a decision. We face the same one. We can worry that our paycheck won’t stretch far enough, worry that God isn’t in the blessing business, and close not only our wallets, but also our hearts and minds. We can succumb to scarcity, especially when it concerns helping those we don’t like or giving to projects that won’t benefit us directly.
Or we can remember that God gives and gives abundantly, and that out of God’s abundance we can share in the work God is doing around us in the world.

This isn’t a prosperity gospel, but a basic belief in stewardship. It’s a belief that God blesses us, that God blesses what we give, and that when all of us give accordingly, it’ll be enough. There was a church in Chicago that did this very thing. It was tithing in reverse. Back in 2014 the Chicago Tribune published a story about the LaSalle Street Church, a church in Chicago’s Near North neighborhood. The church sold some property and earned more than 1.6 million dollars. They decided that they would take 10% of the proceeds, the traditional amount of a tithe, and return it to the church’s parishioners. They divided the $160,000 among their 320 worshippers. September 7, 2014 each of the 320 got a check for $500. The money came with no strings attached as long as each person spent, cashed, or deposited his or her check by early December. They could spend the money on whatever they wanted, but their pastor encouraged them to use the money to do good works. That Sunday their pastor, Rev. Laura Truax, preached on the parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew. Since then, the checks have become known as the “Loaves and Fishes checks.” The Chicago Tribune reports that “members have put their $500 gifts toward a skate park in Amman, Jordan, a scholarship fund for engineering students, an eyeglass ministry, a no-kill animal shelter, food pantries, homeless shelters and struggling family members. A few endorsed their checks right back to the church. Truax shared her check with her son, a college student in Minnesota, so he could buy winter coats for disadvantaged students he tutors there.”
While most of the members have given to or started incredible causes, some have struggled. Some members just can’t figure out what to spend their money on. Others have become paralyzed by this task. They view it as one more thing on their to-do list to cross off, and they resent it. The article concludes with a powerful quote from Truax. She says, “You’re asked to do something of promise and of note with your life. The fact that it’s within your power to put in motion a new future for people, it’s in your power to forgive somebody or love somebody or have compassion on somebody, those are things that shift the whole future of a person. That’s immeasurably important, right? I really hoped the $500 would give some sort of mirror to this intangible thing called life. This intangible responsibility that’s put on each one of us - the weight and awesomeness of that at the same time.” In the grand scheme of things $500 isn’t all that much money, especially if you are wanting to donate money to really eliminate a problem. We think of these really large checks that extremely wealthy people write towards causes. That’s what we think really makes a difference. Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Warren Buffett, Jeff Bezos, Oprah - if each one of them and their wealthiest buddies would just pick a different issue and donate a portion of all that money they have, then they’d all be fixed, right? The problem with such an attitude, aside from being incorrect, is that it removes our responsibility to help heal the world around us. And in that regard, 320 people each donating $500 to help make the world a better place, that’s a big deal. People without a whole lot of money donating what they can to help those with even less, that’s life-changing. People overcoming the shameful divisions that keep us apart to use whatever they have to honor God by helping the stranger, that’s rejecting cycles of scarcity and living in ages of
abundance. People rejecting the lie of not enough and believing that with God all things are possible, that’s what the Kingdom of God looks like. Just like the Corinthians, the choice is ours. Paul makes clear what his preference and God’s preference is. May we be people who exhibit the wisdom to follow Paul’s lead. May we be people who exhibit the strength to overcome our divisions. May we be people of faith who remember what God calls us to. Amen.

Sermon 3

Romans 15:22-29 - Creating Community

For the past two weeks we’ve examined Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem. We’ve looked at the ethnic, social, and economic differences between the Gentile Christians in Corinth and the Jewish ones in Jerusalem, and how those divisions, along with decades of mistrust, has led to a huge division between them. The first week we explored how Paul called the Corinthians to give an offering towards this collection, and we explored what offering means not just from a practical standpoint, but also from a theological one. We discussed how an offering isn’t just money like Paul asks of the Corinthians, but includes our time and our talents as well. Last week we looked at the honor or shame Paul faces as he works on this collection, how the Corinthians not fulfilling their obligation could publicly shame him so much that it could affect his ability to continue to do ministry in that part of the world. We looked at the difference between the scarcity embraced by the Corinthians and the abundance advocated for by Paul. And today, while we’re moving outside of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and are exploring a portion of
his letter to the Romans, we’re going to look at a final component of his collection, how the collection functions in creating community.

Historically, it’s difficult to find many successful examples of groups overcoming ethnic, social, and economic differences to peacefully build community with one another. One notable exception, however, is found in South Africa at the end of apartheid. By nearly every historical example we have, the end of apartheid should have been a blood-bath, but thankfully it wasn’t. Thanks to the good work of people like Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and others on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa was able to move beyond the violence and retribution that have plagued so many others as countries transition from oppression and move towards equality. Describing his work on truth and reconciliation, Tutu writes that “All South Africans were less than whole because of apartheid. Blacks suffered years of cruelty and oppression, while many privileged whites became more uncaring, less compassionate, less humane, and therefore less human. Yet during these years of suffering and inequality, each South African’s humanity was still tied to that of all others, white or black, friend or enemy. For our own dignity can only be measured in the way we treat others.” Reconciliation would not and did not happen by people trying to minimize or gloss over their differences, but by admitting them to one another. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission worked by getting everyone to admit their role in what happened. Full disclosure was required for amnesty. What they learned was that many who had propped up apartheid were shocked because they only knew the details to their part in the process. They didn’t fully comprehend how all the pieces fit together to create this system of oppression. Tutu writes, “Unearthing the
truth was necessary not only for the victims to heal, but for the perpetrators as well. Guilt, even unacknowledged guilt, has a negative effect on the guilty. One day it will come out in some form or another. We must be radical. We must go to the root, remove that which is festering, cleanse and cauterize, and then a new beginning is possible.” It was through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that South Africa was not only able to transition peacefully, but heal as a nation. To this day they remain a peaceful, democratic nation in a part of the world where that is often regrettably an exception rather than a rule.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission remains relevant for us today as we live in a time in which people are becoming more and more divided, as we live in a time in which people not only malign those they disagree with, but differing sides hold “alternative facts.” During such a time Tutu’s words on forgiveness and reconciliation ring out. He writes, “Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking, but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.” That’s what Paul is trying to do with his collection for the saints in Jerusalem. He’s undertaking a risky endeavor, having an honest confrontation with reality, and hoping that real healing will follow.
Paul tells the Romans that the collection has hindered him from coming to visit them, but that he desires to come to Rome on his way to Spain. He also tells them that he is currently going to Jerusalem because Gentile churches, particularly those in Macedonia and Achaia, have been pleased to share their resources with the saints in Jerusalem. And once he delivers this collection, he will come to meet them. He writes that he has no further place in these regions, but he also mentions his reasoning for this collection he’s worked so hard to procure. He writes that it’s good for the Gentiles to share their material things since they have come to share spiritual blessings. The Gentile Christians needed a spiritual blessing that the Jewish Christians could provide and now the Jewish Christians need a material blessing that the Gentiles can provide. It’s a type of reciprocity, a give and take between two sides where each gives and receives. Upon delivering this collection, this reciprocity would prove that the Gentile and Jewish Christians were in a relationship of equals where mutually beneficial relationships could exist between them. Equality and solidarity could be possible. Community could be built.

That’s the real purpose for this collection after all. It’s creating community between two groups who would rather remain strangers. It’s bridging the divide between two sides who’d rather not cross. It’s bringing together those who would rather stay apart. And that, as Paul has learned, is difficult work. Paul hasn’t forced, but he’s been persistently pleading and persuading. What do you when two sides refuse to come together? What do you do when the things that divide people outnumber the things they have in common? How do you bring together people who don’t understand one another, who fear
one another, who don’t trust one another? How can community ever be created from that?

Paul tries to serve as an honest go-between, a willing negotiating partner. He’s already gone to Jerusalem on the Gentile Christians’ behalf. He even lays into Peter for not accepting the Gentiles when he said he would. Now, he’s asking the Gentiles to give financially to help out the Jewish Christians who are even poorer than they are. He’s encouraging both sides to put some skin in the game. And he’s willing to tarnish his own reputation in defending each side to the other. Creating community ain’t easy. Bridging divides isn’t for the faint of heart, but Paul sees and keeps trying to impress upon them something that they can’t fully comprehend. While their divisions may be more numerous than their similarities, their similarities are what’s more important. Their humanity and their faith in Christ are both vastly more important than their ethnic, social, and economic divisions. And the same holds true for us today. Our humanity is intimately connected to that of another, and our faith consistently reminds us that every person we meet is a child of God created in the image of God. Paul is in the business of creating beloved community. His collection has been about creating this beloved community between those in Jerusalem and those in the larger Roman world, but it also serves as a transition in Paul’s ministry.

Paul wants to go to Spain, what was then known as the ends of the earth, and this desire represents a shift in his work. Thus, the collection would serve as a culmination of Paul’s previous efforts, and its delivery would serve as a launching point that would allow him to move on to other work. In his Smyth & Helwys commentary on Romans,
Charles Talbert notes, “Paul’s plan to go to Spain would be different in one regard from his previous work. In the Aegean area, he had worked in and out of the Jewish synagogues. There is, however, no evidence of Jewish communities in Spain prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In Spain Paul would have to work without the support of synagogues.” In effect, Paul would be working without a safety net, without a potential base of support. Paul is so committed to helping create beloved community that he has worked to reconcile two groups who don’t like one another, and now seeks to expand that community to the ends of the earth. Paul’s collection has been about building this community up, showing it how it’s to be different than the world around it, and opening its’ eyes to the fact that God might have additional possibilities on the horizon. As always, Paul has much to teach us.

We live in a time in which people consistently try to separate us, to place into differing silos, so we only end up being around those who look, act, and believe like we do. The primary tools used are anger and fear. They tell us who we should be scared of, and the people we should be scared of never look like us. They’re never from where we’re from. They never believe what we believe. And they’re always going to take something that we either hold dear or can’t afford to give up. And if they don’t scare us, they make us angry, unbelievably angry. And we’re told that it’s the folks we don’t agree with that are doing. It’s always the other side. They’re trying to change something we like or prevent something from happening that we’re in favor of. And if anyone who disagrees with you tries to point out that maybe some details have been conveniently left out, that a false
reality has been created, that the situation is more nuanced than what it is people are actually arguing about, well that’s just fake news. Spend ten minutes on social media, watching cable news, or listening to talk radio, and I promise you that you’ll find something that angers you or scares you. And when we allow that to happen, when we buy into it, our definition of community becomes smaller. We become surprised that other parts of the world or other parts of this country can be so different, and we shake our heads in mixture of sorrow, anger, and fear wondering how they got to be so wrong and how we were lucky enough to be so right. We may even start to other them, implicitly stating that they aren’t like us, implying that they aren’t real Americans or true Christians. Pretty soon they aren’t even viewed as human. They become something different, something sub-human, so it doesn’t matter how they’re treated. That is where anger and fear lead. They lead to hatred. And anger and fear will kill community if we let them. Our faith will become a hollowed out shell of its former self, a grotesque figure that now looks nothing like the Jesus of the Scriptures. Before hate even has room to grow, anger and fear will prevent us from seeing the humanity in other people because they’ll cause us to wall ourselves off from them. And in the process of building these walls we become less human. Anger and fear will prevent us from seeing others as children of God created in the image of God, and in the process we’ll forget that our value comes not from being right or from winning but from simply being because God made us and said that we were good.

Closing his article Desmond Tutu writes, “we have had a jurisprudence, a penology in Africa that was not retributive but restorative. Traditionally, when people quarreled, the main intention was not to punish the miscreant but to restore good relations.
This was the animating principle of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For Africa is concerned, or has traditionally been concerned, about the wholeness of relationships. That is something we need in this world - a world that is polarized, a world that is fragmented, a world that destroys people. It is also something we need in our families and friendships. For retribution wounds and divides us from one another. Only restoration can heal us and make us whole. And only forgiveness enables us to restore trust and compassion to our relationships.”

Back in April I had the opportunity to spend some time with people that are very different from me and it was illuminating. I took part in the Third National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue, a conference that was specifically geared for younger clergy and held at the Green Lake Conference and Retreat Center in Green Lake, WI. I was one of a handful of people representing CBF, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and I didn’t really know what to expect. In fact, I only knew one other person there. I hoped to learn more about Islam, because admittedly I didn’t know much about it, but, if I’m honest, I was slightly scared because generally we all get scared of the things we don’t know much about. The conference was very informative, and while I still don’t know a lot about Islam, I do know considerably more than I did going in so the conference was a help that regard. The biggest change for me personally, however, is that the small tinge of fear and uncertainty I had is now gone. That’s what happens when you meet and really get to know a person who’s different from you. They can explain some things you’re fuzzy about, clear up any misconceptions you may have, and all of the sudden things don’t seem so scary.
Towards the end of our first day together I overheard a few people bemoaning the fact that there weren’t TVs in our rooms and that the ones in the common areas didn’t have cable. I was in agreement. I wasn’t thrilled about that either. And then one of them suggested that we go find a restaurant with some TVs and watch the NBA playoffs. I was in and that’s when I met my friend, Eftekhar.

I wasn’t sure how to pronounce his name at first. He kindly responded. I asked if it had any special meaning and he told me that it was Farsi for the glory of the universe. I laughed and replied that that was quite the name to have to live up to and it was then that he said that his dad told him he hadn’t earned that name yet so he was going to call him Efte. He laughed and said that all of his friends and family called him Efte, too. We sat at the Goose Blind Bar & Grill watching the NBA playoffs and there Efte and I got to know one another. He works for Islamic Relief, a religiously affiliated non-profit organization that frequently partners with the American Red Cross, one that sends medical supplies, dry goods, and clothes to the most disadvantaged and depressing places in the world, and one that he regularly has to defend when someone ignorantly accuses it of being a front for terrorists. He’s from the DC suburbs in Northern Virginia, went to a small, private Catholic school for college, and Georgetown for law school. He’s married to a good Catholic girl and they just had their first child a few weeks ago, a little girl. Efte lives outside of DC, loves all things related to DC sports and is a card-carrying member of the NRA. He proudly opened his wallet and pulled his membership card out to show it off. He’s also obsessed with politics. Part of that comes from the fact that he has worked for two Republican senators, Senator David Vitter from Louisiana and Senator Orrin Hatch
from Utah. He wasn’t what I expected, and I wasn’t like the Baptist minister from South Carolina that he had envisioned either. I suspect that if people we didn’t know had to guess which of the two of us, me the Baptist, the white guy with the Southern accent from small town Georgia or him the Muslim, the brown man who grew up in the DC suburbs, was a card carrying member of the NRA and had worked for two Republican senators I’d be picked every time. And they’d be wrong.

I don’t know what relationships you need to begin to restore or who you need to forgive, but now’s a good time to start. I don’t know who it is that you have misconceptions about. I don’t know who the “other” is for you, what group it is that angers you or scares you, what group it is that you don’t much like, but I want to challenge you to get off Facebook, to cut off Fox News or CNN or MSNBC, to turn off talk radio, and actually go talk to who it is you’ve heard so much about. And I challenge you to listen to them, not listen partially so you prove yourself right, not listen to develop talking points so you can win a debate, but listen to understand. Listen with empathy. And finally, I challenge you to be honest, to speak not in talking points but to speak from your heart with all the sincerity you have when you’re given the opportunity to respond in kind because that’s how we move past the polarization and division we currently find ourselves in. That’s what Paul tries to do with his collection. That’s what Efte and I were briefly able to at the Goose Blind Bar & Grill in Green Lake, WI. That’s holy. And that’s one of the ways we can be the church to the world around us because that’s how we create community. Amen.
APPENDIX F

SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 1 OUTLINE
SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 1 OUTLINE

1. Have each participant write down three things he or she can teach the group.

2. Give each participant the opportunity to share with the group what he or she has written.

3. Have each participant write down three things he or she would like to learn.

4. Give each participant the opportunity to share with the group what he or she has written.

5. See if the participants can teach someone else in the group more about a thing he or she would like to learn.

6. Ask participants how this experience might connect to their faith.

7. Ask participants how this experience might be applied in the life of the church.

Materials Needed: paper, pencils, pens

Goal: That participants learn what is needed is already present in the group.
APPENDIX G

SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 2 OUTLINE
SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 2 OUTLINE

Have participants complete a portion of Brené Brown’s companion worksheet to *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn’t)* which can be found in Appendix G.

2. Have participants share their answers as they feel comfortable

3. Ask participants what their results might reveal about their interactions with others.

4. Ask participants how this experience might connect to their faith.

5. Ask participants how this experience might be applied in the life of the church.

Materials Needed: copies of the companion worksheet, pencils, pens

Goal: That participants develop a deeper appreciation for how honor and shame impact relationships.
APPENDIX H

SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 2 WORKSHEET
SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 2 WORKSHEET

Brené Brown Companion Worksheet  
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RECOGNIZING SHAME
The first element of shame resilience is recognizing shame and understanding our triggers. Men and women who are resilient to shame have this capacity. This enables them to respond to shame with awareness and understanding.

When we can’t recognize shame and understand our triggers, shame blindsides us. It washes over us, and we want to slink away and hide.

In contrast, if we recognize our shame triggers, we can make mindful, thoughtful decisions about how we’re going to respond to shame – before we do something that might make things worse.

Shame has physical symptoms. These might include your mouth getting dry, time seeming to slow down, your heart racing, twitching, looking down, and tunnel vision. These symptoms are different from one person to the next. So if you learn your physical symptoms, you can recognize shame and get back on your feet faster.

I physically feel shame in/on my ________.

My shame symptoms include:
I know I’m in shame when I feel ________.

If I could taste shame, it would taste like ________.

If I could smell shame, it would smell like ________.

If I could touch shame, it would feel like ________.

EXPLORING TRIGGERS AND VULNERABILITIES
Our unwanted identities dictate our behavior every day. It’s worth it to figure them out and get real about them. Often, you’ll see that the perceptions you want to have and want to avoid are totally unrealistic.

To get at shame triggers, figure out how you want to be perceived around a specific identity. So...
for example, with regards to motherhood, one might want to be perceived as calm, knowledgeable, educated and not perceived as overwhelmed, stressed out, too ambitious, or unable to balance career and mothering. When we write these down and look at them, we understand the perceptions that make us vulnerable to shame. In the process, we learn a lot about ourselves.

To start, pick a shame category (body, work, motherhood, parenting, etc.)

Then, answer the following questions.

3-5 Ideal Identities
I want to be perceived as:

01. __________
02. __________
03. __________
04. __________
05. __________

3-5 Unwanted Identities
I do NOT want to be perceived as:

01. __________
02. __________
03. __________
04. __________
05. __________

Looking at your list of unwanted identities, answer the following questions:

Unwanted Identity 1.
01. What does this perception mean to me?
02. Why is it so unwanted?
03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from?

Unwanted Identity 2.
01. What does this perception mean to me?

02. Why is it so unwanted?

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from?

Unwanted Identity 3.
01. What does this perception mean to me?

02. Why is it so unwanted?

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from?

Unwanted Identity 4.
01. What does this perception mean to me?

02. Why is it so unwanted?

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from?

Unwanted Identity 5.
01. What does this perception mean to me?
02. Why is it so unwanted?

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from?

Looking at your list of unwanted identities, complete the following sentence:

If you label me and reduce me to this list of unwanted identities, you will miss the opportunity to know that I’m complex and that I have many strengths, including:

01. _________

02. _________

03. _________
APPENDIX I

SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 3 OUTLINE
1. Explain the concept of soul collage and “beloved community.”

2. Have participants build soul collages around the theme “beloved community.”

3. Have participants share what they have created and explain how the pictures in their collages reflect their idea of beloved community.

4. Ask participants how this experience might connect to their faith.

5. Ask participants how this experience might be applied in the life of the church.

Materials Needed: construction paper, pictures, glue

Goal: That participants expand and deepen their idea of beloved community.
SMALL GROUP REFLECTION SESSION 4 OUTLINE

1. Briefly review what has been mentioned in each sermon of the sermon series and what we have done in the previous reflection sessions.

2. Ask participants how these previous experiences might connect to the soup kitchen ministry.

3. Share the responses from clients.

4. Ask participants how their experiences and the clients’ responses might change the soup kitchen ministry.

5. Brainstorm ideas together to improve the ministry.

Materials Needed: results from client group discussions, marker board, dry erase markers, paper, pens, pencils

Goal: That participants connect what has been previously discussed and client responses with what they do when they volunteer, and explore ways in which the soup kitchen ministry might improve.
APPENDIX K

CLIENT GROUP DISCUSSION SESSION 1 OUTLINE
CLIENT GROUP DISCUSSION SESSION 1 OUTLINE

1. Briefly review the purpose of the discussion and inform participants about my project.

2. Ask clients if they have relationships with others who are served at the soup kitchen. If so, ask how long they have known them and how well they know them.

3. Ask clients if they have relationships with those who serve and help prepare the meal at the soup kitchen. If so, ask how long they have known them and how well they know them.

4. Ask clients what they think could be done to further develop and/or strengthen the relationships between those who are served and those who serve. Ask if they consider this a valid goal and why.
APPENDIX L

CLIENT GROUP DISCUSSION SESSION 2 OUTLINE
CLIENT GROUP DISCUSSION SESSION 2 OUTLINE

1. Briefly review the purpose of the discussion and inform participants about my project.

2. Ask clients about their experience at the soup kitchen.

3. Ask clients if there is anything they dislike about the experience. If there is, ask them what it is.

4. Ask clients about their general thoughts on the soup kitchen ministry.

5. Ask clients what they would change about the ministry if they could. Give examples such as how the room is arranged, how people are served, the quality of the food, and group interaction to spur discussion.