

Jules Ferguson

UR510: Urban Theology

Site Visit

April 11, 2023

The writer was responsible for writing a six-page paper on urban church theology. In the paper, he was responsible for naming the selected church, providing the visit date, and interviewing the Pastor. Additionally, he has to give the church's vision and mission for the targeted urban context. Next, provide the church's social analysis of its target urban context and share its connection to the resulting theological reflection and formation. Lastly, he has to include the theological implementation, approach, and practice and how it correlates directly to the stated urban theological reflection and formation. Now that we know the assignment and its instructions let us begin!

CHURCH/ DATE/ PASTOR

The name of the church the writer visited was Perfecting Faith Church. The visit was conducted on Apr 3, 2023, and the Pastor of the church is Donald McClurkin, Jr.

CHURCHS VISION & MISSION

The vision of the church is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and allow it to transform the worldly souls of Long Island into sincere Christian followers of Jesus Christ. The mission is to meet lowly people in need where they are and show them the love of Jesus Christ through meeting their holistic needs today by providing food, clothing, shelter, and the Word of God.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS & THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION & FORMATION

Perfecting Faith Church is concerned with those less fortunate in Long Island. The primary focus of the church's social analysis is on community members who live below the poverty line and provide them with the necessities they need to survive from day to day. For example, Perfecting Faith Church offers free food and clothing drives monthly for their community. By doing so, they are ensuring they are being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who says in Matthew 20:20, "He came to serve, not to be served and to give His life as a ransom for many." How does this tie into theological reflection and formation? Good question! Let's take a look at that.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION & FORMATION

Theologically the Bible is clear that Christians are supposed to help others in need. Why? Because as followers of Jesus Christ, He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He came to give us life and give it more abundantly (John 10:10). The best way to sum up the reason why is in this quote:

"James 2:26 says, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." James also wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). Similarly, John said, "The man who says, 'I know Him,' but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. . . . Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:4, 6). And the words of Christ Himself: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15)."¹

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/giving-to-the-poor.html>

Here the quote ends with an important disclaimer, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). When we do things to help the less fortunate, we are simultaneously doing things for three people—the person we help, Jesus, and ourselves. When we help someone else, we immediately see our impact on their lives, making us feel good. When we help others who are less fortunate than us, it reminds us what Jesus did for us, and it makes us feel like we are being good to God, who has been good to us. Sort of like paying God back in the way of letting Him know we are paying it forward. However, the biggest reward is to see that we are grateful for what Jesus did for us, so much so that we never forget what it was like to be a beggar. We recall what we were rescued from, look into the other person's eyes, and see their pain. It reminds us that we still have remnants of that pain, and when we provide solace to another person's pain, we simultaneously heal ourselves. That is the essence of our theological formation to become the embodiment of what Jesus Christ has done for us. That is what Perfecting Faith Church is all about and why they do their food and clothing drives.

Here are some of the fundamental beliefs of Perfecting Faith Church according to their doctrine that supports their evangelistic and missionary efforts.

1. Matthew 28:18-20: Go into all the world and teach the gospel to every creature.
2. Acts 1:8, John 4:1: Make disciples of believers.
3. Revelation 11:15: Establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.
4. Hebrews 13:16: Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

5. Acts 20:35: In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”
6. 1 John 3:17: But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?

THEOLOGICAL IMPLEMENTATION & CORRELATION TO REFLECTION/FORMATION

So we see how Perfecting Faith Church implements its theological beliefs into the community by helping the less fortunate through food and clothing drives. Additionally, we note their foundational beliefs concerning the Word of God that provides clear precedence for those actions. In other words, their actions line up with their words, and their words line up with the word of God, which is all you can ask for from a church. The rest is on the believer to do the same with their life and become a doer of the Word of God—not just a hearer.

Now as we go back to the beginning of our paper, we reflect on Perfecting Faith Church stated urban theological reflection, which is that Jesus came to give us (Christians and our brothers and sister, Jews and Gentiles alike) life and to give it more abundantly (John 10:10). The question remains, “Does the missionary efforts of Perfecting Faith Church provide more life to members of the community?” The writer must say, based on the interview, the church's vision, and missionary efforts, the answer is a resounding yes!

How can the writer be so confident in this analysis? Let us begin by examining the benefits of missionary efforts and the theological context. We have established the help that is being done, but is it helping? The writer believes so. Here's why. When the basic needs of those

less fortunate are being met, they remember who helped them get their needs met. Why is that important? When someone receives a favor from someone else, the natural response is to want to give something back to the other person who helped out. That is human nature. If a less fortunate person gets help from a church, what do they have to give back, money? No. Since they do not have money to give back, they will want to give back time, and time spent in the church will give them a chance to hear a Word from God that may renew their spirit and provide eternal salvation. This transaction takes place over a period of time and may not happen overnight, but eventually will happen because, as humans, we are wired to support those who support us. So many of the people who receive help regularly turn into members of Perfecting Faith Church.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The writer's reflections on the church's urban theology are that he feels Perfecting Faith Church's urban theology matches the current needs of its community while staying orthodox with the biblical intent of both the Old and New Testament regarding meeting the needs of those who are less fortunate than us. Outside of our needs, there is nothing more important than taking care of the needs of others. There is so much benefit to being a blessing to other people that it is worth mentioning again to reinforce those principles. First, we get the feeling of knowing we are helping someone else out and seeing the benefit in their life firsthand. The joy, smile, happiness, and thankfulness they show at that moment are priceless. Looking at the clothes they are wearing and the hunger in their eyes while knowing they will be fed and receive clothing at that very moment is a positive exchange of fulfillment because we see a need and meet it in a short time.

Secondly, we recall being desperate in some areas of our life and remember God meeting our needs at that time and every day after that. The feeling of God seeing our need and filling it immediately brings us to a moment of a karmatic carousel coming around full circle allowing us to see what God did for us we can do for another in a small way. And if we are honest, isn't that the point of our Christian walk? For us to lead the way, helping, guiding, and loving others to the love of Jesus Christ through our actions and instead of taking credit for what we did, guiding the person we are helping to Jesus so that He can be seen as their source and their brother or sister pilgrimaging together with them on the same journey as they are following Him?

The strengths of Perfecting Faith Churches' urban theology is that helping to meet the needs of the less fortunate is biblically mandated and comes with built-in rewards as a consequence of obedience to those principles, such as Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." As a member of the church, the writer has seen how the blessing the church provides to the community and also witness the blessing the church receives in return as a reward for its obedience to being a good steward, provider, and healer to souls. One of the main strengths is that church members are the lifeblood of the workforce for outreach. The motto of Perfecting Faith Church is "Where ministry means people." In other words, everyone must donate a small piece of their time every month to help in missions. So when church members are invested in time to help others in the community, they also want to give monetarily because they see the benefits, which are a great strength for the church, its members, and those less fortunate.

The weakness of Perfecting Faith Churches' urban theology is that although they are meeting the basic needs of the less fortunate, they are not teaching a man to fish. Instead, they

are providing fish to them monthly. Churches have limitations to what they can and cannot do due to limited resources, including people (volunteers, staff) and finances (complimentary food and clothing are not free). However, one solution they can provide is to partner with other churches, city, governmental, and non-profit organizations to pool their resources together to meet the additional needs they cannot otherwise provide on their own but can as a team of organizations working together to meet the needs of those they serve.

In conclusion, we discovered how one urban church chooses to make a difference in Long Island through holistic missionary efforts based on orthodox biblical beliefs. Perfecting Faith Church is positively impacting its community by serving the needs of those less fortunate in a way that brings them to Christ. If that story sounds familiar, it is because it was done a long time ago by one man named Jesus Christ, who led twelve others who lead the world to become more like Christ. Here we are today doing what so many others have done before us today—take small steps to become more like Jesus.