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Pastoring the Urban Church
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CHURCH VISIT AND INTERVIEW

Churches in the urban areas are sometimes viewed as inadequately equipped to deal with the issues in the community. I believe that the churches are misunderstanding what is their role in this modern society. What it is like to do ministry in an urban community. On Sunday February 19, 2023, I visited United Christian Fellowship Community Ministries in Brooklyn, where I interviewed Pastor Sarah Ferguson. Pastor Ferguson has been the senior pastor for the past twenty-four years. In my interview with Pastor Ferguson, we discussed her theology on urban ministry, challenges faced in the urban community, the church background, ministries in the church and how they were engaging the people in the community.

As we began to discuss the issues in the community, Pastor Ferguson told me that her theology on urban ministries is that the church should make an impact in the community they serve. The church should be bible based and following God's instructions. They should get involved in the social issues that plagued the community. She stated that she believes that urban theology is the study of social issues through the lens of the bible. She also expressed the view that the people in authority are not seeking to help the poor. They are pushing them into a state of confusion. She feels like society is not upholding morals and values anymore. There is hardly a difference between right and wrong. She holds the belief that the church should be doing mission in the community they serve before going outside. In her words, the outside mission is pure, the only intent when speaking to people of different nations, is to tell them about the love of Jesus. She said that there is an absence of God in the cities. The churches in the urban communities

have become too commercialized and their focus is on making money instead of saving souls for the kingdom.

Pastor Ferguson told me that the church was founded in 1967 by her late husband. She explained that the church started out as a predominantly black American church. After her husband died, Pastor Ferguson became the senior pastor. At that time, people from the Caribbean started joining the church. She said that when she began studying the bible, she realized that God commissioned the church to serve without partiality. Pastor Ferguson pointed out that the neighborhood is constantly changing. From the time the church started to now, there has been an influx of people from various countries with different cultural backgrounds. She said that the challenge is meeting with them to find out what their needs are. She explained that in her view, the church must find ways to break down the cultural barriers. Pastor Ferguson went on to say that their church has gone through many changes. When the church started, they were an American Baptist church. As time went by, their beliefs and practices changed and now the church is non denominational. The church name has also been changed several times.

As we continued discussing the church in the urban cities, pastor Ferguson described the vision for United Christian Fellowship Ministries. She said the vision for the church is to make the community a better place and to ensure that the spiritual, physical and socio economic needs of the people are met. The mission of the church is to reach and influence people of the world with the word of God. Pastor Ferguson believes that the members of the church must be taught how to make their friends and families disciples of Jesus Christ. She said that discipleship is a very important component in the growth of the body of Christ. As the senior pastor, she has

implemented strategies for training and making leaders. Pastor Ferguson said that Jesus' mission on the earth was to train leaders and send them out into the world to make disciples. She expressed the view that the churches should never lose focus of this mission for it is the model that Jesus has set for us to follow.

In light of the many changes that the church went through, the membership has decreased tremendously. Pastor Ferguson said that in time past, they had many ministries in the church, now the church only has an Outreach and Help ministry. She said their focus is on building back up the church membership. They are involved mainly in street evangelism. They go from door to door in the community and spread the word of God. The church has recently got involved in a food pantry, where they serve food once a week to the people in the community. The younger people in the church go to the homes of the elderly and assist them with the activities of their daily living. They take them to their doctor's appointment and when the weather is warm, they accompany them to the recreational centers. The older people in the church serve as mentors to the younger people. Pastor Ferguson told me that in the future, they hope to have a deliverance and healing ministry.

From this interview, I realized that the church is in desperate need of learning how to do ministry in an urban context. The pastor does not have the knowledge of how to get the community involved in the ministry. She has the vision for the church, but she needs people who would catch the vision and be able to carry it out to the community. She also needs help in building back the church membership. I have come to the realization that when a church is in existence for so long and they have undergone so many changes, they need a revival and the only way this can happen is by discipleship. Pastor Ferguson talked about discipleship but in my

view, I believe that she thinks that evangelism and discipleship is one of the same. I do not think that she recognizes that there is a clear difference between the two. The church is still set in the old way of doing things and I believe that they need to adapt to the modern times. The pastor is elderly and in my opinion she should be training someone to be able to take over the ministry. I believe that the church would benefit from getting more involved in the community and finding out the needs of the people.

