

Final Holistic Mission Project Paper

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The Church as a Social and Cultural Institution

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Abstract

Churches have been called to minister to cities. The Old Testament is filled with dozens of examples of God instructing the Hebrew people to provide for the widows, homeless, strangers, and the poor. Today's churches must continue in this vein; our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ commanded us to love our neighbor as we do ourselves. Based upon His commands, this paper will include an exam of how Clarendon Road Church can minister in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and work out its holistic mission by practicing the love of Christ in the community where it has been located for 100 years.

1. Introduction:

Big cities are in a numerical crisis. Larger numbers of migrants are relocating to large areas daily. Ray Bakke suggests, "The spectacular growth of large cities on this plane represents an awesome challenge to the church of Jesus Christ on all six continents populations lived in cities."¹ This paper will examine the culture in the context of the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn. An area where gang and gun violence has been on the rise. It will identify a holistic mission theory to address the issue and to develop a holistic mission approach to solve the problem.

The word of God has laid the foundation for Christians to follow. Over and over again, biblical texts have given us instructions that we should aid and assist the immigrants, refugees, strangers, fatherless, widowed, and the poor.

¹ Raymond Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 13.

The culture and context:

I am currently attending the Clarendon Road Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. I have been a member for over 40 years. I am seriously thinking of retiring from my current Executive Director of Enrollment Management position at Kingsborough Community College. My pastor, Dr. Rev. Charles Galbreath, asked me to serve as Executive Director of The H.E.A.L. Center Community Development Corporation is a faith-based nonprofit which will seek to foster holistic change in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. We hope to facilitate holistic change by providing essential services to affected populations. We will strive to empower the community to become productive citizens by providing educational enrichment, immigration, job training, housing, emergency food services, and other services that empower the community to obtain self-sufficiency. Our vision is to actualize the potential of our great community. Our desire is to partner with local businesses, churches, and nonprofits in transforming our neighborhood for social and societal revitalization.

The Clarendon Road Church will be celebrating its 100th anniversary year in 2022. The current pastor is the first to be mission-minded in the Church's community. His vision for a para-church ministry in the neighborhood is historic.

The East Flatbush section of Brooklyn is known for gangs and gang violence. Their ages ranged from 16 to 21—more than a dozen reputed gang members reported in the New York Post.² The members faced an 81-count indictment, including conspiracy to commit murders and weapons possession. Gang members eyed in a series of shootings were swept up in a massive takedown in Brooklyn Thursday — with police officials calling them “as dangerous a group as they come.”

² <https://nypost.com/2021/07/01/14-dangerous-gang-members-busted-in-nyc-gun-violence-takedown/>

Those indicted include six juveniles and four people already in jail, officials said. The charges are related to 11 shootings with eight victims — six alleged rival gang members and two men who were not rivals. Gang violence and gang activity are not new to this section of Brooklyn.

These young men, I believe, need attention, they need love, they need to be educated, they need to be given direction and purpose in life. Clarendon Road Church is in this neighborhood. So often, poor Black areas get neglected by crooked politicians, non-caring educators, and, unfortunately, by some churches.

East Flatbush is a neighborhood in New York City, with 162,610. East Flatbush is in the borough of Brooklyn. I spent my formative years living in the area. I am now living in a minority community in Long Island. The East Flatbush area of Brooklyn is undergoing regentrification, and many new buildings are going up. The majority of residents rent their homes. In East Flatbush, there are a lot of bars, restaurants, coffee shops, and parks. There are a variety of churches in the area. Many families and young professionals live in East Flatbush, and residents tend to be liberal. The public schools in East Flatbush are above average. According to a police report in <https://bkreader.com/2021/10/29/the-week-in-crime-spotlight-on-flatbush-and-east-flatbush-5/>³

Crime is up in Flatbush and East Flatbush, and Brooklyn.

There has been a 19.5% decrease in crime reported to Flatbush's 67th Precinct, but an 81.8% increase reported to

³ <https://bkreader.com/2021/10/29/>

East Flatbush's 70th Precinct during the week October 18 to October 24 compared to the same period last year.

Across the two precincts, there have been 73 incidents reported, including reports of robbery, felony assault, burglary, grand larceny, and grand larceny auto to both precincts.

During the same period last year, there were 63 incidents reported across the two precincts, including seven incidents of robbery and 27 of felony assault.

There have been 15 murders and 43 rapes reported this year in the neighborhood, compared with 19 murders and 54 rapes reported by the same date in 2020.

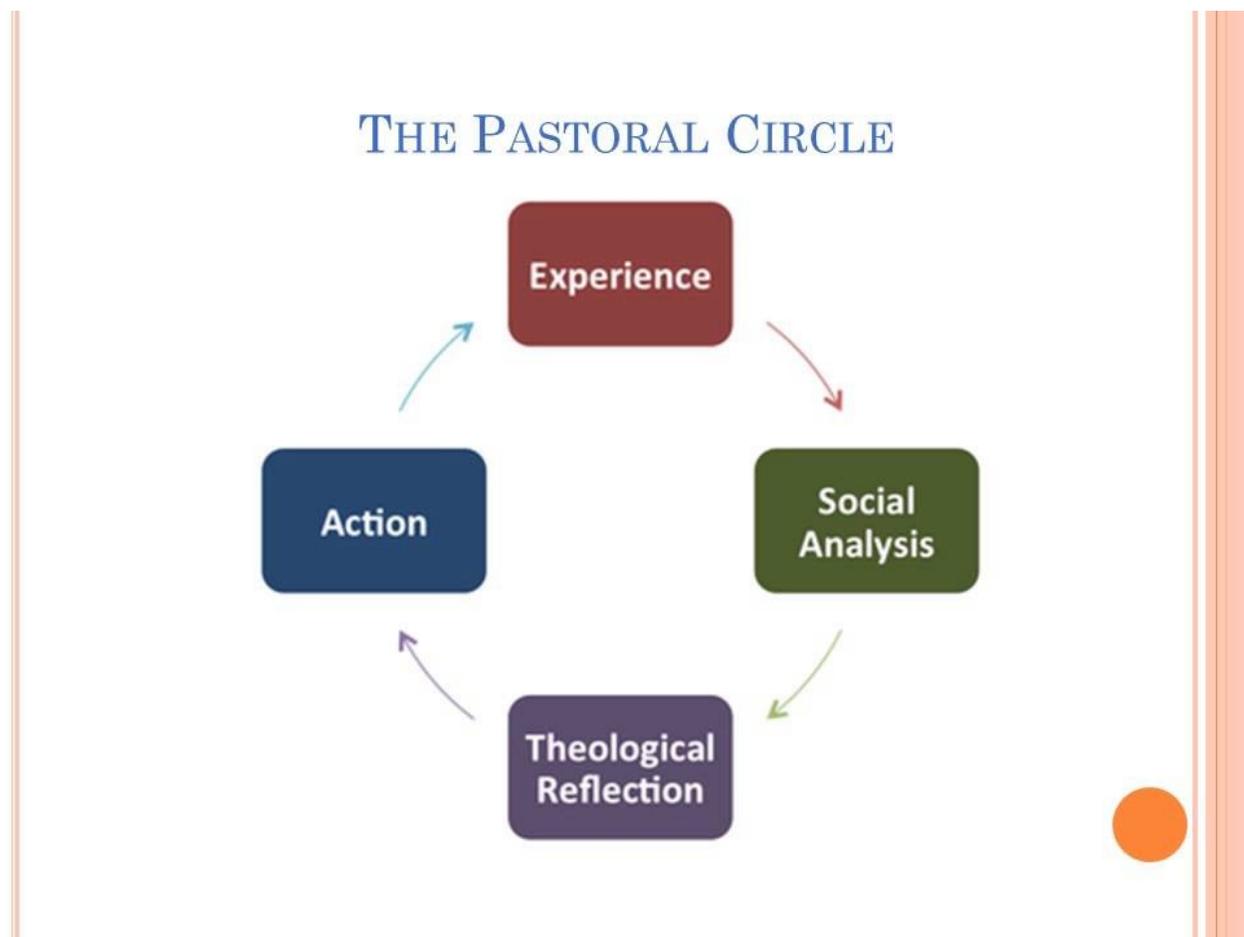
Churches should do much more to address the underlying causes that cause a community to deteriorate right before their eyes. Young men and women need direction, education and they need to see the love of Jesus in the Christian community.

Theology of holistic mission:

Dr. Galbreath's and I share the same vision. We are both mission and community minded. We both march and voiced our concerns during the height of the Black Lives Matter marches last year. We both see the Church as a hospital taking care of the social needs in our community. We delivered food to those who were shut-in during the height of the pandemic. Our community is in need of God's love and God's compassion. The Church cannot close its doors to

those in need. We have raised funds for flood, hurricane, and earthquake victims. We see a need and we address the need.

Prof. Charles O. Galbreath suggested the pastoral circle as his preference for the sociological aspect of a holistic approach. In his meeting with the HEAL board, he distributed the following diagram on how the pastoral circle works. The Board is made up of educators, a lawyer and former policeman, a medical doctor, an accountant and business people. He explained how we are to view the model and how we are to use it to address social needs in east Flatbush. He explained to us that Christ is central to bringing justice to our community. There is no justice without Jesus. The Board must be one with the community. We must own the problems we encounter, and we must work together to bring a resolution.



The Pastoral Circle is a process by which Churches and their para-church ministries work together to meet the community's needs by transforming their spiritual and social needs. First, it aids

in living the commitment for the change of the world. It demands being in touch with them to improve their situation. Third, the Pastoral Circle helps churches discover the roots of social injustice, and finally, it links the religious right with the secular left. The pastoral circle "the individual or the community a framework from which we can explore all the details of both social issue and the applicable moral principles from which we can make our "prudent judgment."⁴ Gonzalez page 1.

Experience – The circle begins with experience. Experience is when one has an experience of a social issue. For example, one notes that many people are begging on the streets in a particular neighborhood. This becomes is an issue of concern. First, one must determine whether or not it is isolated or is chronic. Then, what will be done about the chronic problem?

Social Analysis – Social analysis is when one uncovers the root causes and values behind the social issue. One asks why? Does it affect a few people or many? It's a time for reflection on the history of the issue and the unjust systems that fueled the problem.

Prayer and Theological Reflection – Prayer and theological reflection when one makes judgments about the issue and its causes based on the Biblical and theological tradition as you have appropriated it. What does God and His word have to say about poverty?

Pastoral Action – Pastoral action begins when one acts on the judgments made in a manner consistent with one's moral values. First, one asks the question, what do we do? What is our framework? How will we advocate? What is our action?

⁴ John Gonzalez *The pastoral Circle* <https://franciscanaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Pastoral-Circle.pdf>

The cycle then continues as problems arise. It's a never-ending circle that seeks to meet the needs of the disenfranchised in the community. Thurman states that a twofold demand was made of Jesus. "to love those of the household of Israel who became his enemies because they regarded him as a perverter of the truths of God; to love those beyond the household of Israel – the Samaritan, and even the Roman."⁵ We cannot say that we love our neighbor if we do not address his spiritual and social needs. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Lord's command to love God and neighbor are to be lived simultaneously. We cannot witness the unsaved without addressing their social needs. Jesus, on many occasions, met social needs.

Holistic mission approach:

My holistic mission approach would work with the nonprofit arm of Clarendon Road Church. My goal is to become the Executive Director of The H.E.A.L Center (Hope, Empowerment, Advocacy & Learning). The organization is in the process of being incorporated,

According to the Lausanne Occasional Paper,

In the Old Testament, "poor" can be translated by six significant and three other terms—totaling about 300 references, revealing a broad understanding of poverty's causes, reality, and consequences. The poor person is the downtrodden, humiliated, oppressed; the man pleading and crying out for justice; the weak or helpless; the destitute; the needy, dependent person; and the one forcibly subjected to the powerful oppressor. The wide range of terms shows that "the

⁵ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 80.

poor" must be seen by many. Perspectives. Clustering around "the poor" are linked words like "the widow," "the fatherless," and "the stranger."⁶

Many of the young men in East Flatbush are poor, uneducated, humiliated, and often oppressed. They need a helping and "HEALing" hand. Unfortunately, I do not know of a contemporary urban church that is based upon the model outlined in (Acts 11:19-30). The early Church started because of persecution. The modern Church in American has not faced the intense and relentless persecution of the First Church. I believe the persecution resulted in a church being dependent on each other. In the Church of Antioch, there was not a feeling of mine or yours but one of ours. Verse 21 is critical, "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." It appears that we often want the blessings without the hand of the Lord being placed on us. The Church must seek the will of the Father before stepping out on a mission. I often see men, not God, as I watch ministers on T.V. I get outraged when I see ministers living in mansions, driving expensive cars, having private jets. The poor sacrificing sending in their tithes and offerings. According to Bakke, the Antioch church model can be recreated, but the church "Through evangelism ... put its arms around a previously despised people, baptized and welcome them into the church."⁷ We must evangelize as the early Church did, we must love as the early Church did, we must meet the needs of all men and women as the early Church did. We must be servant leaders following in the footsteps of the first church leaders.

⁶ Lausanne Movement. "Lausanne Occasional Paper: Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment," June 25, 1982. <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-21>

⁷ Bakke, A Theology as Big as The City, 142.

I am impressed by what Timothy Keller has listed as the seven features of a church in the city. They are:

Respect for urban sensibility

Unusual sensitivity to cultural differences

Commitment to neighborhood and justice

Integration of faith and work

Bias for complex evangelism

Preaching that both attract and challenge urban people

Commitment to artistry and creativity.⁸ P163

These features are a must for a church and its para-church ministries. Together with the pastoral circle, lives and communities like East Flatbush can be changed for the better. Christian-centered local missions must intentionally and systematically find ways to resolve the complex issues that plague the inner cities.

I am reminded that Jesus sat and talked to a prostitute. He had a meal with the tax collector. He took time to speak with and heal lepers. He made time for the outcasts and the despised. I have thoughts of starting a ministry with Black and Brown young men 18 years and older who do not have a high school diploma. The first stage would be to help the young men obtain their G.E.D. The next stage will be job preparation, including resume writing, dressing for success, interviewing, etc. The third stage teaches the young men what to do and not do when encountering police. Finally, the fourth stage introduces a better way of life by offering an alternative, namely, Jesus Christ.

⁸ Timothy Keller, *Loving the City* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 163.

Our cities are filled with young people with so many gifts, talents, and abilities. Unfortunately, many of them are without the support, guidance, and love that can help them fulfill their potential. As a result, they get off track, and many find themselves in legal trouble. Creating and providing alternatives for at-risk youth is crucial. Unlike many, I was given another chance. Because of this, I understand the role every single person in this world has and the impact they can create in someone's life.

I feel that at-risk children can be so much more than outcasts in our community. So many youths don't need to be incarcerated; they need a voice, a chance to change, and an opportunity to become more than a statistic.

It is well known that millions of Black people cannot vote because of mass incarceration. The war on drugs has disproportionately targeted the Black community. Police brutality is often targeted towards men of color. The wrap-around services that my mission will provide will complement the horizontal and vertical needs of Black and Brown males. We cannot condone bad behavior; we must hate the sin but love the sinner.

I am reminded of Dr. Howard Thurman when he talks about the young black men who have their backs against a wall. He speaks about loving the people you serve. He states, "to love them means to recognize some deep respect and reverence for their persons. But to love them does not mean to condone their way of life."⁹ We must desire the same thing for those we serve as we need for our families. Living out the gospel means sharing in the suffering and pain of others. We cannot love from a distance. We must put our backs against the wall along with those we serve. Jesus would expect no less.

⁹ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 84.

Conclusion:

Paul was speaking to me when he said, "I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4: 1- 3). I am aware that "Following the call of God to move into the neighborhood to live and work in a more deprived area have implications for ministers and their families." Williams P. I cannot minister to people if I drive up and away in my Mercedes Benz while walking to and from the ministry. I cannot live in palatial housing while they live in rat-infested projects.

The Christian Church must be positive in the community it is in. According to Siu Fung Wu, Paul had a vision for the early Christians in Rome who suffered socioeconomic hardships and injustices like many African Americans in Brooklyn. Paul envisioned a community that practiced the following:

1. Love and mutuality. Romans (12:10, 16)

2. Mutual sharing and solidarity (12:13,15)
3. No racial/ethnic discrimination (12:9-21)

Paul's teachings in Romans 12 would be relevant to the Christian Community in low-income countries in the 21st century.¹⁰ The community will know that we are Christians by the love we show them. Our love should be the catalyst that drives them to the arms of our loving savior Jesus Christ.

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