NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WHERE URBAN AND RURAL COLLIDE:
A MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR EXURBIA

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
March 25, 2022

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Doctor of Ministry Dissertation Approval

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Dissertation Title: WHERE URBAN AND RURAL COLLIDE: A MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR EXURBIA

Date of Defense: March 2, 2022

We, the undersigned, determined that this dissertation has met the academic requirements and standards of Nazarene Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program.

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ABSTRACT

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Where Urban and Rural Collide:
A Missional Ecclesiology for Exurbia

At the edge of the urban sprawl, exurban communities are
experiencing rapid growth and change. Longtime residents of rural
heritage collide with newcomers from urban and suburban
backgrounds. This creates a place of conflicting ideologies and
distrust. Many ecclesial models have been imported to and utilized
in exurbia; however, there has been little written about what a
theologically and contextually faithful ecclesiology for exurbia
looks like. In this paper, Mount Airy, Maryland is studied as a
prototypical exurban town in order to assess various ecclesial
models in light of the unique characteristics of the exurban context
and a missional theological framework built upon the principles of
embodiment of mission, engagement in acts of mission,
proclamation of mission, peacemaking, and relationship with
culture. This paper shows that incarnational ecclesial forms are
integral to a missionally and contextually faithful expression of
church within Mount Airy specifically, and exurbia generally.

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The Exurban Context

Introduction

  Within the church in the United States, there has been increasing conversation concerning ecclesial forms and structures in light of missional theology. This conversation has been bolstered by the movement of Western culture toward a post-Christendom mindset. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the United States in 2020 has caused many theologians, missiologists, and practitioners to reexamine ecclesial models in light of inabilities to gather together in traditional ways. From the Fresh Expressions movement of the Methodist and Anglican denominations to the missional ministry conversation led by Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, and others, there has been a considerable amount of writing done on ecclesial forms in Western church contexts. An uncertain future requires new thinking in how the church is to look, function, and engage in a variety of different cultures and contexts. While various ecclesial forms come and go, the need for the church to contextualize remains through every era and locale. This study seeks to examine that conversation on contextual ecclesial forms in light of the exurban context, a settlement pattern in the United States that is largely unexplored from an ecclesial perspective.

  Exurban contexts are places where an intersection of cultures is occurring as formerly rural towns experience a rapid influx of former urbanites and suburbanites. As former urbanites and suburbanites move into the exurban context, they bring with them their ideologies, politics, and expectations for a variety of areas of life, including the church. This intersection of cultures creates interesting and unique dynamics for the ecclesial conversation; however, this context has yet to be explored from an ecclesial perspective. How can the church contextualize well within the exurban context? What are the unique situations and dynamics at play within the exurban

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context that the church must take into account as it seeks to contextualize? What ecclesial forms currently exist within exurbia and how well are they contextualized to the unique place in which they find themselves? These are all questions that lie at the heart of the development of an ecclesiology for exurbia.

While a full exploration of churches in exurbia across the United State lies outside the scope of this study, this paper will seek to assess the ecclesial presence in one exurban town in order to begin a conversation on exurban ecclesiology. Mount Airy, Maryland is one such exurban context located in central Maryland. Mount Airy is located an hour west of Baltimore, Maryland and an hour northwest of Washington, D.C. The urban sprawl of these two major metropolitan cities places Mount Airy at the outer commuting edge of both cities. Mount Airy has been chosen as a prime example of an exurban context due to its location, traditionally rural character, and rapid growth due to the influx of urbanites and suburbanites to the town. While Mount Airy is unique in being an exurban community to two metropolitan areas, the exurban settlement pattern found in Mount Airy is not unique at all. The exurban settlement pattern can be located at the edge of urban sprawl of most major cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. As such, it is the hope of the author that exploring ecclesial forms in Mount Airy, Maryland will prove helpful for ministry practitioners, pastors, and church planters in exurban contexts across the country seeking to live into missionally faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative ecclesiologies.

The importance of this research goes beyond those communities that would be considered exurban by definition though. As the future-thinking missiologist Leonard Sweet states, "One of the least understood divisions [in the United States] is between urban and rural, which in many

ways surpasses the divide between North and South, coastal and flyover."[1] The cultural divide of rural and urban is occurring in an acute way in the exurban context. While many locations across the United States are either rural or urban, exurbia holds characteristics of both urban and rural settings simultaneously. In exurbia, those of a rural heritage live in close proximity with those of an urban/suburban background offering both a place of potential conflict and of potential bridge-building between differing worldviews. Because of this, it is imperative for the church to identify effective ecclesial forms that will adapt to the unique challenges of the exurban context in order to engage in missionally faithful ways including the need to offer spaces of reconciliation and bridge-building in the urban/rural divide. The exurban context in general, and the exurban church in specific, may be uniquely positioned to offer possibilities for bridge-building into the urban/rural divide Sweet identifies. As such, the development of an exurban ecclesiology is of importance for the larger body of Christ, not only those congregations that happen to be located in exurban contexts.

The goal of this dissertation is to identify various ecclesial forms present in Mount Airy's exurban context; assess them in light of missional theology; and offer principles and analysis for what it means to be a faithful church in Mount Airy's exurban context. In working toward this end, missional faithfulness, contextual relevance, and culturally integrative engagement will be utilized as avenues to assess the ecclesial faithfulness within the exurban environment. The remainder of this first chapter will seek to further define the exurban context, uncover the unique challenges of the exurban space, and identify Mount Airy, Maryland as a prototypical exurban context worthy of study. In the second chapter, a review of literature surrounding the exurban context and the unique challenges present in that context will be discussed. Due to the limited

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[1]   Leonard Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 68.

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nature of literature on the exurban ecclesial landscape, this review of literature will include a review of rural, suburban, and urban spaces; foundations for multicultural ministry; and concepts for peacemaking and conflict resolution. Then, in chapter three, the theological foundation of missional theology will be examined and defined around five principles: being, doing, telling, peacemaking, and right relationship with culture. Chapter four seeks to synthesize information from the literature review and theological foundations in order to assess exurban ecclesial models, develop principles for exurban ministry, and offer a starting point for an exurban ecclesiology in Mount Airy. Finally, the fifth chapter will offer a vision for the future of the church in the exurban context and identifies places for further study within the important and growing mission field of the exurban context. In all, this dissertation seeks to begin a conversation about what ministry looks like within the growing, but largely unidentified, mission field of the exurban context using Mount Airy, Maryland as a starting point for a critically important conversation within the church. It is the hope of the author that additional study on exurban ecclesiology will take place in the future by others seeking contextually relevant, missionally faithful, and culturally integrative forms of church for the exurban context.

Defining Exurban

Prior to defining ecclesial forms that arise within the exurban context, it is important to further define the exurban context in order to have a clear picture of the contextual setting for this study. The term "exurban" was first used in the 1950's by A.C. Spectorsky in his satirical book, *The Exurbanites*.[2] Spectorsky defined exurbanites as those individuals living on the far edges of suburbia seeking to live "the good life" through moving further away from metropolitan

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[2]   Auguste C. Spectorsky, *The Exurbanites* (New York: Street and Smith Publications, 1955), 4.

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areas while continuing to work in the metropolitan area.[3] Spectorsky understood exurbanites to

be former urbanites, who had achieved a level of income and status that afforded them to move

to the urban fringe to enjoy the rural quality of life while maintaining relatively close proximity

to the city. As one who thoroughly enjoyed urban living, Spectorsky used the book to poke fun at

those who would choose to live in the outer suburbs. He believed that exurbanites' desire to

achieve "the good life" went unrealized as their time was consumed with commuting to and from

work and the necessity to work the land they owned.

John Tarrant, on the other hand, shows in his book, *The End of Exurbia: Who Are All

Those People and Why Do They Want to Ruin Our Town?*, that while Spectorsky was unable to

see the allure of exurbia, many continued to flock to exurbia seeking "the good life."[4] The allure

of a little extra space, a slightly slower pace of life, and the status of living outside of urban

centers continued to compel those who had achieved certain levels of income and status to move

out of urban centers to the urban fringe. Tarrant also shows that the windfall of civil rights

legislation occurring through the 1960's and 1970's left many wondering about the future of

exurbia. For many, moving to exurbia was a sign of success where economic and business

achievement offered the ability to distance oneself from the "problems of the city."[5] As such,

most exurban towns were largely white and did not need to worry themselves with issues of

multiculturalism. According to Tarrant, much of the exurban escape from the city was to distance

oneself from "them," a term used to describe people who live in the city, people who are "black

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[3]   Spectorsky, 4.

[4]   John J. Tarrant, *The End of Exurbia: Who Are All Those People and Why Do They Want to Ruin Our Town?*,
First Edition (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), 14.

[5]   Tarrant, 14.

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or Hispanic," and other people that are seen as less successful for one reason or another.[6] Tarrant effectively shows that exurban growth in the middle of the 20th century was integrally tied to "white flight" out of urban centers due to fear, distrust, and racism toward people of color.

The title of Tarrant's book notwithstanding, the exurban phenomenon has continued to grow and expand since the 1970's. This has led Laura E. Taylor and Patrick T. Hurley to state that the exurban settlement pattern is the predominant pattern occurring in the United States today.[7] In addition, David M. Theobald's model of housing density shows that exurban housing density is expected to increase to almost seven times the rate of increase in urban and suburban contexts signifying the expanding population and influence of the exurban context.[8] In an article on Axios dated August 27, 2021, Jennifer A. Kingson wrote of the population growth occurring in exurbs across the United States. Kingson writes that data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates continued expansion of exurbs in the United States. She continues stating, "Formerly sleepy places are being reshaped by rapidly swelling population, influencing everything from politics and development to the local employment and retail scene."[9] In fact, the pull toward exurban settlement patterns has moved internationally as well. Christopher Baker shows that exurban settlement is occurring in Britain as well as the United States in his study of Milton

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[6]   Tarrant, 53.

[7]   Laura E. Taylor and Patrick T. Hurley, eds., *A Comparative Political Ecology of Exurbia: Planning, Environmental Management, and Landscape Change*, 1st ed. 2016 edition (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), Kindle location 210.

[8]   David M. Theobald, "Landscape Patterns of Exurban Growth in the USA from 1980 to 2020," *Ecology and Society* 10, no. 1 (June 2005), https://www.jstor.org/stable/26267722: 22.

[9]   Jennifer A. Kingson, "Here Are the Fastest-Growing Cities in the U.S.," Axios, accessed September 21, 2021, https://www.axios.com/fastest-growing-cities-population-buckeye-new-braunfels-eacd2fdb-919a-4440-b838-e635fc46f020.html.

Keynes, an exurb of London.[10] This underscores the need for the church to engage in generative

dialogue on what it looks like to minister well in this critical and expanding mission field across

the United States and around the world.

While much research and popular discussion, especially in ecclesiology, revolves around

urban, suburban, and rural contexts, little research and thinking has been given to the unique

dynamics of the exurban context. Exurban communities are a fusion of urban and rural

ideologies in which a new set of social, political, economic, and religious dynamics occur.[11]

Exurban locations are often filled with low density housing developments filled with former

urbanites and suburbanites who have moved further from the city center in order to enjoy the

natural amenities and beauty of rural life while maintaining access to modern conveniences

common in urban and suburban environments.[12] This interaction of urban, suburban, and rural

creates communities that are "decidedly non-urban, non-rural."[13] These communities become a

separate entity with their own set of dynamics, issues, and concerns. These dynamics, issues, and

concerns make it imperative that the church look contextually at the exurban environment

instead of relying on ecclesial forms imported from urban, suburban, and rural contexts.

Today, exurban communities and towns can be found on the edge of urban spheres of

influence. Usually, this urban edge occurs about an hour's commuting distance outside major

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[10]   Christopher Baker, "Religious Faith in the Exurban Community: A Case Study of Christian Faith-communities in Milton Keynes," *City* 9, no. 1 (April 2005): 110-112.

[11]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 217.

[12]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 219.

[13]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 253.

metropolitan areas.[14] This typically constitutes the outer edge of the commuting zone of a city; however, increases in teleworking may change where exurban patterns of settlement occur in the future. Within those who have studied the exurban context in the area of land-use planning, questions arise as to the static or dynamic nature of exurban contexts. Many observers have noted that exurban change is likely a step in the process toward urbanization of a locale; however, Laura Taylor and Patrick Hurley note the possibility of stable exurban communities as a permanent part of the landscape between urbanization and rural life.[15] As Taylor and Hurley show, the stability of the exurban context is often attributed to active opposition of continued urbanization where the town limits continued urbanization and development in order to preserve rural history.[16] Exurban communities typically occur in previously incorporated areas that experience rapid population growth spurred by the relocation of urban and suburban people to formerly rural towns.[17] As noted above, an increase in teleworking opportunities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic also has the potential of increasing the number of rural communities experiencing exurban settlement patterns as commuting distance becomes less important in various sectors of the economy. Further research will be needed on this phenomenon in the years to come.

With this definition of exurbia, it is important to be able to identify exurban change in particular contexts. In identifying exurban contexts, Taylor and Hurley offer a framework of

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[14]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 1085.

[15]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 300.

[16]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 300.

[17]   Nancy L. Eiesland, *A Particular Place: Urban Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), Kindle location 96-98.

seven markers present in current and transitioning exurban communities. The first marker is the rural character of the community where land and resources are historically used for rural purposes. The second marker is metropolitan access. Whether through telecommunications or commuting distance, exurban communities offer access to urban and suburban areas. The third marker is a changing local economy. The fourth marker is a reworking of ideologies toward nature from a resource to be used to an amenity to be preserved. The fifth marker is altered perspectives on land use often marked by conservatism toward local culture. The sixth marker is the development of coalitions among people in town to accomplish various goals and move toward a preferred future. These coalitions often arise between long-time residents of the community and newcomers; however, they also can arise in other varieties. These surprising forms of coalition can occur around preservation of rural culture, natural resource conservation, ecological sustainability concerns, and a myriad of other locally specific issues.[18] Finally, the seventh marker is the emergence of land use planning to balance demands of development with conservationism.[19]

These seven markers offer a framework from which to assess whether a particular community is undergoing exurban transition. According to Taylor and Hurley, all seven of these markers are present in some form within most exurban communities. While some markers may be more obvious than others, all seven markers are present when a community is undergoing exurban transformation.[20]

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[18]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 797.

[19]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 713.

[20]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 815.

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Comparison with Suburban and Rural Environments

Now that the exurban context has been defined, it is important to understand the similarities and differences between the exurban context and other settlement patterns, namely suburban, and rural settings. Cornelia Butler Flora states in her book, *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change,* that it is best to look at communities as a part of a continuum instead of categorically. This continuum starts with densely populated urban areas on one end, moves to suburban communities, and eventually ends with isolated rural communities on the other end of the continuum.[21] Seeing exurban communities as a part of a continuum helps to show the interconnectedness of various forms of community.

Exurban communities are influenced by both urban and rural influences at the same time since they sit at a place on the continuum where urban and suburban areas give way to rural areas. Exurban communities truly become the place where those who are "rural by choice" meet those who are "rural by heritage."[22] As such, exurban communities contain similarities to both suburban and rural communities at the same time. Understanding aspects of small town living and urban living present in an exurban community is integral for developing a clear understanding of context for ministry.

Exurban communities hold many similarities to small town, rural environments. Understanding the culture of small towns offers a window through which to understand aspects of exurban environments. In small towns, a strong sense of community identity is developed

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[21]   Cornelia Butler Flora, Jan L. Flora, and Stephen P. Gasteyer, *Rural Communities: Legacy + Change,* 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 4.

[22]   Flora, Flora, and Gasteyer, 3.

through the use of symbols, festivals, and other rituals.[23] There is a sense in small towns that a person is required to work together and get along with a variety of people since there are not as many people groups present within the community as might be present in urban areas.[24] Small towns also tend to have stratified social layers with a small minority of individuals holding most positions of power in the town.[25] These towns also often develop a sense of community through the presence of cafes, coffee shops, bars, and other hangouts where people in the town tend to meet for conversation, gossip, and news.[26] Religiously, small towns tend to have a small handful of aging congregations near Main Street with newer churches located on the edge of town.[27] Many parts of small town living, from schools to cafes to churches, have been a part of the fabric of the town for decades to the point that they are integrally tied to the identity of the town itself.

Not only do exurban communities resemble small towns, but exurban communities are also similar to suburban communities, which offer another window through which to understand the exurban environment. Suburban environments are perceived to be faster paced than most rural communities. These communities are often filled with higher density housing in which neighbors live closer together than is common in rural areas.[28] Despite these close neighborhood

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[23] Robert Wuthnow, *Small-Town America: Finding Community, Shaping the Future* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

[24] Wuthnow, 17.

[25] Wuthnow, 20.

[26] Wuthnow, 125.

[27] Wuthnow, 217.

[28] Lillian Daniel, "Suburban Search for Meaning," *Christian Century*, August 9, 2011, 26.

relationships, many suburbanites state they know very little about their neighbors due to the

frenetic nature of their schedules.[29] In addition, the suburban lifestyle is typically filled with

numerous appointments, meetings, extracurricular activities for kids, and more.[30] In short, the

suburban lifestyle tends to be fast-paced and desires many amenities, such as shopping, grocery

stores, and other conveniences, close by; however, national and regional chains are preferred

over mom and pop establishments.[31] These dynamics often leave many suburban areas without a

strong sense of community identity. Churches in suburban environments tend to mimic this

desire for convenience through age-specific programming, contemporary music, and felt needs

preaching.[32]

     Most former urbanites and suburbanites moving into exurban areas are looking for a mix

of rural and suburban living. In short, "the people choosing small-town life today usually want a

quiet town with its wonderful small-town values, but they also want big-city attractions close

by."[33] Religiously, many moving into exurban environments are looking for a church with rural

feel, but also with the contemporary music, modern facility, and educational programs normally

associated with suburban locales.[34] The desire to have the best of both the suburban and rural

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[29]   Daniel, 26.

[30]   Daniel, 26.

[31]   Ron Klassen and John Koessler, *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small-Town Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Pub Group, 1996), 59.

[32]   Klassen and Koessler, 59.

[33]   Klassen and Koessler, 59.

[34]   Klassen and Koessler, 59.

worlds is the ideal of newcomers in the exurban community, and it aptly describes religious

preferences of newcomers within the exurban context as well. For long-term residents, their

religious preferences tend to be centered on church traditions with a longer history within the

town; however, Nancy Eiesland shows that many long-term residents are welcoming to a

suburban style of ministry desiring for their children and grandchildren to remain connected to

the church.[35] In his dissertation work on priestly engagement in an exurban congregation, Adam

C. Smith notes, that the rapid influx of suburbanites and urbanites into an exurban congregation

can cause both "a growing, vibrant ministry" and also create "less intimacy and a sense of

mistrust between long-time and newer members."[36] As Smith shows, the mistrust common in the

exurban community at large easily infiltrates the exurban church community as relational

dynamics, expectations for ministry, and diverse worldviews collide.

There are points of connection with both rural environments and suburban environments

within the exurban context. Often the dynamics of both small town living and suburban living

occur simultaneously within exurbia leading individuals in the town to have vastly differing

viewpoints and experiences of living in the same town. As shown above, what an individual or

family desires within the community often translates to what a person or family is looking for in

a church. Since rural and suburban desires differ, this can easily lead to congregations that

become segregated based on one's identification with either a traditionally rural background or

suburban background. In addition, churches can be tempted to appeal to either rural sensibilities

or suburban sensibilities instead of seeking to bridge these cultural divides present in the larger

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[35]   Eiesland, Kindle location 799.

[36]   Adam C Smith, "Living into God's Priesthood: Building and Developing Trust in a Transforming Community"
(DMin diss., McCormick Theological Seminary, 2018), 1.

community. As will be explored later in this paper, this should lead the church to think critically about how it goes about ministry in the community in order to reach the community with the gospel while seeking to bridge existing divides between old-timer and newcomer in the community.

Mount Airy as an Exurban Community

As a final piece in developing the context for this exploration of the exurban ecclesial context, it is necessary to assess Mount Airy, Maryland in light of the criteria expressed above. Before moving in the Taylor and Hurley's framework for the identification of exurban contexts, it is helpul to get an idea of the demographic makeup of Mount Airy, Maryland. Ethnically, Mount Airy is a predominantly white town with 86.7% of the population identifying as white. The next largest ethnic group is Latino, which constitutes 6.1% of the population. In addition, Mount Airy is also a wealthy community when compared to United States averages. The average household income in Mount Airy is $145,952, which is $57,374 over the national average. While Mount Airy is a wealthy community, it also is an expensive community to live in. 83% of houses in Mount Airy are valued over $300,000, and 55.9% are valued over $400,000. In addition, rentals in the town of Mount Airy are scarce and cost more than the national average.[37]

As would be expected in a formerly rural community, the vast majority (88.5%) of the population lives in a single family home. Underscoring the rapid change in the community, almost twenty percent (19.8%) of the homes in the community have been built since 1999.[38] This

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[37] "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics," accessed August 26, 2021, https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/summary.html?y=4775807.474226838&x=-8588616.899967996&b=5.

[38] "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics," accessed August 26, 2021, https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/summary.html?y=4775807.474226838&x=-8588616.899967996&b=5..

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shows the increase in housing that has occurred in the community in the past twenty years, which has attributed to the exurban change in the community. In addition, the average commuting time of a resident of Mount Airy is significantly higher than national averages. 65.6% of the residents of Mount Airy commute at least a half hour each way to work, which underscores the importance of the town's location to two major metropolitan cities. Finally, Mount Airy also has a high level of educational achievement with 41.9% of the population holding at least a bachelor's degree, which is significantly higher than the national average (32.1%).[39]

Using Taylor and Hurley's framework of seven markers for exurban environments, this section will show that all seven markers identified are present within the town of Mount Airy. First, the town has a decidedly rural character to it. From large areas of farmland to a quaint Main Street with vestiges of the town's railway history, the rural character of the town is easy to see. The majority of the open spaces surrounding the town of Mount Airy are filled with pastures for raising livestock, fields to grow crops, or woods that have been largely untouched. While an increasing number of these open spaces have been developed for housing and other amenities, the rural heritage of the town is very much present. While development has taken place, there does appear to be a priority given to open space as developments intentionally add large parks and open spaces. In addition, most housing developments in Mount Airy tend to include large houses on lots that are large enough to have a spacious yard and separation from neighbors.

Secondly, the town's access to urban areas is uniquely impressive. Situated just off Interstate 70 an hour outside of both Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Mount Airy is uniquely accessible to two major metropolitan cities. Four counties come together in Mount Airy,

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[39] "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics," accessed August 26, 2021, https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/summary.html?y=4775807.474226838&x=-8588616.899967996&b=5.

signifying this unique exurban situation. Carroll County and Howard County make up the eastern side of the town. Both of these counties are considered to be within the outer suburban counties of Baltimore, MD. The southern and western sides of the town are in Montgomery County and Frederick County respectively. Both of these counties are considered suburbs of Washington, D.C. As such, Mount Airy and the Four County region offers a uniquely impressive access to both the Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas offering access to jobs and urban amenities within an hour's drive.

Thirdly, Mount Airy has seen significant changes to its local economy. As more urbanites and suburbanites have moved to the town, more commerce and economic activity occurs in commercially developed areas populated by large chain grocery stores, department stores, restaurants, and service providers. Main Street, in the center of the Mount Airy, is host to boutique shops, independently owned restaurants, and proprietary businesses as is typical in many small towns. Meanwhile, along State Highway 27 and State Highway 144, there are burgeoning commercial areas completed with multiple national grocery chains, a Wal-Mart, national fast-food chains, and liquor stores. While less than a half-mile apart from one another, the majority of commerce in the local economy has shifted from Main Street to these commercial areas as the population has increased.

Fourth, Mount Airy's ideology toward nature has shifted toward understanding nature as an amenity, which is noticeable through the development of parks, hiking trails, and agritourism in the area. As farmland is sold and developed into housing, there is an intentional move to preserve the open spaces and beauty of the rural character of the land. This emphasis shows the transition that has occurred from land being used to raise cattle and crops for income to land being preserved in order to maintain beauty and enjoy as an amenity of the community. One

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example of this shift is the Rails to Trails project headed by Mayor Larry Hushour. Hushour worked to recover out of service railroad tracks in the town in order to convert them into a walking trail that connects Main Street with a local park.[40] In addition, as noted above, many new developments intentionally are creating large parks in order to preserve the natural beauty of the rural heritage of the community.

Fifth, Mount Airy has seen transition to a mode of conservationism. Many desire for the town to conserve reminders of the town's rural history amongst the development taking place in order to preserve the town's rural heritage. The shift in ideology toward nature discussed above is one such way in which this mode of conservationism plays out in the community. In addition, this can be seen through the development of a Mount Airy Museum dedicated to preserving the town's history, the placement of historical placards along Main Street with past pictures of the town, and the restoration of a train caboose placed on Main Street as an homage to the railway history of the town. Each of these avenues of preserving the history of the town have been recent additions to the town. Mayor Larry Hushour stated this shift to a mode of conservationism stating in relation to the town's railway history, "Most people in town do not know the importance of this town to the history of the B & O Railroad and railway history in general. We need to find ways to tell that story as we move into the future as a town."[41]

Sixth, Mount Airy has seen the development of coalitions, especially between old-timers and newcomers. While many of these coalitions are informal in nature, locally important issues often result in development of factions that coalesce around similarly held beliefs. Largely, these coalitions tend to be based on length of time lived in the community, political affiliation, or

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[40] Larry Hushour, interview with author, April 7, 2021.

[41] Larry Hushour, interview with author, April 7, 2021.

economic incentive; however, surprising coalitions do form at times based on socioeconomic levels, political viewpoints, or other unifying ideologies, worldviews, and backgrounds. One growing coalition that has occurred in recent years in the town of Mount Airy is the Mount Airy Main Street Association. This is an association of small business owner whose businesses are located at or near the downtown section of Main Street. This group seeks to work together to drive commerce and engagement with Mount Airy Main Street businesses.[42] The formation of this association offers a greater platform for these small businesses to be able to combat the economic shift toward Wall Street businesses as more suburbanites and urbanites move into the community.

Finally, Mount Airy has increased its engagement with land use planning including the development of a City Council Planning Commission and creation of a Town Vision Plan for the downtown Main Street area. Consistent conversation occurs surrounding what sustainable growth looks like and how the town can effectively plan for the growth that continues to occur in and around the town. Mayor Larry Hushour notes, "Growth is a four-letter word to many; however, the most important thing is that the town effectively uses the means at its disposal in order to grow in a responsible fashion."[43] The development of the town's vision plan and work toward responsible growth as important markers of an increased engagement with land use planning.

In addition to these seven markers, Mount Airy shares both rural and suburban similarities at the same time. Mount Airy engages in the use of various symbols and rituals to generate a sense of community. Two common images are used throughout publications, online

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[42]   "ABOUT," MAMSA, accessed September 21, 2021, https://www.mountairymainstreet.org/about.

[43]   Larry Hushour, interview with author, April 7, 2021.

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presence, and town logos. The first is an image of the Twin Arch bridge, which is an iconic brick

railroad bridge on the edge of the town. The other is the image of a train caboose. Both of these

images are meant to build a sense of shared identity in the town around the town's history along

the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad. In addition, the town engages in multiple festivals

throughout the year to generate a sense of community. Celebrate Mount Airy, Oktoberfest, the

Halloween Spooky Trail, the Valentine's Day Chocolate Crawl, and the town Chili Cook-off are

a sampling of town festivals throughout the year that generate a sense of community in Mount

Airy. The leadership in Mount Airy also tends to mimic more rural environments, with a small

minority of people engaged in positions of leadership and power. Finally, Mount Airy looks

similar to Wuthnow's description of religious life in rural areas with two church buildings with

traditional architecture near the downtown area of Main Street that are older and struggling to

stay open.[44] Both of these church buildings have housed prominent and large congregations in

the past; however, they have seen an exodus of individuals from these church communities to

other congregations in recent years leaving one building currently vacant without a congregation

worshiping in it and the other housing a congregation a fraction the size of only a decade prior.[45]

      Mount Airy also strongly resembles various aspects of suburban communities. Many of

the people who live in Mount Airy commute up to an hour or more to work utilizing the

convenient access to metropolitan areas and essentially treating the town as a bedroom

community for large metropolitan areas nearby. In addition, many housing communities have

been built on the outskirts of the town. These housing communities feature higher-density

housing where neighbors live in closer proximity to one another than is common in rural areas.

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[44]   Wuthnow, 217.

[45]   Bill Maisch, interview with author, March 12, 2019.

Mount Airy also has many amenities suburbanites look for, such as shopping centers, access to the interstate, and restaurants. While there are two older churches located on Main Street, a handful of churches outside the town's corporate limits tend to engage in a suburban style of ministry with contemporary music, age specific programming, and felt needs preaching. These congregations have grown significantly over the past couple decades specifically seeking to reach newcomers to the town and families with children through various forms of programming. Based on Taylor and Hurley's framework and the presence of both rural and suburban sensibilities concurrently, Mount Airy, Maryland clearly fits the mold of an exurban town that will offer a helpful window into exurban ecclesiology. [46]

In this chapter, the exurban context has been defined as a formerly rural community that is seeing significant population increases resulting from former urbanites and suburbanites moving into the community. Using Taylor and Hurley's seven markers for identifying transitioning exurban contexts, Mount Airy, Maryland has been identified as a prototypical exurban town on the outskirts of both Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. The exurban context is created from the collision of a rural heritage with the rapid influx of urbanites and suburbanites who are seeking a place with a rural character while maintaining access to urban and suburban amenities. This collision of cultures creates a context where conflicting ideologies, political philosophies, and religious desires occur in close proximity. As a result, it is necessary to gain an understanding of how these dynamics of conflict present in the exurban context may influence ecclesial concerns.

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[46] Information Mount Airy, Maryland is developed through the author's personal history of living in the town, attendance at Town Council meetings, engagement in local festivals, and information available from the Mount Airy Museum.

In the end, this chapter has sought to show that the exurban context is its own unique

context for ministry that requires a contextual ecclesiology just as rural, suburban, and urban

contexts require their own contextual ecclesiologies. Currently, the exurban church largely

consists of imported ecclesial models from rural, suburban, and urban contexts that have been

transplanted in the community. While these forms are likely to connect with a portion of the

community due to the rural, suburban, and urban characteristics to the exurban context, new

contextually relevant ecclesial forms are needed in order for the church to engage in missionally

faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative ways in Mount Airy, and other similar

exurban contexts across the United States. Now that the exurban context has been defined, this

study will turn its attention to existing scholarship that is integral to the assessment of ecclesial

forms in the exurban context. Since there is relatively little research that has occurred seeking to

look specifically at exurban ecclesiology, the next chapter will seek to offer an overview of

existing literature on topics that are integral to the development of an ecclesiology for exurbia.

Study Integral to Exurban Ministry

Rural, Suburban, and Urban Ecclesial Environments

In order to understand the unique nature of the exurban ecclesial environment, an

understanding of rural, suburban, and urban ecclesial environments and principles for ministry

within those environments must be developed. As stated above, most churches in Mount Airy's

exurban context tend to follow either rural or suburban ecclesial forms. Based on the research

above, rural communities, due to their size, tend to require greater collaboration among those

who are a part of the community.[47] In addition, the small town often has forged an identity that is

reinforced through the use of shared symbols, rituals, festivals, and events, which local

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[47]   Wuthnow, 17.

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congregations are often integrally engaged in.[48] These congregations usually consist of mainline

congregations situated in stately church buildings near the center of the town. Newer

congregations in the small town are usually found on the outskirts of the town and tend to be less

integrally stitched into the fabric of the town.[49]

Rural congregations tend to mimic the culture and identity of the small town. Rural

congregations tend to exhibit more conservative values and cultural traits that put them at odds

with those who identify with more progressive values, viewpoints, and traits.[50] In addition, the

long-time community members that make up rural congregations tend to place an emphasis on

the ministry of presence in the community. Eating and shopping locally, attending local sporting

events, and engaging in the life of the community is typically expected of pastors and leaders

within the rural congregation.[51] This investment in the lives of others in the community through

participation in the life of the community is integral to the social fabric of the rural town and

ministry in rural contexts.[52] Christopher Baker speaks of the theology of the rural church as being

a "theology of rootedness and lived space, which…believes that people will come and seek the

church out."[53] In these environments, the church is known to be present and engaged in the town

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[48]   Wuthnow, 3.

[49]   Wuthnow, 217.

[50]   Glenn Daman, *The Forgotten Church: Why Rural Ministry Matters for Every Church in America* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 39.

[51]   Daman, 133-134.

[52]   Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Touchstone Books by Simon & Schuster, 2000), 25.

[53]   Baker, 119.

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due to the presence of traditional worship buildings near the center of town and the participation of members of the congregation in the rituals and events of the town.

In urban spaces, the dynamics are rather different than in rural spaces. Due to the population density and unique nature of varying neighborhoods, ministry within the urban space is largely centered on incarnating the gospel in a localized way. Jonathan Brooks speaks of the need for the church "to be interwoven into the fabric of our communities the way God is interwoven into the fabric of our lives."[54] He continues stating that the work of the church should be toward "the restoration of communities."[55] Due to economic disparities present in many urban settings, issues related to poverty, and greater ethnic diversity, Brooks shares that urban ministry should seek to engage "the whole life of the community;" however, there is a need to be a partner with those in the community as they minister to each other.[56] The ministry of presence is integral to urban ministry, as it is in rural ministry; however, that presence is centered at the neighborhood level, as opposed to the entirety of the town or city.[57] In addition, John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association, shows that those who minister in urban spaces need to "overcome an attitude of charity" in order to minister with those in the community.[58] As such, Perkins calls the urban church to seek to be more than "just a group of people, but the incarnation of God's love" to a specific neighborhood.[59]

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[54]   Jonathan Brooks, *Church Forsaken: Practicing Presence in Neglected Neighborhoods*, 2018, 59.

[55]   Brooks, 63.

[56]   Brooks, 70-77.

[57]   Brooks, 77.
[58]   John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 23.

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[59]   Perkins, 60.

Finally, as stated above, suburban life is often perceived as having a faster pace than rural living, yet does not have the same housing or population density as urban areas. The fabric of the community tends not to be as strong in suburban contexts as it is in either rural or urban contexts considering that suburbanites tend to know very little about those who live in close proximity to them.[60] The suburban lifestyle, which desires many amenities nearby, has led to ministry forms that offer various ministries for age groups, affinities, and special interests.[61] The suburban church is often program-centric desiring to meet people in their places of interest, concern, or affinity. James S. Bielo shows that the primary ecclesial form developed from suburban ministry is the megachurch, the large, program-centric ministry model that seeks to reach the masses.[62] While relatively non-existent on the American ecclesial landscape fifty years ago, "megachurches now number over 1,200, nearly all of which are in suburbia."[63] As such, suburban ministry tends to focus more on programs, events, and religious offerings for attenders than rural and urban ministry.

Within the Church of the Nazarene, the denomination that the author is a member of, the conflict between urban and rural forms of ministry has been present since the beginning of the denomination. David A. Busic shares in *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition* that "the early years of the Church of the Nazarene were forged out of compromise

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[60]   Daniel, 26.

[61]   Klassen and Koessler, 59.

[62]   James S. Bielo, "City of Man, City of God: The Re-Urbanization of American Evangelicals: City of Man, City of God," *City & Society* 23 (September 2011): 2–23, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-744X.2011.01053.x: 5.

[63]   Bielo, 5-6.

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between two similar – but slightly different – visions of the Christian life. The resulting outcome alternated between a creative tension and a source of conflict."[64] In quoting Timothy Smith, historian of the Church of the Nazarene, Busic continues saying, "In Smith's words, 'Neither the origin nor the subsequent history of the Church of the Nazarene can be understood without a knowledge of the two holiness traditions, urban and rural.'"[65]

Busic states that the urban vision of holiness focused on education and social reform based in the teachings of John Wesley.[66] This urban vision was largely found in major cities and surrounding suburbs and consisted of an intellectualized faith that was less concerned about external standards of holiness such as dress or behavior.[67] The rural vision of holiness was centered in the southern United States and focused on "aggressive evangelism, the personal crisis of entire sanctification in a believer's life, and a strong influence of the camp meeting ethos from the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement."[68] This rural strain of the Church of the Nazarene was more emotionally demonstrative and engaged in more rigid beliefs concerning dress and behavior than the urban vision for holiness.[69] Eventually, a more suburban strain of the Church of the Nazarene was developed as well creating three separate ideological perspectives attempting to be interwoven in one denomination.[70]

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[64]   David A. Busic, *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition* (Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing, 2020), 13.

[65]   Busic, 13.

[66]   Busic, 13.

[67]   Busic, 21.

[68]   Busic, 13.
[69]   Busic, 21.

[70]   Busic, 21.

Despite this fracturing within the early years of the Church of the Nazarene, Busic shows that the union between urban and rural groups that occurred in the creation of the Church of the Nazarene "was considered a miracle by many and, as Smith observes, was key to understanding Nazarene DNA."[71] This has led Busic to look hopefully toward the future of the Church of the Nazarene stating, "If the Church of the Nazarene was formed by the merging of two distinct Holiness traditions – urban and rural – then the Lord of the church can also help disparate traditions rediscover a healthy tension going forward."[72] The exurban context offers a place where these church traditions naturally live in close proximity to one another offering a context where the possibility of a new miracle of bridging urban, suburban, and rural ideologies might occur.

This exploration of rural, suburban, and urban ecclesial contexts shows an interesting dynamic converging in the exurban context. Despite the vast differences between rural and urban contexts, prevailing forms of ministry in each of these contexts tend to be centered on incarnational forms of ministry rooted in a ministry of presence and engagement with the social fabric of the community. On the other hand, suburban forms of ministry tend to be modeled in the pattern of the megachurch, centered on programmatic offerings for congregants of varying age groups, affinities, or locations. Individuals from these three backgrounds converge in the exurban context bringing with them their prevailing methodologies for ministry. Understanding these prevailing forms of ministry gives insight into the ecclesial norms that congregants expect as well as helps to make sense of the ecclesial diversity present in exurban contexts. In addition,

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[71]   Busic, 13.

[72]   Busic, 14.

the history of the Church of the Nazarene shows that the urban/rural divide is not a new phenomenon in the ecclesial world. In fact, the past of the Church of the Nazarene might help to offer some clues as to how the exurban church can effectively seek to build bridges between urban and rural ecclesial mindsets. This bridge building may help in larger divides occurring between urban and rural environments within the church and, as noted by Leonard Sweet in the first chapter, United States culture at large.

Multicultural Ministry

In addition to surveying rural, suburban, and urban ecclesial environments, the development of an understanding of principles of multicultural ministry is necessary in working towards an exurban ecclesiology. In order to understand multicultural ministry, one must have a firm grasp on what constitutes a culture and a worldview. George G. Hunter III defines culture as:

> "the learned pattern of beliefs, attitudes, values, customs, and products shared by a people. A culture is sometimes explained, metaphorically, as 'the software of the mind' that has been programmed into a given people's shared consciousness through their early socialization."[73]

Cultures help to share the worldview of the people who inhabit and engage with the culture. Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin defined a worldview as "what we think of the world when we are not really thinking."[74] The presence of multiple cultures and worldviews within a particular context constitutes and multicultural setting.

Most research on multicultural ministry has focused on the integration of various ethnic cultures within a particular church body. The integration of ethnic cultures, especially between

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[73]   George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism, Tenth Anniversary Edition: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . .Again*, 10th Revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010),108.
[74]   Martin Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever: Building Innovative Relations* (Crowborough: Monarch Books, 1994), 33.

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African American and white cultures is difficult due to the history of conflict and subjugation between those cultures. While exurban contexts can have a variety of ethnic demographics, they tend to be more monocultural than urban or suburban contexts. Even so, exurban ministry is a form of multicultural ministry due to the presence of both rural and suburban cultures, which are often at odds with one another. While not as pronounced as the power dynamics at play in ethnic multicultural settings, the exurban context has its own set of power dynamics at work as newcomers and old-timers seek to establish a position of power in order to shape the trajectory of the future of the town.[75] As such, principles developed from pioneers in ethnic multicultural integration are applicable for exurban ministry that desires to integrate old-timers and newcomers.

First, it is necessary to understand theological justifications for the pursuit of multicultural ministry. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A Parrett show that humans are given a "cultural mandate" from God in Genesis 1 and 2.[76] This cultural mandate is built from the call of God for the first humans to cultivate the land and engage in various acts of cultural development.[77] As the story of Scripture moves forward, this cultural mandate is further elaborated upon when Abraham, whose name means "father of multitudes," is told that through him "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).[78] Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, the desire of God to reconcile and bless all people through identifying with one

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[75]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 800.

[76]   Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 52.
[77]   Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 52.

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[78]   Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 52.

nation, Israel, is present; however, the inability of that nation to live as a blessing toward other people groups is also present.[79]

In the New Testament, Jesus' heart for unity among all people is seen in his prayer in John 17 in which Jesus "prayed specifically that future generations of believers would be one so that the world would know God's love and believe."[80] Following Jesus' death and resurrection, the book of Acts records the story of the gospel moving out from Jerusalem into the cultures surrounding Israel.[81] As the gospel moves out beyond the cultural boundaries of Israel, the struggle of reconciling various cultures and learning to live together as one body of believers began.[82] Despite this difficulty, the canon of Scripture ends stating that "all nations will come and worship" the Lord God Almighty forever in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 15:4).[83]

Through this brief biblical survey, it is apparent that God's heart is for the cultivation of cultures, the blessing of other cultures, and the eventual reconciliation of all cultures in worship of Jesus Christ; however, Sherwood Lingenfelter rightly notes that "to accomplish that vision we must take up the cross – through sacrificing our quest for power, our emotional needs for acceptance and recognition, our obsession to have 'my will' implemented – thereby denying

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[79]   Jon Huckins and Jer Swigart, *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 32.

[80]   Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 9.

[81]   Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 58.

[82]   Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 58.

[83]   Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 62.

ourselves and following him [Jesus]."[84] This has led Mark DeYmaz to state that "the pursuit of the multi-ethnic local church is, in my view, not optional. It is biblically mandated for all who would aspire to lead local congregations of faith."[85]

Exurban ministry, by nature, is multicultural ministry due to the fact that the traditionally rural culture of old-timers is being impacted by the suburban culture of newcomers to the area. Within these cultural dynamics, old-timers, who tend toward traditionally conservative values and cultural traits, tend to conflict with the more progressive cultural values and viewpoints of newcomers to the area.[86] Glenn Daman states that both old-timers and newcomers must acknowledge the viability, importance, and value of the other culture, seeking to understand them better in order to move forward together as an integrated community of faith,.[87] The valuing of another's culture, especially when one sees the other culture as a threat, takes intentionality on the part of leadership of the congregation.[88] David Anderson agrees stating that congregations must intentionally create opportunities for leaders from various cultures to lead within the congregation, share positions of power, invest in the ministry of the church, and hold each other accountable for living into the multicultural vision of the congregation.[89]

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[84]   Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*, Illustrated Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 168.

[85]   DeYmaz, Kindle location 507.

[86]   Daman, 39.

[87]   Daman, 30.

[88]   David Anderson, *Multicultural Ministry: Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), Kindle location 420.

[89]   Anderson, Kindle location 483.

In order for this integrated culture to arise in an exurban environment, it will require both old-timers and newcomers to lay down their preferences in order to form a new multicultural expression of ministry.[90] Douglas Brouwer states that true integration of cultures requires intentionality within every aspect of the ministry, including the leadership, decision making process, use of symbols and ritual, music, and presence in front of the congregation.[91] The goal is not simply to have people of different cultural practices present, but to fully integrate multiculturally into every part of ecclesial life. Just as the presence of multiple colors of skin within a church does not make a multicultural church, so too the simple presence of old-timers and newcomers does not ensure an exurban multicultural ministry.

Despite this support for multicultural ministry, there are some who believe that seeking to work toward multicultural and integrative ministry is not advantageous for the church. Usually, those in this camp point to Donald McGavran's homogeneous unit principle, which was originally generated in order "to warn the church of its natural tendency to stay within its own culture," not as an apologetic for the church-growth movement.[92] A homogeneous unit is "a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common."[93] In McGavran's use of this principle toward church growth, he states that churches grow fastest when they are homogeneous instead of diverse.[94] While it may be true that McGavran's homogeneous unit

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[90]   Anderson, Kindle location 328.

[91]   Douglas J. Brouwer, *How to Become a Multicultural Church* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 7.

[92]   Dave Gibbons, *The Monkey and the Fish: Liquid Leadership for a Third-Culture Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 76.
[93]   Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, "The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle" (Lausanne Occasional Paper, 1978).

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[94]   DeYmaz, 62.

principle will cause churches to grow fastest, Mark DeYmaz rightly asks whether this approach

to ministry is faithful to the testimony of Scripture, which shows that the heart of God is for the

integration of individuals from various cultures within the body of Christ.[95] Elizabeth Conde-

Frazier, Steve S. Kang, and Gary A. Parrett agree stating, "The Bible does not allow for the

notion that people can somehow be reconciled to God but not to one another…Diversity in the

church, according to Scripture, is not merely good; it is essential. It is not something to be sought

or tolerated; it is a reality we must obey and endeavor to preserve."[96] As such, theological

faithfulness to this pursuit within the exurban context calls for the local congregation to seek

ways to engage in multi-cultural ministry where those from rural backgrounds, the long-term

residents, and those from suburban and urban backgrounds, the newcomers, learn to live

peacefully and worship together within the local church.

Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution

While multiculturalism is a worthy goal, the integration of cultures is likely to bring

about conflict. Due to the multicultural nature of the exurban context, avenues for peacemaking

and conflict resolution are integral to the development of a criteria for missional faithfulness in

the exurban church. David Augsburger states, "Conflict is essential to, ineradicable from, and

inevitable in human life; and the source, cause, and process of conflict can be turned from life-

destroying to life-building ends."[97] Conflict is one of the guarantees of life; however, in spaces

where individuals from different cultural backgrounds are forced to live and work in close

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[95]   DeYmaz.

[96]   Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 74-77.

[97]   David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 5.

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proximity, the chances for conflict increase. Augsburger adds that "Conflict is a crisis that forces us to recognize that we live with multiple realities and must negotiate a common reality…"[98] Considering that the exurban context is a natural intersection of cultures, newcomers and long-time residents, it is a natural breeding ground for conflict while negotiating a shared locale. At first glance, it may appear that avoidance of interaction between newcomers and long-time residents is the best path for churches to take in order to avoid unnecessary conflict. While this does produce an absence of conflict, the theological reflection above on multicultural ministry calls the church to seek peace in the midst of the conflicts between newcomers and long-time residents instead of avoiding conflict all together.

Having built a theological foundation for the necessity of multicultural ministry, it is also necessary to build a theological foundation for peacemaking ministry in exurbia as well. The word for peace in Hebrew is *shalom. Shalom,* while occasionally connoting a place where there is an absence of conflict, "indicates wholeness, completeness, fullness, salvation, and flourishing."[99] Biblical peace is not the absence of conflict. Instead, it is the "the abundance of wholeness, completeness, and fullness that emerges on the other side of holistically repaired, formerly severed relationships."[100] This concept of *shalom* is what Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden, and it is the peace that God will restore in His return; however, the majority of the remainder of Scripture can be understood as a God's faithful, peacemaking presence among a pride-filled, power-hungry people.[101]

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[98]   Augsburger, 11.

[99]   Huckins and Swigart, 23.
[100]   Huckins and Swigart, 33.

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[101]   Huckins and Swigart, 33.

While the concept of *shalom* is found throughout Scripture, the culmination of peacemaking is found in the image of the cross. Huckins and Swigart state, "The cross of Christ exposes God…as an others-oriented, nations-embracing, enemy-loving peacemaker."[102] Through understanding the peacemaking mission of God at the cross, the people of God discover their peacemaking identity.[103] By taking his disciples to the cross, Jesus taught them that peace does not occur through force or avoidance of conflict, but through "selfless sacrifice."[104] Through the lens of the cross, Huckins and Swigart show that peacemaking isn't the avoidance of conflict or even a reaction to conflict, but is "a way of life."[105] This way of life means embodying the same attributes as Jesus including seeing the other, immersing oneself in another's culture, and working for justice.[106]

Due to the conflict present in the exurban setting, this theological approach to peacemaking is integral to a pursuit of an integrated model for ministry. Peacemaking in the way of the cross requires that the exurban church "seek the peace" of the exurban community and actively engage in sacrificial, cross-shaped acts of love toward those of different cultural backgrounds. As such, the rhythms of the exurban congregation seeking to integrate both long-

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[102]   Huckins and Swigart, 36.

[103]   Huckins and Swigart, 40.

[104]   Huckins and Swigart, 56.

[105]   Huckins and Swigart, 57

[106]   Huckins and Swigart, 71-115.

time residents and newcomers must include opportunities for seeing others, immersing oneself in the culture of others, and contending together for the *shalom* of the community.

In addition to the development of a theological foundation for multi-cultural ministry and peacemaking, the world of social psychology is a helpful field of study for the identification of useful tactics for congregations to employ in seeking to be peacemakers in the exurban environment. While this is a large discipline involving many theories that may be of use in understanding conflict in the exurban context, avenues of conflict resolution, and bridging between cultures, this paper will focus on two approaches: the common ingroup identity model and contact theory.

The common ingroup identity model was introduced by Lowell Gaertner, Jack Dovidio, and colleagues in order to understand how to build bridges across the us versus them chasm.[107] This model is meant to serve as a correction to the "outgroup homogeneity effect."[108] The outgroup homogeneity effect is the tendency among people in one group to view those that are apart of another group as a homogenous unit while maintaining that those in the ingroup are unique.[109] This conclusion, that all in the outgroup are the same, reduces motivation to interact and learn about the outgroup making conflict resolution and peacemaking difficult.[110] This also can lead to those in one group to see the other group as a homogenous whole instead of individuals who bear the image of God, decreasing the ability to see those in the other group as human.[111]

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[107] Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 178.

[108] Cleveland, 51.
[109] Cleveland, 51.

[110] Cleveland, 51.
[111] Cleveland, 51.

The common ingroup identity model states that the way to break down the walls of division erected by the outgroup homogeneity effect is to help members of different groups think of themselves as members of a single group with a common identity. As the individuals begin to see themselves as a part of a single group, attitudes toward outgroup members become more positive and connection is more likely to occur between the groups.[112] Individuals in the group begin to see those in the other group as people who bear the image of God, which changes the nature of interactions between the groups. In short, when two different groups are able to see themselves as part of one large group, members of different groups begin to treat each other more like ingroup members and opportunities for peace can occur.[113]

While the outgroup homogeneity effect develops an understanding as to the conflict and distrust that exists between long-time residents and newcomers in exurban contexts, the common ingroup identity model offers an understanding of how peacemaking might occur in the exurban context. Helping exurbanites in Mount Airy to see themselves as residents of the town of Mount Airy first and foremost instead of long-time or short-term residents may help to create bridges for peacemaking and collaboration within the exurban context. The development of that common identity is integral to the development of an exurban church where long-time residents and newcomers worship together.

In addition to the common ingroup identity model, contact theory offers another perspective on how people from different groups may be able to engage in reconciliation and peacemaking. Christena Cleveland states that cross-cultural contact "is the most powerful

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112   Cleveland, 178.

113   Cleveland, 178.

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antidote to divisions."[114] Contact theory is based on the concept that "relationships between

conflicting groups will improve if they have meaningful contact with one another over an

extended period of time."[115] Brenda Salter McNeil states that this contact between conflicting

groups must occur in certain ways in order to be effective at improving relationships between

groups. First, the contact must be in "mutually beneficial learning environments and involve

multiple opportunities for the participants to have cooperative interactions with one another."[116]

Cleveland adds that the power of contact theory is that group members find that their stereotypes

of the other group do not hold as they engage in cooperative interactions which improves the

relationships between the groups.[117]

     In addition to contact theory, Cleveland also shares that the "extended contact

hypothesis," which is an extension of contact theory, may be helpful in seeing conflicting groups

engage in more positive attitudes toward one another. The extended contact hypothesis states

"that people who are friends with people who are friends with outgroup members are more likely

to have positive attitudes toward the outgroup."[118] As an extension to contact theory, this

hypothesis underscores the importance of community leaders, such as government officials,

pastors, and business leaders, to help bridge the ingroup/outgroup divides in the exurban

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[114]   Cleveland, 153.

[115]   Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 37.

[116]   McNeil, 37.

[117]   Cleveland, 153.

[118]   Cleveland, 173.

context.[119] These individuals are able to serve as initial bridges creating opportunities for greater

contact between members of differing groups. The importance of religious leaders in

peacemaking has been affirmed by both scholars and policymakers as key leaders in helping "to

break down 'us vs. them' polarization and nurture rapprochement."[120]

      While contact theory and the extended contact hypothesis offer helpful and hopeful

lenses to approach cross-cultural conflict, Brenda Salter McNeil cautions against thinking that

contact alone will lead to reconciliation. In her "roadmap to reconciliation" contact is only the

first step on the path to reconciliation. Following these events of contact, which Salter McNeil

calls "catalytic events", there must be realization.[121] In the realization phase, Salter McNeil states

that "vague understanding and intellectual assent… come to an awareness that is contextually

connected."[122] This is where a new reality is discovered. Following realization, the identification

phase "is where we begin to identify with and relate to other people who are experiencing the

same thing."[123] As Salter McNeil states, this is where "your people become my people."[124] The

next phase is the preparation phase. In this phase the transition between a "personal and

relational" journey begins to move "to the structural and the transformational" as preparations

are made to go public.[125] Finally, the last phase of Salter McNeil's model is the activation phase.

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[119]   Cleveland, 173.

[120]   Nathan C Funk, "Peace Starts Now: Religious Contributions to Sustainable Peacemaking," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 30, no. 1 (2012): 60.

[121]   McNeil, 46.
[122]   McNeil, 60.

[123]   McNeil, 70.
    McNeil, 70.
[125]   McNeil, 86.

In this phase the decision is made to "take the risk and get actively involved" in efforts of justice and reconciliation in order to bring about social change.[126]

In the exurban environment, contact theory and the extended contact hypothesis give insight into ways to help bridge the divide between long-time residents and newcomers to the area. In Mount Airy, most newcomers and long-time residents live in different parts of the town, shop at different stores, frequent different restaurants, and generally stay away from one another. The creation of spaces for interaction between newcomers and long-time residents has potential to be formative in the bridging of this divide. This space needs to offer extended contact surrounding a shared identity and purpose allowing for mutually beneficial conversations, and, as the extended contact hypothesis shows, pastors, church leaders, and congregations are uniquely situated to serve as catalysts for the creation of those spaces. In many ways, the peacemaking ministry of the church should look similar to what Dave Gibbons calls being "third culture."[127] As Gibbons explains, "Third culture is a term used by sociologist and by foreign-service workers whose children are immersed in foreign cultures because of their parents' work."[128] These children are able to adapt to a variety of cultures and serve as bridges between cultures because of this adaptability.[129] A similar adaptability and ability to bridge cultures is helpful in developing an ecclesiology for the exurban setting of Mount Airy.

Exurban Ecclesial Landscape

Following this survey of rural, suburban, and urban ecclesial environments; principles of multicultural ministry; and research on peacemaking and conflict resolution, the next piece of existing research integral to an exurban ecclesiology is a survey of the exurban ecclesial

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[126]   McNeil, 99-100.
[127]   Gibbons, 18.

[128]   Gibbons, 18.
[129]   Gibbons, 18-20.

landscape. Ecclesial forms can be difficult to assess without engaging in intense qualitative study using surveys, first-hand experience, and interviews as all local congregations are inherently unique due to the unique group of people that engage in the life of the congregation. Because of the inherent uniqueness of congregations, there can be resistance to the use of ecclesial forms that group churches in various ways. Acknowledging the difficulty that forms can pose, the use of ecclesial forms or models is helpful for assessing how churches that are engaged in similar "ecclesiopraxis" engage in ministry in particular contexts.[130] Christopher James defines ecclesiopraxis as "the whole constellation of theory-laden practices that animate a particular church or practical ecclesiological model."[131] In short, ecclesial forms will be used in this study as a way to simplify the assessment of a broad range of churches engaging in similar ecclesiopraxis, while acknowledging that each local congregation has unique expressions that may not always coincide with the predominant praxis of a particular form.

In his work *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil*, Christopher James offers a typology of churches in Seattle, Washington as a way to understand what kinds of churches are flourishing in a post-Christian context and assess their faithfulness to missional theology. In this work, James identifies four ecclesial forms present in the Seattle context: the Church as Great Commission Team, the Church as Household of the Spirit, the Church as New Community, and the Church as Neighborhood Incarnation.[132] While these ecclesial forms were developed out of extensive research of Seattle churches, each of these ecclesial forms is present and active within

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[130]   Christopher James, *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil: Theology and Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

[131]   James, 7.

[132]   James, 86-134.

Mount Airy's exurban context as well. In addition to these four forms, conversation surrounding

non-traditional ecclesial forms have begun to occur in Mount Airy following the pattern of the

Fresh Expressions movement emanating out of the Anglican and Methodist traditions. Through

the remainder of this section, each ecclesial form will be defined and described. In addition,

examples of each ecclesial form within the town of Mount Airy will be offered based on the

author's firsthand knowledge of those congregations, surveys of their print and digital

publications, and interviews with leadership in those churches.

The Church as Great Commission Team

Churches in the model of Great Commission Team are congregations that tend to "reflect

a mission-centered spirituality."[133] These churches tend to be evangelical in belief and practice,

sometimes to an exaggerated extent. Because of the centrality of mission in the ecclesial form,

these churches tend to understand their existence as working toward accomplishing the mission

set before them as a "disciple-making mission team."[134] These churches tend to see themselves in

opposition to a wider culture that is hostile to the gospel. In addition, they tend to be pragmatic in

nature preferring methods of ministry that work well. Occasionally, these congregations serve

their immediate neighborhood well, but often these churches see their "relationship to their

neighborhood (and city) is more as a launching pad than as a parish."[135]

In Mount Airy, two prominent congregations are built out of the Great Commission Team

framework: Damascus Road Community Church and Mount Airy Bible Church. Both churches

were planted 20-30 years ago with a missional focus. Each of these congregations are deeply

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[133]   James, 86.

[134]   James, 87.

[135]   James, 102.

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evangelical in belief and practice. While Damascus Road Community Church attempts to take a more moderate position in relation to the wider culture, Mount Airy Bible Church tends to view the wider culture as hostile to the gospel leading them to open a Christian private school to foster a Christian learning environment for students. While these two congregations are located in Mount Airy and often serve locally, the reach of their ministries goes far beyond the Mount Airy context. Considering these traits, both Damascus Road Community Church and Mount Airy Bible Church are good examples of the Great Commission Team ecclesial form in Mount Airy.[136]

The Church as Household of the Spirit

Churches in the model of Household of the Spirit tend to enact a vision of the church as "a family of faith who experience the power and presence of God's Spirit in a foreign or unfriendly environment."[137] While Great Commission Team churches are mission-centric in focus, Household of Faith churches tend to be Spirit-centric in focus. This is not to say that they are not missional in focus, but instead that their missional focus is predicated upon their engagement and experience of God's Spirit.[138] As James states, the Household of the Spirit is the "empowered family of God, experiencing God's miraculous healing and offering it to others."[139] These churches are often Pentecostal or charismatic; however, many immigrant churches fit this

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[136] Further information on Damascus Road Community Church can be found at http://www.damascus.com. Further information on Mount Airy Bible Church can be found at https://www.mountairy.church/.

[137] James, 104.

[138] James, 104.

[139] James, 106.

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model as well due to the emphasis on the church being a family of faith.[140] Similarly to Great Commission Team churches, Household of Faith churches tend to view the culture around them as being "foreign or hostile" to the family of faith gathered as the church.[141]

In Mount Airy, Household of Faith churches are alive and well; however, they are not as visible as other ecclesial models. With an influx of Latinx individuals to the area, a few Latinx congregations that engage in the Household of Faith model have developed in Mount Airy. These congregations do not have impressive websites or other marketing tools; however, they offer refuge to those living in a foreign culture.[142] In addition, Mount Airy's ecclesial landscape hosts a few Pentecostal and charismatic congregations that tend to operate in the Household of Faith ecclesial model. One example of these is Lighthouse Ministries, which is a Spirit-centric worshiping community with a focus on the congregation being a "family" or "community" of faith.[143]

The Church as New Community

A third ecclesial model is the church as New Community. Churches built upon the New Community model tend to "reflect an approach to spirituality that is worship and community centered, strong denominational identity, and a socially embodied approach to mission."[144] Christopher James shows that these congregations tend to be focused upon a specific community and tend to be highly contextual while maintaining a strong liturgical identity.[145] These congregations tend not to be very large, and they are often defined based on their distrust and

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[140]   James, 105.

[141]   James, 104.
[142]   Aureliano Hernandez, interview with author, phone call, March 8, 2021.

[143]   Further information on Lighthouse Ministries can be found at https://lhm.church/.
[144]   James, 112.

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dislike of other ecclesial models, namely the Great Commission Team model.[146] Unlike Great

Commission Team and Household of Faith congregations, New Community congregations tend

to have a positive outlook toward culture understanding "God is present and active in all contexts

and cultures."[147]

While the ecclesial presence in the center of Mount Airy is sparse, Saint James Episcopal

Church is a great example of a New Community congregation. Saint James Episcopal Church is

located on North Main Street, less than a half mile from the center of town. The congregation is

heavily involved in the life of the town through the development of a nursery school, opening a

thrift shop on Main Street, sponsoring social outreaches, and partnering with local schools. In

addition, Saint James Episcopal Church maintains a traditional, high church liturgy as is

common in the Episcopal denomination. While New Community churches are not as common in

Mount Airy, Saint James Episcopal Church is a great example of this ecclesial model.[148]

The Church as Neighborhood Incarnation

Churches in the ecclesial model of church as Neighborhood Incarnation are churches that

are deeply contextual to the local community immediately surrounding the congregation.[149]

Neighborhood Incarnation churches reflect a contextual identity with a desire "to contribute to

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[145]   James, 112.

[146]   James, 170.

[147]   James, 169.

[148]   Further information on Saint James Episcopal Church can be found at https://www.stjamesmtairy.org/.

[149]   James, 125.

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their neighborhoods and make a socially embodied witness."[150] These congregations can have features of the three ecclesial models above; however, they are differentiated by a distinctive emphasis on the local neighborhood.[151] These churches seek to embody principles of hospitality in local, tangible, and relational ways.[152] These congregations tend to view their context with a mix of optimism and realism seeing both the beauty of the culture and the difficulties.[153]

In the Mount Airy exurban context, there are a multitude of small, neighborhood congregations in the rural neighborhoods surrounding the center of the town. Many of these congregations are a part of the United Methodist Church. Historically, these congregations have sought to develop strong contextual ties to those living in a small geographic area around the church. Examples of these congregations are Marvin Chapel United Methodist Church, Prospect United Methodist Church, and Taylorsville United Methodist Church.[154] Despite the multitude of these congregations surrounding the town of Mount Airy, the author is not aware of good examples of Neighborhood Incarnational congregations in the Main Street area of Mount Airy.

Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions is a fifth model of church that has grown in popularity recently. The fresh expressions movement started as a part of the Anglican denomination in England in a time of stagnation within parishes. Audrey Warren and Kenneth H. Carter define a fresh expression as "a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who

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[150]   James, 125.

[151]   James, 125.
[152]   James, 126-127

[153]   James, 131.
[154]   These congregations do not have a strong internet presence for further information. Descriptions of these congregations comes from the author's firsthand experiences with these congregations.

are not yet members of any church."[155] Fresh expressions tend to see people as parts of networks instead of neighborhoods.[156] As such, fresh expressions tend to be highly contextual, similar to Neighborhood Incarnational congregations; however, the contextualization is around existing networks of individuals that are typically created around similar existing affinities.[157] Fresh expressions seek to build contextual forms of church for subcultures of the community out of a holistic, missional impulse.[158] Many congregations in this ecclesial form tend to flip the discipleship pathway for individuals entering into the life of the congregation. Instead of seeking to invite individuals to a worship service, then join the congregational community, and finally engage in mission, Fresh Expressions congregations tend to lead with missional engagement, then create community out of that missional engagement, and finally move to participation in worship.[159] All of these factors pulled together often leads these congregations to hold a positive viewpoint of the community seeking to bring wholeness to the entirety of the community through existing subcultures.

Fresh expressions are included as a model for church within this study of the exurban context because of the growing popularity of this ecclesial form and conversations that have occurred regarding their efficacy in the Mount Airy context. Currently, the author is not aware of

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[155] Kenneth H. Carter, Jr. and Audrey Warren, *Fresh Expressions: A New Kind of Methodist Church For People Not In Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 3.

[156] Carter and Warren, 54.

[157] Carter and Warren, 55.

[158] Travis Collins, *From the Steeple to the Street: Innovating Mission and Ministry Through Fresh Expressions of Church* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2016), Kindle location 3098.

[159] Jon Ritner, *Positively Irritating: Embracing a Post-Christian World to Form a More Faithful and Innovative Church* (Cody, Wyoming: 100 Movements Publishing, 2020), 30.

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any fresh expressions occurring within Mount Airy; however, the presence of multiple

subcultures, including those of old-timer and newcomer, warrants further study on the missional

faithfulness and exurban viability of the fresh expressions ecclesial form.

Gwinnett County Case Study

The final piece of this survey of existing research integral to exurban ministry involves a

case study of an exurban community outside of Atlanta, Georgia. While relatively little has been

written concerning churches within exurban environments, both Nancy Eiesland and Nancy

Ammerman have written about Gwinnet County, Georgia, an area that underwent exurban

transition in the 1980's and 1990's.[160] Similar to Mount Airy, Gwinnet County, and specifically

the town of Dacula which Eielsand writes of, is a location in which large tracts of farmland have

been developed into subdivisions and shopping centers causing those who have grown up in that

area to struggle to preserve historical patterns of living as urbanites from Atlanta move to the

area.[161] While neither Eiesland nor Ammerman offer a prescriptive lens on how to create ministry

to both newcomers and old-timers in Gwinnet County, Eiesland offers a survey of how existing

congregations responded to exurban transition in the town of Dacula.

In Dacula, there were three positive responses by churches trying to respond to exurban

transition. The first was a generalized approach to ministry in which the congregation invests in

high-intensity religious experiences with limited systems of accountability for congregants.[162]

These congregations sought to be full-service churches that attracted individuals through various

experiences of worship. The second approach to ministry found in response to exurban transition

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[160]   Nancy Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 32.

[161]   Ammerman, 32.

[162]   Eiesland, Kindle location 795.

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in Dacula was a specialized approach to ministry in which the congregation intentionally sought to appeal to a small segment of the larger population.[163] In Dacula, this was represented by the Hinton Memorial United Methodist Church who sought to cater to those desiring to engage with the religious ethos of the area's rural heritage.[164] Finally, a third approach to ministry found in Dacula was a decentralized approach to ministry in which the congregation intentionally sought to birth new local congregations in order to reach more people in the area.[165] In this model for ministry, the emphasis was on developing a larger number of smaller congregations to reach more people in the area through a variety of leaders developed through the congregation.[166]

While these three approaches to ministry saw positive response from the community of Dacula, it is interesting to note Eiesland's commentary on First Baptist-Dacula, the only downtown church in the town. Eiesland notes that the ministry model adopted by First Baptist-Dacula was "to mix and match stylistic and cultural responses in an effort to appeal to everyone."[167] Despite attempting to please everyone, Eiesland notes that the church effectively drove everyone away through engaging in this model.[168]

This case study on models for ministry adopted by congregations in response to exurban transition in their community offers a couple important conclusions. First, a congregation in which newcomers and old-timers in the community worshiped together did not occur without intentionality. As the three successful approaches to ministry suggest, it is easier to cater to one

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[163]   Eiesland, Kindle location 806.

[164]   Eiesland, Kindle location 806.
[165]   Eiesland, Kindle location 884.
[166]   Eiesland, Kindle location 914.
[167]   Eiesland, Kindle location 947.

[168]   Eiesland, Kindle location 947.

culture in the community than to engage across cultures. It requires intentionality for a church to effectively reach both old-timers and newcomers within the community. Second, a simple model for ministry that seeks to please everyone within the community did not result in a missionally effective model for ministry. Simply mixing and matching aspects of urban, suburban, and rural culture within a congregation did not create a multi-cultural expression of exurban ministry. Something more nuanced and intentional is required in order to develop a missionally effective model for exurban ministry.

While the amount of literature available on exurban ecclesial environments is limited, the overview above helps to give an understanding of issues and circumstances that are important to the study of exurban ecclesial forms. In this study, the exurban environment was compared and contrasted to urban, suburban, and rural environments. In addition, this overview also included common trends among ecclesial forms developed in urban, suburban, and rural contexts. Due to the nature of exurban ministry, an overview of peacemaking and conflict resolution studies was offered, as well as, an overview of various ecclesial forms, their definitions, and connection to their presence in Mount Airy, Maryland. Finally, Gwinnet County in Georgia offered a case study of exurban ministry, which will be helpful as conclusions are drawn later in this dissertation.

Foundations of Missional Theology

Having shared the above information on areas of study integral to exurban ministry, this project will now turn to the task of developing a theological foundation from which to assess the exurban ecclesial economy of Mount Airy, MD. For this project, a foundation of missional theology will be developed in order to assess ecclesial forms in Mount Airy. While there are other theological frameworks that may offer a different view into the ecclesial life of Mount

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Airy's ecclesial forms, missional theology seeks to assess as to whether church forms in Mount Airy remain faithful to the *missio Dei* present throughout Scripture. In developing this missional theological framework the term *missio Dei* will be defined. Following that, five aspects of missional engagement will be explored: being, doing, telling, peacemaking, and right relationship with culture.

Missio Dei

While the term "mission" has become common vernacular within the contemporary church, the term was used exclusively to reference the doctrine of the Trinity until the sixteenth century. Prior to the sixteenth century, the term "mission" was used to describe the Father sending the Son and the Holy Spirit being sent by the Father and the Son.[169] While the origins of the term in the church are grounded in trinitarian theology, from the sixteenth century until the twentieth century, the term "mission" was used for a variety of activities engaged in by the church that sought to see people come to faith in Jesus. While there are many examples of the church engaging in missions work to non-Christian people in which there was care and love shown to them, too often the story of missions work was closely aligned with nationalistic motives of the state and was accomplished at the tip of a sword.[170]

Despite the difficulty of the past, a resurgence in seeking to understand and better define the term "mission" in the church has occurred throughout much of the twentieth century. Theologians, such as Karl Barth, began to break from Enlightenment approaches opening the door for a conception of mission derived from the nature of God to resurface on the theological

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[169]   David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, NY: ORBIS, 2011), Kindle location 381.

[170]   See Stephen B. Bevans, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: ORBIS, 2004) or David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, NY: ORBIS, 2011) for a thorough exploration of the role of Christian mission throughout history.

landscape.[171] At the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952, the term *missio Dei* was omitted; however, the basic concept of *missio Dei* surfaced clearly for the first time in hundreds of years. At the conference, the classic trinitarian doctrine was expanded to include the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church as well.[172]

In recent decades, this expansion to the classical definition of the *missio Dei* has been expounded upon and commented on by many scholars and theologians. David Bosch states succinctly in his seminal work, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, "*Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people."[173] Instead of mission being seen as the programs and ministries that increase membership, an understanding of the *missio Dei* calls the church to be participants in the work of God in our world offering the fullness of salvation found in service of God.[174] This comprehensive understanding of mission coupled with trinitarian origins has led Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile to state that "mission is not just one more activity or dimension of the church's life; rather, it flows out of the very identity and nature of God."[175] In light of this, Christopher J. H. Wright provides a simple, yet expansive

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[171]   Bosch, Kindle location 9144.

[172]   Bosch, Kindle location 9144.

[173]   Bosch, Kindle location 585.

[174]   Stephen B. Bevans, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: ORBIS, 2004), Kindle location 463.

[175]   Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2018), Kindle location 955.

definition of the *missio Dei* stating that mission is "all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose."[176]

In order to understand what God is doing and what his purposes are for the whole of creation, it is important to note scriptural foundations for understanding the *missio Dei*. While a full survey of biblical texts with missional implications lies beyond the scope of this paper, a brief survey will offer a foundation for understanding the mission that lies at the heart of God's identity and the church's identity.[177] While David Bosch has stated that there is "no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent by God…to win others to faith in Yahweh," Christopher J. H. Wright shows that throughout the Old and New Testaments there are a multitude of texts that could be examined in the development of a theology of mission.[178] Wright notes that the missional mandate of Scripture starts in the Creation story, which calls for humankind to care for Creation as stewards, protectors, and servants (Genesis 2:15).[179]

In addition, Wright shows the continuation of the *missio Dei* in the Old Testament through the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12. In this covenant, Abraham and his descendants are called to be a blessing to the nations, which Wright connects to Paul's missional theology that compelled him to take the gospel to all nations in the New Testament.[180] Wright notes that

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[176]   Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, 1st edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 2010), Kindle location 182.

[177]   See *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* by Christophe J. H. Wright for a thorough biblical theology of mission.

[178]   Bosch, Kindle location 660.

[179]   Christopher J. H. Wright, Kindle location 679.

[180]   Christopher J. H. Wright, Kindle location 918.

the Abrahamic covenant's narrative of Abraham being called to leave his homeland and fully

obey God is the archetype for Paul's missionary journey and all missional living: to leave the

ways and forms of our world and obey God fully.[181] This leads Wright to state that the

Abrahamic covenant also calls the people of God toward righteous living and Christian ethics in

order to be a blessing to the nations.[182]

Two statements made by Jesus in the gospels are foundational for understanding the

missio Dei. The first comes from Luke 4:16-21, where Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah while

sharing the core of his ministry:

> "[16] He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, [17] and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
> [18] 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
>   because he has anointed me
>   to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
>   and recovery of sight for the blind,
> to set the oppressed free,
> [19]   to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'
> [20] Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him."[183]

In this passage, Jesus speaks of the redemptive nature of his mission, which Bosch states

becomes possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is available to all

nations.[184]

The second passage of Scripture is likely the most well-known passage on mission. The

Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 states,

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[181]   Christopher J. H. Wright, Kindle location 1260.

[182]   Christopher J. H. Wright, Kindle location 1533.
[183]   Luke 4:16-21 (NIV)

[184]   Bosch, Kindle location 2379.

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> "**18** Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"[185]

While it is important to note the call of Jesus for the disciples to "go", it is also important to note what they are to do. Matthew's call is to "make disciples," which Bosch states, "means living out the teachings of Jesus, which the evangelist has recorded in great detail in his gospel."[186] Bosch continues stating, "the church is only to be found where disciples live in community with one another and their Lord and where they seek to live according to the will of the Father."[187] He concludes commentary on this passage stating, "a missionary community is one that understands itself as being both different from and committed to its environment; it exists within its context in a way which is both winsome and challenging."[188]

Paul sums up this discussion on the *missio Dei* well in Ephesians 1:9-10 stating, "…he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."[189] In this summation of the God's purposes through Christ, Paul declares that the mission of God is nothing less than the restoration of unity of "all things in

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[185]   Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

[186]   Bosch, Kindle location 2161.

[187]   Bosch, Kindle location 2191.

[188]   Bosch, Kindle location 2204.

[189]   Ephesians 1:9-10 (NIV)

heaven and on earth under Christ."[190] The *missio Dei* involves God's active engagement to bring

unity, restoration, redemption, and reconciliation throughout all of Creation. This summation,

alongside the theological and scriptural work above, leads to the statement that the *missio Dei* is

nothing less than the redemption and restoration of all creation under Jesus Christ.

This scriptural foundation of mission and trinitarian theology of mission work together to

offer a picture of the church's role in joining into the *missio Dei*, which is existent within the life

of the trinity itself. Reggie McNeal states, "The missional church believes it is God who is on

mission and that we are to join him in it. The missional church is made up of missionaries; the

people of God partnering with God in his redemptive mission in the world."[191] In a similar vein,

Jon Ritner states that the church is called to be an "*amuse-bouche* – a foretaste of the kingdom of

God, so that when the world sampled us, they would long to know how they could fully

experience God's kingdom."[192] Dean Flemming offers an important framework of mission

partnership in the church, which will serve as the framework for the remainder of this discussion

on mission. This framework is based on Flemming's exposition of God's mission in the Bible. In

the framework, Flemming states that God's mission has three dimensions: "being, doing, and

telling."[193] Michael Goheen offers a similar framework stating that the church is called to be "a

people whose lives, deeds, and words bear witness to the gospel of the kingdom both nearby and

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[190]   Ephesians 1:10 (NIV)

[191]   Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, 1st edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 21.

[192]   Ritner, 43.

[193]   Dean Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 14.

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far away."[194] Using the scriptural and theological foundation laid above, the next portion of this paper will seek to understand what it means for the church to engage in missional being, missional doing, and missional telling as the church joins in the *missio Dei.* In addition to these principles for missional engagement, peacemaking and a right relationship with culture will be explored as integral aspects of a missional theology for exurbia considering the conflict present between old-timers and newcomers in the exurban context.

Being

The first aspect of developing a missional ecclesiology involves being. The church, due to its participation in the *missio Dei,* is called to embody a different way of being in the world than what is normative in the culture surrounding it. This call to embody the purposes of God is existent throughout Scripture. In Genesis 12, God selects Abram and his family to be a chosen people through whom God's redemptive story would unfold. In doing so, the Lord's call to Abram was,

> "I will make you into a great nation,
>   and I will bless you;
> I will make your name great,
>   and you will be a blessing."[195]

Abram and his descendants are called to "be a blessing" to those around them as they embody a different way of living in light of being God's chosen people through whom redemption will come.

Jesus picks up on this redemptive theme of embodying the *missio Dei* in Matthew 5:13-14 saying, "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty

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[194]   Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 191.

[195]   Genesis 12:2 (NIV)

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again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."[196] Yet again, the call, this time to Jesus' disciples and the crowds gathered for the Sermon on the Mount, is for the people of God to embody the *missio Dei* by being salt and light. Jesus' teaching is more than a call to do things that are salty and enlightening, however good that may be. Instead, his call is for the people of God to embody the mission of God and kingdom of God in such a way that they embody the mission themselves.

Finally, Peter's letter to the church scattered throughout the Roman world in 1 Peter brings around the idea of embodiment of a different way when Peter states, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession…"[197] As Abram and his descendants were called to be a chosen people in order to be a blessing to the world around them, now Peter declares that the church continues this call to be a chosen people who are called to embody God's missional purposes in the world.

Through this scriptural survey, it can be said that the church is called to embody something to the world because it is meant to serve "as a sign of the kingdom of God."[198] Michael Goheen, in his work on the writings of Leslie Newbigin states "the gospel is an invitation to believe, follow, love, and obey Jesus, and that means entry into his kingdom-community and costly participation in his comprehensive vision."[199] Later in the same work, Goheen describes the church living in light of the kingdom as "a people who live in the already-

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[196]   Matthew 5:13-14 (NIV)

[197]   1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

[198]   Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and Khiok-Khng Yeo, *The Church from Every Tribe and Tongue: Ecclesiology in the Majority World*, ed. Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2018), Kindle location 727.

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not yet era with the vocation of making the end of history, accomplished in Christ and given in the Spirit, known to all the nations and to the ends of the earth."[200] It is the proleptic living into the kingdom of God that sets the church apart as a missional people engaging in the work of God on earth. As N.T. Wright states in commentary upon Paul's letters in the New Testament, "we should live in the present as a people who are to be made complete in the future."[201]

Rich Villodas, in the book *The Deeply Formed Life,* makes a similar claim in relation to what he calls "deeply formed mission."[202] Villodas states, "Deeply formed mission is first about who we are becoming before what we are doing."[203] In this, Villodas is stating a similar idea to what Goheen, Newbigin, and Flemming state above: participation in the mission of God begins with who we are – our being. Villodas goes on to show how our doing must be rooted in our being. He states, "When we're doing without being, we're liable to serve in order to gain the approval of others, lead to mask a deep sense of insecurity, volunteer to get God to love us more, start new things to prove our worth, and over-function, not giving adequate space for our own health…Our engagement in the world becomes marked by a kind of stale obligation rather than joyful participation."[204] Dave Gibbons adds that embodying the message of the mission of God is

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[199]   Goheen, 36.

[200]   Goheen, 57.

[201]   N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church,*

[202]   Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2021), 171.

[203]   Villodas, 172.

[204]   Villodas, 175.

integral because "if the medium doesn't match the method, the message is incongruous."[205] Engagement with the *missio Dei* begins with being.

The question then arises as to what the church is called to embody as a part of a missional ecclesiology. The first trait that the church is called to embody is the declaration that Jesus is Lord over all creation. Missiologist Alan Hirsch states that this declaration sits at the heart of what it means to be authentically Christian, and it serves as a guard against syncretism with the culture surrounding the church.[206] This declaration is more than simply a statement of one's mouth or cognitive assent to an idea of Jesus' lordship. Instead, as a part of our being, this declaration must lead to a life that embodies the lordship of Jesus over all areas of life. The missional church must be a church that lives in submission to Jesus' lordship because it is his mission in the first place. The church is called to participate in the *missio Dei*, which requires submitting to Jesus' lordship.

This declaration leads to the next trait of being, which is a holistic approach to the gospel. As the misión integral movement in Latin America has taught, the whole gospel is intended to be linked to the whole of life under the lordship of Christ so that the "reign of God and God's justice may be made visible in particular historical contexts."[207] Jesus' lordship extends to all areas of life and throughout all of creation. In the same way, the redemptive, restorative mission of God reaches into all of creation and all areas of life. As such, embodying the mission of God in the world requires an embodiment of the holistic nature of God's mission. In other words, the

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[205]   Gibbons, 20.

[206]   Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 92.

[207]   Green, Pardue, and Yeo, Kindle location 1130.

claim that Jesus is Lord is to be embodied throughout all of life within the church that seeks to

live as a participant in the *missio Dei.* This means that God's mission goes far beyond simply

getting people into heaven. It is the holistic redemption and restoration of all of creation, of

which the church is meant to embody to the world.

Finally, in being a community shaped and formed by a hope grounded in Jesus'

resurrection and coming kingdom, the church is also called to embody a "unity-in-diversity."[208]

Amos Yong states that the trinitarian genesis of the *missio Dei* shows that mission occurs from a

unity built out of a diversity of persons. As such, Yong states that the missional church is

intended to be driven by the power of the Holy Spirit to become a unified community built out of

diversity.[209] Goheen, commenting on Leslie Newbigin's writing, states, "the unity of the church

has a missionary purpose because it illustrates the End, a unity of humankind that transcends all

usual human divisions and parties. It is a visible proof that Jesus is not simply one more name of

a great religious leader. Rather, he is the Creator and Ruler of all and will one day reconcile all

things to himself."[210] A powerful way for the church to live as an embodiment of the holistic

redemptive and restorative purposes of God is to intentionally seek to build unity within the

diversity present throughout creation. As such, churches engaged in the *missio Dei* are always

engaging in some form of multi-cultural ministry as they embody the unity-in-diversity of the

Trinity. A missional ecclesiology requires the church to embody the unity found in Jesus Christ

within the diversity of the context in which the congregation is located. Jon Ritner sums up the

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[208]   Amos Yong, *Mission after Pentecost (Mission in Global Community): The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 277.

[209]   Yong, 277.

[210]   Goheen, 63.

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importance of missional being saying, "Our discipleship must deeply inform and impact the way we live. It is essential to embody the alternative Jesus-centered kingdom that challenges the dominion of individualism, materialism, and self-protectionism around us.[211]

Doing

The embodiment of redemptive qualities in light of the kingdom of God is not only something that is intended to be a part of the church's missional being but is to be exemplified through the church's missional doing. Luke 4:16-20 shares that Jesus' mission included redemptive acts such as setting the oppressed free and opening blind eyes, so too is the church that partners in the *missio Dei* to engage in actions in the world that exemplify God's mission to the world.[212] While the primary verb throughout Luke 4:16-20 is "proclaim," the ministry of Jesus shows that this proclamation resulted in doing works. Jesus' ministry includes the restoration of sight to multiple blind people. His ministry includes setting people free from evil spirits and various infirmities. His ministry includes welcoming those who are on the margins of society. Following the example of Jesus Christ, the church is called to act – to do. Jesus' declaration of his mission in Luke 4:16-21 does not stop at mere words. Jesus makes this declaration, and then spends much of the rest of his ministry doing redemptive and restorative works among the people. When the church embodies the mission of God and a Kingdom ethic, the church is compelled to engage in acts of redemption and restoration toward all of creation. The missional church does "the work of justice, beauty, evangelism, the renewal of space, time, and matter," as N.T. Wright states.[213] In

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[211]   Ritner, xx.

[212]   Bosch, Kindle location 2219.

[213]   N.T. Wright, 270.

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short, Jesus' ministry was all about doing redeeming, restoring, and reconciling works that were integrally tied to the *missio Dei.*

The Apostle Paul connects this ministry of reconciling and redeeming works of Jesus to the ministry of the church in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 which states,

> "**17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! **18** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

In this passage, Paul makes the connection between Jesus' doing and the church's doing. The church has been given "the ministry of reconciliation," which means that the church is called to reconciliatory action. As such, the missional church is a church that is an active participant in God's reconciliatory mission throughout all of creation.

David Bosch states the concept well when he says, "the inner life of the church is connected to its outer life."[214] In speaking of "deeply formed mission," Villodas agrees stating, "The invitation to deeply formed mission is one that starts with the liberating understanding that he [God] is always on mission but from a place of being. From the quality of God's life, God acts."[215] The missional church is not a church that seeks only to live a "private and personal, vertical-relationship gospel," which does not challenge the ways of the world.[216] The church's being is tied to its doing.

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[214]   Bosch, Kindle location 3048.

[215]   Villodas, 176.

[216]   Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Seventh Impression edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 90.

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Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's kingdom of redemption and restoration has been inaugurated. As such, the church is called to engage in redemptive and restorative acts in the world offering a picture of the renewal of all things that God is accomplishing.[217] The church is called to live proleptically into the Kingdom of God as a core part of its witness to the world. In light of this hope of the gospel, N.T. Wright states that the missional church is to "go to the work of justice, beauty, evangelism, the renewal of space, time, and matter as the anticipation of the eventual goal and implementation of what Jesus achieved in his death and resurrection."[218] Van Gelder and Zscheile add that our being "is expressed by doing things in relationship with neighbors – acts of mercy, compassion, justice, and service," in order to reflect God's reconciling acts to the world.[219]

Not only is missional action that is formed out of an embodiment of the *missio Dei* faithful to Scripture, but it has also been proven to be integral in the spiritual growth of individuals within a congregation. Willow Creek Community Church conducted a study on the effectiveness of various forms of discipleship in 2007 in order to better understand what avenues facilitated greater spiritual maturity. In this study, it was discovered that one of the most important spiritual practices leading to deeper discipleship is serving others.[220] This study shows

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[217]   J. R. Woodward, Dan White Jr, and Alan Hirsch, *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove,. IL: IVP Books, 2016), 127.

[218]   N.T. Wright, 270.

[219]   Van Gelder and Zscheile, Kindle location 5882.

[220]   Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

that missional doing not only is a faithful response to Scripture, but is also an effective means of deepening discipleship with in a congregation.

While it is important for the church to engage in these acts of restoration, redemption, and compassion, it is equally important for the church to engage in these acts in contextually appropriate ways. Van Gelder and Zscheile state, "It is in the local and concrete, not the abstract, where we join up with what God is doing to restore community in Christ in the power of the Spirit. Such a neighborhood focus plays out not so much in organized church activities or programs, but through abiding and accompanying – cultivating relationships, hearing stories, and discerning God's presence among the lives of neighbors. Out of these relationships and practices come opportunities for witness and service."[221] Similarly, John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association, calls the church to seek to do ministry locally alongside the existing individuals, families, organizations, and assets within the community.[222] By utilizing the assets within the context of ministry, the missional action of the church does not occur in the abstract or theoretical. Instead, it is integrally tied to the unique challenges, concerns, assets, and helps within the local community. This requires the church to live out the *missio Dei* by engaging locally and contextually in such a way as to mediate the call of Christ in a faithful way. As such, the church is called to embody the mission of God within a specific location through contextual acts of redemption, restoration, and compassion that give witness to God's great mission for all of creation.

Missiologist Leslie Newbigin offers a framework for why the church should engage in missional acts. First, Newbigin states that missional acts "are essential to the very nature of

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[221]   Van Gelder and Zscheile, Kindle location 5646.

[222]   Perkins, 23.

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salvation and the church."[223] They are not to be seen as optional or secondary. Instead they sit at

the heart and soul of what it means to be Christian. Second, Newbigin states that the deeds of the

church give "witness to the coming of the kingdom in Jesus."[224] Third, Newbigin states that the

deeds of the church serve as "an expression of love and compassion."[225] Fourth, he states that

deeds are "aimed at conversion to Jesus."[226] Fifth, Newbigin states that these missional acts seek

to help transform culture around the church.[227] In all, Newbigin and others show the importance

of missional doing as a part of a full participation in the *missio Dei*.

Telling

In addition to being and doing as pieces of engaging in the *missio Dei*, the missional

church is also called to "tell". Whether one uses the terms preach, proclaim, or tell, there is an

aspect of mission that requires verbalization in addition to embodying and acting upon the

gospel. As the church embodies the ways of the kingdom of God and does things living into the

proleptic reality of that kingdom, the church is then called to "tell its story to neighbors in ways

that are faithful to God and intelligible to those neighbors."[228] The apostle Paul states in his letter

to the church in Rome,

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[223]   Goheen, 88.

[224]   Goheen, 89.

[225]   Goheen, 89.

[226]   Goheen, 90.

[227]   Goheen, 90.

[228]   Van Gelder and Zscheile, Kindle location 5888.

"[14] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15] And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'
[16] But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' [17] Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."[229]

In this passage, Paul makes it abundantly clear that the church is called to preach and proclaim the good news as a part of its missional engagement through referencing the prophet Isaiah's words in Isaiah 52:7 which state, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"[230] These passages, when taken together, show that the church is called to proclaim the beautiful kingdom story to the world around it.

In addition, Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 to the early church gathered at Jesus' ascension call the church to engage in missional proclamation as a part of their missional identity. Acts 1:8 states, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[231] Dean Flemming in giving commentary to this verse states, "Jesus doesn't say, 'Go out and testify!' Rather, he gives his followers an identity: they are 'his witnesses.' And he promises what the Holy Spirit will do through them. They will participate in a mission of bearing witness to Jesus that starts in Jerusalem and radiates from there to the ends of the earth."[232] From the prophet

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[229]   Romans 10:14-17 NIV

[230]   Isaiah 52:7 NIV

[231]   Acts 1:8 NIV

[232]   Flemming, 135.

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Isaiah through Jesus and to Paul, the theme of missional proclamation runs as a thread throughout Scripture. The question arises as to what is to be proclaimed and what that proclamation is to look like. In addition, it is only when the church faithfully embodies the mission and has proven the authenticity of that embodiment through engaging in redemptive and restorative acts that the church earns the right to be able to speak into the context in which the church is located.

The proclamation of the church is meant to be in keeping with the *missio Dei* and the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus' resurrection. As such, the message proclaimed by the church should be one that is holistic in nature, reflecting and speaking to the reign of God over all of life and creation.[233] The church's message is one of reconciliation with God, with humanity, and with all of creation.[234] Christopher J. H. Wright adds that, "the Christian gospel does not just announce the concept 'God reigns'; it outlines exactly how that reign has been revealed to the world… the core content of the gospel is the work of God's anointed king, Jesus."[235] Pulled together, the message the missional church is called to proclaim to the world is the reconciliation between God, man, and all creation that has occurred through the breaking forth of the kingdom of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This leads to the question of what the proclamation of that message is to look like for the church on mission. N.T. Wright states that the proclamation of God's redemptive and reconciliatory work is intended to flow from the church's living out of the kingdom of God,

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[233]   Van Gelder and Zscheile, Kindle location 5901.

[234]   Bevans, Kindle location 1983.

[235]   Christopher J. H. Wright, Kindle location 3471.

which will spread the word of God powerfully.[236] Lesslie Newbigin agrees stating that following

our missional being and doing, "Something has happened which makes people aware of a new

reality, and therefore the question arises: What is this reality? The communication of the gospel

is the answering of that question."[237] This underscores why being and doing are listed before

telling in what it means to be a church engaged with the mission of God. Just as our doing is

found to be inauthentic without an embodiment of the mission of God, so too does our telling

prove to be inauthentic without missional being and doing. Our proclamation of God's

redemptive and restorative purposes in the world must occur upon a strong foundation of

missional being and doing.

     In addition to having proclamation flow from being and doing, Van Gelder and Zscheile

note the need for the missional church to proclaim in inclusive, participatory, and collaborative

ways.[238] Instead of proclamation being understood as something accomplished by a member of

the clergy from a pulpit on a Sunday morning, this paradigm for proclamation is inclusive of the

words and proclamation of all people within the body of Christ as a part of a participatory

culture. The missional church understands that all of what the church does and says is a

proclamation of something. The proclamation of the *missio Dei* and kingdom of God do not

solely consist in pulpit preaching. Instead, all of the congregation should engage in missional

proclamation of God's restorative and redemptive acts. The missional church participates in

holistic proclamation of God's purposes in the world.

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[236]   N.T. Wright, 267.

[237]   Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Later Printing Used edition (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Geneva SZ: Eerdmans, 1989), Kindle location 2506.

[238]   Van Gelder and Zscheile, Kindle location 6265.

Amos Yong offers a similar concept in calling for the church in the power of the Spirit "to reorient even our preaching as dialogical rather than monological" that is founded in interaction between people where transformation can occur through gospel proclamation.[239] Often, the best opportunities for missional proclamation occur through everyday dialogue that occurs between individuals. When individual members of the church, and the church as a whole, have faithfully embodied the mission and proven authenticity through redemptive and restorative acts, then missional proclamation overflows out of every conversation, interaction, and encounter. Gabe Lyons agrees stating, "The perception of Christians will only change through consistent exposure, over time, to Christ's followers who take seriously their call to proclaim and embody the gospel in everything they do, everywhere they go."[240] As such, the proclamation of the message of reconciliation and redemption offered through Jesus Christ is to be communicated through dialogical interactions between people where the Spirit can engage in moments of transformation inviting others on the journey of being, doing, and telling in partnership with the *missio Dei.*

As a final piece, Dean Flemming shows that missional proclamation should also be contextual to the place in which one is located. Flemming states, "Jesus consistently tailored his teaching and preaching to his audience. He conveyed good news in ways that made sense to his Jewish hearers."[241] Jesus' usage of agricultural, fishing, and temple metaphors was not random. Instead, Jesus intentionally contextualized missional proclamation in such a way as to be able to

[239]   Yong, 283.

[240]   Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America*, 1st edition (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), 214.

[241]   Flemming, 67.

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best connect with those around him and the world in which he lived. The church is always called to follow in Christ's footsteps seeking to contextualize the proclamation of the mission of God to the culture and locale in which one is located. Missional telling requires thoughtful translation of the mission of God into local contexts.

Peacemaking

In the book *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World,* Jon Huckins and Jer Swigart note that, "…while the redemption of the human soul was in God's peacemaking focus, so was the restoration of interpersonal relationships, broken systems, and global conflicts."[242] Huckins and Swigart continue connecting the peacemaking ministry of the church to the *missio Dei* stating, "Peacemaking is the mission of God and vocation of God's people. While it is hard work, peacemaking is neither a strategy to employ nor an obligation to uphold. It is a life fueled by our identity as the reconciled beloved."[243] As stated above, peacemaking is primarily concerned about seeking *shalom,* which "indicates wholeness, completeness, fullness, salvation, and flourishing."[244] As such, an important piece of participating in the *missio Dei* is to engage in peacemaking within the context the church finds itself. While this peacemaking ministry will likely look different in various contexts, the connection of peacemaking to the mission of God is integrally important within the exurban context due to the conflict occurring between long-time residents and newcomers to the community.

Divisions within the body of Christ are nothing new to the church. These conflicts, and the need to seek *shalom,* are present throughout Scripture. In Acts 10, one of the clearest

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[242]   Huckins and Swigart, 11.

[243]   Huckins and Swigart, 40.

[244]   Huckins and Swigart, 23.

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examples of the call for reconciliation comes in Peter's vision as messengers from Cornelius'

house come to find him. In this vision, God, through a voice, tells Peter to eat various animals

considered to be unclean based on Jewish law.[245] Peter initially states that he will not do as the

voice says; however, the voice responds saying, "'Do not call anything impure that God has

made clean.'"[246] Eventually, Peter meets Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and states, "'You are

well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has

shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.'"[247] In this passage, God shows Peter

clearly that his desire is not to have a Gentile church and a Jewish church, but instead that God's

desire for the church is to see reconciliation and peacemaking occur among groups that have

been at conflict with one another.

> Paul speaks to the same Jewish/Gentile conflict in the letter to the Ephesians stating:
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> "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, but which he put to death their hostility."[248]

Paul shows that God's desire in the church is for groups that find themselves to be in conflict

with one another in the world to find reconciliation and peace within the church. As Jon Ritner

states, "The gospel that Jesus and his disciples shared was a holistic gospel of communal

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[245]   Acts 10: 9-13 NIV

[246]   Acts 10:15 NIV

[247]   Acts 10:28 NIV

[248]   Ephesians 2:14-16 NIV

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flourishing, described in the Old Testament as God's *shalom"*[249] The church is intended to look different than the world around it offering a place where reconciliation and *shalom* can be found between groups in conflict.

Considering that ministry in the exurban context is a form of multi-cultural ministry where those from a rural culture live in proximity with those from urban and suburban cultures and, as our theological foundations have shown, that there is a biblical call for congregations to seek to incorporate individuals from varying cultural backgrounds into fellowship, the question remains as to how a congregation might engage in integrative ministry within the exurban context. Both the common ingroup identity model and contact theory are helpful for congregations seeking to engage in peacemaking ministry within the exurban context. Per the common ingroup identity model, exurban congregations engaging in the peacemaking mission of God should seek to create places of connection between long-time residents and newcomers, rural and urban, in order to offer a common identity for groups engaged in conflict in the community. Per contact theory, the exurban congregation should also seek to create spaces for conflicted groups to interact with one another on mutually agreed upon projects.

Through these sociological principles and the work of various theologians and ministry practitioners engaged in peacemaking in a local context, three principles can be extrapolated for peacemaking ministry in an exurban environment: seeing, immersing, and co-laboring. While these principles may occur in succession, they are better understood as ongoing pursuits for the congregation that desires to engage missionally with both long-time residents and newcomers. In addition to principles for exurban ministry, these concepts can also be understood as three

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[249]   Ritner, 54.

hurdles that need to be cleared in order for a congregation to be a peacemaker in the exurban

context.

Seeing

The first hurdle that a congregation needs to clear is the hurdle of seeing. Jon Huckins

and Jer Swigart note that "seeing is our first peacemaking practice."[250] Utilitizing the story of the

Good Samaritan, they note that the primary difference between the Samaritan who stops for the

bleeding man and the religious leaders who pass him by is that the Samaritan saw the "humanity,

dignity, and image of God" in the man.[251] This leads Huckins and Swigart to conclude,

> "Everyday peacemakers are men and women who choose to see the humanity, dignity, and image of God in others and who understand the plight of the voiceless. We are people who choose to see our own biases, opinions, lies, and fears as well as our contributions to what is broken around us. We are men and women who acknowledge our blindness, understand what has contributed to it, and ask God to heal our sight."[252]

Unfortunately, even though long-time residents and newcomers tend to live in close

proximity to one another in exurbia, there are many forces that keep these groups from seeing

one another. Within the exurban context it is easy to see large housing developments that are

predominantly populated with former urbanites and suburbanites. It is also easy to see the rolling

pastures and open spaces that harken back to the rural history of the context. The difficulty

occurs in having the people within these two groups actually see each other and then to see each

other as bearers of the image of God. Members of these two groups tend to shop at different

stores, frequent different restaurants, and worship in different congregations. This limits contact

between groups making reconciliation difficult. As contact theory teaches us, this limitation of

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[250]   Huckins and Swigart, 71.

[251]   Huckins and Swigart, 78.

[252]   Huckins and Swigart, 78.

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contact between groups created by a lack of seeing the other works against the aims of reconciliation and restoration in the community.

Not only does this lack of seeing occur in housing developments, commercial areas of town, and workplaces, but also in worshiping congregations. Within Mount Airy, most congregations tend to be filled with congregants that are either newcomers or long-time residents. Most of the former suburbanites and urbanites in the community attend a couple of congregations that are largely program-driven while most of the long-time, rural residents of the community attend a myriad of smaller congregations that dot the area. While there is likely a need for various congregations to reach various people groups in the community, it is important for the church to note the necessity of conflicted groups in the community to see one another as image bearers of God.

Exurban congregations are in a powerful place to help bridge the seeing divide in the community. As the extended contact hypothesis shows, leadership in the community can serve as a significant bridge between conflicted groups. As such, pastors and congregational leaders have an opportunity to help lead their congregations to see other groups in the exurban context. Prayer walks through neighborhoods, moving a worship service to a park in a different part of the town for a couple of Sundays, or partnering with local farmers, businesses, organizations, and other local congregations can help to create spaces where seeing might occur opening a pathway for peacemaking. In each of these possibilities, the role of the pastor or congregational leader is important to help participants see the beauty beyond their dominant worldview and identity group to help expand their field of vision in the community. In addition, the religious leader can also serve as a bridge by curating events, either at the church or in partnership with the

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community, where community leaders from various organizations and specialties might interact with members of the congregation in order to help expand their line of sight.

Immersing

While seeing is an important first step into cross-cultural exurban ministry, a second hurdle that must be crossed is immersion. Seeing offers individuals and congregations an opportunity to see the people behind the farms, housing developments, large trucks, and minivans in the community; however, just seeing others does not necessarily lead to peacemaking and reconciliation. To immerse is to move toward and enter into the situation of another.[253] Immersion means to move beyond seeing the other person or group; it is to enter into relationship with another person or group in the posture of a learner.[254] This process of immersion offers a space for contact to occur between the groups helping to reduce the "us" versus "them" barrier.[255] A primary piece of immersing oneself into the world of another is to simply listen closely to the other person. David Augsberger underscores this simply, yet important, aspect of peacemaking stating, "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable."[256] An example of a ministry that seeks to immerse individuals from various cultures is the Taizé movement in France. As Carolyn Chau notes, the Taizé movement dares "to propose that peace happens through trust and through being

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[253]   Huckins and Swigart, 89-91.

[254]   Huckins and Swigart, 92.

[255]   Huckins and Swigart, 100.

[256]   David W. Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard: How to Hear and How to Be Heard in Equal Communication,* 2nd Printing as Stated edition (Ventura, CA: Baker Pub Group, 1982), 12.

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vulnerable to the other, through becoming open to the gift of difference that inevitably emerges in living with and being with others."[257]

Within the exurban context, the lack of seeing people from different groups often results in a lack of immersion within the worldview of the other. As a result, stereotypes of outgroups are common among individuals within the community. As such, the outgroup homogeneity effect referenced in chapter 2 occurs between long-time residents and newcomers to the community. Each group creates a caricature of the other group assuming that all those in the opposing group are the same. As stated above, this underscores the necessity of congregations in the community to offer a common ingroup identity for opposing groups to engage in together.

The creation of spaces for relationship and learning becomes an integral task of the leadership of a congregation in the exurban context due to the lack of immersion occurring in the community. This requires that congregations develop spaces for long-term, sustained, and mutually beneficial conversation and engagement to occur between different groups. A directed approach to immersion could be done through the development of a program where conversations on background, personal story, politics, and attitudes toward local issues can be shared in a learning, cooperative environment. An organic means of immersion could be possible through the leveraging of spaces that Robert Wuthnow has termed "great good places."[258] These "great good places" are cafes, coffee shops, and community centers that stand as important pieces of the fabric of the town.[259] The development of or partnership with these spaces, which

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[257]   Carolyn A Chau, "Religion and Justice: The Faith-Based, Intercultural Peacemaking of L'Arche and the Community of Taizé," *The Way* 54, no. 3 (July 2015): 102.

[258]   Wuthnow, 125.

[259]   Wuthnow, 125.

often have appeal to both long-time residents and newcomers, could offer congregations a place through which conversations could occur, lives could be shared, and learning of the other might happen. The utilization of these spaces would allow for the congregational leaders to help shape an environment where, as Mark Branson and Juan F. Martin state, the "people of God participate in the action-reflection cycle as they gain new capacities to discern what God is doing among and around them."[260]

Co-laboring

A third hurdle that needs to be cleared in becoming an exurban peacemaking congregation is to engage in co-laboring. The principle of co-laboring is built upon the common ingroup identity model, where relations between groups improve when members of those groups begin to see themselves as members of one, large, inclusive group.[261] One way to encourage common ingroup identity is through working together toward a commonly held pursuit or desire. In other words, places and situations where individuals from different groups can work together toward a goal that is held in common create opportunities for peacemaking and reconciliation to occur between those groups. The L'Arche community serves as an example of the power of working together toward a common purpose. This community that seeks to serve handicapped individuals has successfully brought together people of various cultural backgrounds, who previously were in conflict with one another, through a common call and purpose of caring for people with developmental disabilities.[262]

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[260] Mark Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), Kindle location 569.

[261] Cleveland, 178.

[262] Chau, 98.

In the exurban context, the creation of a common ingroup identity offers interesting opportunities for ministry, especially in light of coalitions that often are formed in exurban contexts in patterns that go beyond long-time resident and newcomers.[263] Within the Mount Airy exurban context, a place with potential to see coalitions and a common ingroup identity form are co-laboring in projects that seek to clean up, repurpose, and renovate areas of the town. An example of this occurred surrounding the repurposing of a parking lot attached to an abandoned building on Main Street in Mount Airy. In August 2020, individuals, business, and organizations from both long-time resident and newcomer sub-groups worked together to repurpose the abandoned parking lot into a Pop-Up Park. Since its opening, the Pop-Up Park has been utilized by town groups, non-profit organizations, and churches for events that have been able to bring together individuals across existing divides under a common identity as residents of the town of Mount Airy who take pride in their town.

In addition to this, co-laboring also has interesting connections to Wuthnow's "great good places."[264] As spaces are created in which immersion can occur through "great good places," these spaces also become an opportunity for co-laboring to occur around a common ingroup identity as residents of Mount Airy. Utilizing these "great good places" as a way to motivate co-laboring through community service, justice initiatives, or participating in town events offers an opportunity for these spaces to move beyond immersion into co-laboring. In the end, the task of co-laboring takes the information learned through seeing and immersing and moves toward cooperative action as a way to bring *shalom* and reconciliation to the exurban environment.

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[263]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 713.

[264]   Wuthnow, 125.

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Right Relationship with Culture

A final piece of developing a missional theological foundation for assessing exurban ecclesial forms is how the church is supposed to relate to culture. Throughout the history of the church, the church has taken various postures toward culture. At times, the church has worked closely alongside of culture. Other times the church has stood in stark dissent to the ways of the culture at large. H. Richard Neibuhr's classic work, *Christ and Culture,* offers a lens through which to assess how the church does and should engage with the culture around it. Neibuhr offers five primary choices for how the church can engage with culture. The first is that the church can live in opposition to culture. In this option, the culture surrounding the church is completely rejected and the church's role within the community is largely to judge the world through its existence.[265] The second option offered by Neibuhr is for the church to engage in a position of "Christ of culture."[266] In this position, Jesus is understood to be the one who fulfills the hopes of society as "the great enlightener, the great teacher, the one who directs all men in culture to the attainment of wisdom, moral perfection, and peace."[267]

The third, fourth, and fifth options offered by Neibuhr are all versions of what he calls the "Christ above culture" position.[268] The first of these three versions is a synthesis where the best of both Christ and culture are melded together.[269] The second of these versions is a position of

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[265]   H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture,* 1st edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), ??.

[266]   Niebuhr, 83.

[267]   Niebuhr, 92.

[268]   Niebuhr, 116.

[269]   Niebuhr, 145.

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paradox where conflict between God and humanity are ever present in the form of paradox.[270]

The third version of "Christ above culture" is that of "Christ as a transformer of culture."[271] In

this version, Neibuhr states that "the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the

Lord" seeking to transform culture through the ways of Christ.[272] While Neibuhr shows favor to

the last of these options, "Christ as transformer of culture", he ends his work by stating that each

of the positions is useful in particular places during particular seasons in both the church and

culture.[273]

In addition to Neibuhr's work on this matter, missiologist Lesslie Newbigin also wrote

extensively on how the church should embody a faithful witness within the midst of culture. In

his work on Newbigin, Michael Goheen shows that Newbigin believed that "believers

everywhere will experience a painful tension if they are faithful" because of the competing

stories offered through the gospel and culture.[274] As such, Newbigin states that the church must

adopt "a twofold posture toward its culture."[275] Goheen describes Newbigin's posture toward

culture in this way:

> "On the one hand, the church will identify with its culture, living in solidarity with and
> affirming it, while mediating the call in terms and forms that are familiar. On the other
> hand, the church will be separate from its culture, living in opposition to and rejecting its
> idolatry, mediating a challenging call to repentance and conversion."[276]

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[270]   Niebuhr, 151.

[271]   Niebuhr, 190.

[272]   Niebuhr, 191.
[273]   Niebuhr, 236.
[274]   Goheen, 138-146.

[275]   Goheen, 151.

[276]   Goheen, 151.

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This twofold posture spoken of by Newbigin is similar to the Neibuhr's "Christ transforming culture" option; however, it is important to note that in Newbigin's articulation, the church is expected to engage in reflection upon its local culture in order to find the places to identify with and those that are antithetical to the kingdom of God. All of this, Newbigin states, is done out of a desire within the church "to live and tell the biblical story as the true story in such a way as to call its cultural story into question and invite conversion."[277]

Newbigin's thoughts concerning Western culture continue to be applicable to the Western church today as well. Newbigin states that a missionary encounter with the Western world is to challenge and work against the narratives of progress, economic modernity, consumerism, and autonomy in seeking to be a kingdom-shaped community.[278] Dean Flemming addresses a similar encounter with Western culture drawing from the book of Revelation stating that Revelation calls the church to "become a public embodiment of the narrative of the crucified Lord."[279] Flemming quotes J. Nelson Kraybill stating that the picture of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 18-22 is one which "has no hoarding, no exclusive neighborhoods, and no poverty."[280] As such, the missionary encounter with Western culture seeks to both embody and live out the coming kingdom of God as an alternative to the ways of our culture and world.

The apostle Paul gives a great example of this twofold posture toward culture in his engagement with the philosophers in the city of Athens. Acts 17:16 states, "While Paul was

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[277]   Goheen, 163.

[278]   Goheen, Kindle location 5032-5317.

[279]   Flemming, 240.

[280]   Flemming, 247.

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waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols."[281]

Paul noticed the ways of the Athenians that were contrary to the kingdom story; however, Paul also was complimentary of the Athenians as he engaged with them. In Acts 17:22-23 Paul states, "Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you."[282] Paul compliments their religious fervor on display throughout the city; however, Paul speaks against the idolatry present in the city. In this short exchange, Paul shows a "missionary encounter with culture" that seeks to align with those areas of culture in line with the kingdom story while standing against those in opposition to the kingdom story.[283]

Pulling together Neibuhr and Newbigin, the development of a right relationship with culture is important for any context, especially those in which existing conflict is occurring. It can be easy for the church in a particular context to go along with the ways of the culture in which the church finds itself without critically reflecting on the places in which the kingdom of God is already being revealed in the culture or where places in the culture stand in opposition to God's kingdom. In Mount Airy and other exurban contexts, the church must seek to find the places in which God's missional purposes are already occurring in the culture. This is especially important for those churches and individuals who move into the area from urban and suburban areas as they do not bring the *missio Dei* with them when they move to the area. God has been at

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[281]   Acts 17:16 NIV

[282]   Acts 17:22-23 NIV

[283]   Goheen, 138.

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work in the town and is revealing his kingdom already. On the other hand, churches in Mount

Airy and other exurban contexts must not be afraid to speak out against those places in culture

that are antithetical to the gospel story, including the us-versus-them engagements occurring

between those of rural backgrounds and those of urban/suburban backgrounds. As such,

Newbigin's twofold posture toward culture, which he calls a "missionary encounter with

culture," is an important piece of the development of a missional theological criterion to assess

exurban ecclesial forms.[284]

Each of these five pillars of missional theology – being, doing, telling, peacemaking, and

right relationship with culture – comes together to develop a practical theology that is based in

missional engagement as a central aspect of the churches function in the world. Jon Ritner sums

up this emphasis on missional engagement saying, "our faith is like-wise refined and deepened

much more in the context of missional engagement with the world than by sitting in pews or

traditional forms of Christian education. And the community life of the church is refined and

deepened as we serve hand-in-hand, laboring for the kingdom to come."[285] Lesslie Newbigin

sums up the call for congregations to live out a missional theology writing,

> The question which has to be put to every local congregation is the question whether it is
> a credible sign of God's reign in justice and mercy over the whole of life, whether it is an
> open fellowship whose concerns are as wide as the concerns of humanity, whether it
> cares for its neighbors in a way which reflects and springs out of God's care for them,
> whether its common life is recognizable as a foretaste of the blessing which God intends
> for the whole human family."[286]

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[284]   Goheen, 138.

[285]   Ritner, 49.

[286]   J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 22.

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In the coming assessment of exurban ecclesial forms, the priority of missional

engagement within the congregation will be an important building block of criteria for

assessment. It is to this assessment of the exurban congregation that this study will now turn.

The Exurban Congregation

Missional Framework for the Exurban Church

Having developed the framework of being, doing, telling, peacemaking, and a balanced

relationship with culture above as a way to understand the church's participation in the *missio*

Dei, the question remains as to how this criterion for a missional ecclesiology can be applied

within exurbia. As stated above, Dean Flemming and others have said that the beginning of

mission is based in being.[287] The church is called to embody a different way than those ways

accepted and promoted by culture. In seeking to be a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God,

the church is called to embody the kingdom story as an alternate way of being in the world. This

alternate way of being in the world is based in being a reconciling and peacemaking community.

As stated above, there are two primary cultures present within the exurban community. There are

old-timers, who are long-time residents of the town. These individuals tend to be conservative in

social, political, and economic concerns, and they tend to view the exurban community as a

small town. The other primary culture in exurbia is made up of newcomers to the area, who are

primarily former urbanites and suburbanites. These individuals tend to lean more progressive on

social, political, and economic concerns, and they tend to view the exurban community as an

outer suburb.

While these two cultures are prominent and often at odds with each other in the exurban

community, the missional church is called to embody a different way as a sign and foretaste of

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[287]   Flemming, 44

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the kingdom of God. While it may be easier for churches to serve as a reflection of the community in all ways, including the divisions occurring in the community, the kingdom story calls churches to live as a reflection of Revelation 7:9 where "every nation, tribe, people and language" worship the Lord together.[288] As such, the missional exurban church is called to move beyond the bifurcation of the community in a way that seeks to embody the principle that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[289] Instead of capitulating to the cultural wars of the exurban community, the missional exurban church is called to engage in multi-cultural ministry between old-timers and newcomers as the embodiment of the reconciliatory nature of God. Just as Paul called the church in Galatia to put away the divisions of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, and male and female, the church in exurbia is called to put away the divisions of old-timer and newcomer, conservative and liberal, and urbanite and ruralite. In this way, the exurban church has the opportunity to live proleptically into the kingdom of God by seeking redemptive living, reconciliation, and peacemaking between those of different cultures in the community.

This movement toward embodying reconciliation between disparate groups in the culture is likely to be a difficult movement within the life of the exurban church. Patterns of gathering with like-minded individuals and the continued presence of sin at work in our world makes these reconciliatory actions difficult to take. Many existing exurban churches in Mount Airy tend to be filled with either old-timers or newcomers based on the history of the congregation, style of ministry, and propensity of individuals to desire to gather with those who are similar to them. Working to change this pattern of ecclesial gathering in congregations will likely require

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[288]   Revelation 7:9 (NIV)

[289]   Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

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significant teaching, preaching, training, and rethinking of theological and ecclesiological

paradigms. Pastors and church leaders should also be prepared for pushback from congregants

who do not desire to gather for worship with those who may act, think, and believe differently

than themselves. Despite these difficulties, the exurban church that seeks to be missionally

faithful must seek to find ways to gradually, but intentionally, live proleptically into the kingdom

of God by embracing redemptive environments between long-time residents and newcomers in

order to embody the *missio Dei*.

In addition to being an embodiment of the redemptive and reconciling kingdom of God to

the community, the missional exurban church also is called to live that out in what it does

through concrete actions of compassion, redemption, and peacemaking. The missional exurban

church must not only seek to embody the redemptive mission of God, but the church should also

seek to engage in acts of redemption and reconciliation in the community as a missional

influence in the world. For the exurban environment, this underscores the need for the church

community to engage in reconciling and redemptive relationships with their neighbors regardless

of affinity, theological persuasion, or care of what the church may receive in return. As Jeremiah

tells the Israelites in exile to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and

pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare," so too is the

missional exurban church called to seek the welfare of the exurban community in contextually

appropriate ways.[290] The church exists as an entity for the sake of the world around it, and the

church's missional doing is the action of the congregation on behalf of the community and in

alignment with the *missio Dei.* As such, the missional exurban church must seek to engage in

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[290]   Jeremiah 29:7 (ESV)

redemptive and reconciliatory acts in the community as the living out of the kingdom story in order to serve as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God.

In many exurban communities, such as Mount Airy, MD, there is a great divide occurring between Main Street and Wall Street businesses that parallels the divide between old-timers and newcomers to the community. While many chain restaurants and big box stores are popping up around the community, the Main Street area of the town struggles. The missional exurban church has an opportunity to seek the welfare of Main Street seeking to create opportunities and environments where long term and newly arrived individuals and families can engage in interaction, conversation, and work toward mutual goals. This is important because Main Street businesses are often owned by individuals in the town, are closely knitted to the story of the town, and hold appeal to both old-timers and newcomers to the area. This kind of redemptive ministry may require innovative forms of ecclesiology in order to engage in acts of redemption, reconciliation, and compassion that are contextually appropriate and culturally integrative.

These innovative forms of ecclesiology may endure difficulty within existing congregations due to current beliefs surrounding the definition of church and the decentralization of importance placed on traditional metrics such as Sunday morning worship attendance and income; however, there also is great opportunity present within exurban communities for those willing to creatively explore innovative forms of ministry alongside existing congregations built on more traditional ecclesial models. In seeking to engage in redemptive and reconciliatory acts within exurbia, the missional church must not only look to do traditional compassionate ministries, but also may need to rethink what church looks like and how the church can better contextualize in order to meet the needs present within the exurban community. This both/and

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approach to missional doing offers the exurban church the opportunity to minister in reconciliatory and redemptive ways to a greater number of people in the community.

The exurban church is also called to engage in the task of missional telling of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the good news of the kingdom of God as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God. As Amos Yong calls for a dialogical approach, so too should the missional exurban church seek a dialogical approach in engaging with the larger community. First, a dialogical approach is important in engaging with members of the community in peacemaking and reconciliation. The embodiment of redemptive living between cultures spoken of above requires interactions between people of differing cultural backgrounds where people's stories are told and sought to be understood by each other. This is not likely to take place solely through the preaching of a pastor from a pulpit once a week within the confines of a church building. Instead, the missional exurban church must cultivate the practice of holy conversation seeking to know the other in order to tell the redemptive story of the kingdom of God. Space must be made for conversations where God's reconciliatory Spirit can move in hearts and lives as the kingdom story is told in the midst of the cultural stories of the community. Creating this space in the community requires beginning by creating space for holy conversation to occur within the congregation. Congregations must seek to hear each others' stories and perspectives seeking to understand one another and give space for differing viewpoints in order to build bridges within the congregation. From this foundation, the congregation can then seek to create similar spaces within the community where bridge-building can occur beyond the church community.

In addition, the dialogical nature of telling is important for how churches should engage with each other as well. Many churches in Mount Airy, as well as many other exurban environments, have churches that seek to reach either the long-time residents of the community

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or the growing population of newcomers to the area. Partnership between these congregations is likely to be an important way for these congregations to create avenues of dialogue between members in order to move beyond the bifurcation of cultures occurring within the community at large and embody the kingdom of God. This dialogical approach between churches requires the development of an attitude of cooperation instead of competition where congregations can learn from each other how best to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the various cultures present in the community. It also may offer opportunities for churches to partner in ministering to the community in order to create a more holistic ministry presence within the community.

At first glance, dialogical witness may seem to be a new venture for both long-time residents and newcomers to the exurban environment; however, it is largely an extension of a holistic gospel understanding in which everything a person says is intended to be missional in nature. This does not necessarily mean that every conversation at a coffee shop, grocery store, or other location needs to lead to an explicit gospel presentation; however, it does mean that conversation offers a chance to represent Christ to others through our language. As with missional doing, it is important to begin with small steps in order to exercise dialogical approaches both individually and corporately. Congregations can begin to work together in the development of ministry programs or events in order to facilitate places for conversation. Individuals can seek to frequent local coffee shops, restaurants, and stores in order to get to know the staff and other regulars. Forums can be developed that seek to facilitate productive dialogue surrounding difficult issues of our day in order to facilitate understanding across cultures. There are many opportunities for individuals and congregations to engage in missional telling;

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however, it will likely require looking at current rhythms and schedules with an eye toward missional engagement.

The fourth piece of the missional framework for exurbia is engagement in peacemaking within the community. The missionally faithful church is called to be a church that not only embodies the mission, engages in acts of reconciliation, and proclaims the kingdom story, but it is also to be a people that seek the *shalom* of the community. As a part of peacemaking, the church is called to seek *shalom* within the congregation by creating space for those who come from various backgrounds and cultures to seek completeness and flourishing together. In addition, the church is also called to be a peacemaker within the larger community. As Jon Huckins and Jer Swigart state, this usually requires that the church willingly step into the midst of conflict occurring in the community in order to help bring about *shalom* in the larger community.[291] The peacemaking church's desire is to see fullness occur in the community, which goes far beyond simple peacekeeping, which involves the avoidance of conflict altogether.

In the exurban context, peacemaking should be a vital piece of the missionally faithful church's engagement in the community. The simmering conflict between old-timers and newcomers shows that there is ample conflict occurring in the community for the church to help make peace in. Despite this conflict outside the church, the exurban church must begin with embodying peacemaking within its own community. Often the bifurcation of the exurban community is perpetuated within the church, or, at best, simply ignored. The missionally faithful exurban church must seek to create places of dialogue and understanding among those who come from different backgrounds within the congregation even when this is likely to require that congregants step into the places of conflict within the culture. Churches can seek to create groups

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[291]   Huckins and Swigart, 57-58.

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or forums where current events are discussed among those with differing political, social, and economic persuasions. In addition, groups within the church can be created that will incorporate individuals from various backgrounds to ensure diversity of thought and opinion. Rules will need to be developed by church leadership in order to ensure that these groups seek *shalom* first and foremost; however, the difficulty of this work is vital to becoming a peacemaking entity within the larger culture. If the church can't become peacemakers within its own, then it cannot claim to offer *shalom* to the larger community.

While the church community must seek *shalom* within the congregation, the *shalom* of the larger community must always be in view as well. The missionally faithful exurban church must seek to find ways to step into the conflicts occurring within the community in order to be a peacemaker in the community. This will likely require the church to step into existing divides between old-timers and newcomers in the community in order to seek the *shalom* of the community. In addition, missionally faithful exurban churches can also consider how they might be able to create peacemaking spaces within the community where conversations, interactions, and service might occur among both old-timers and newcomers in the community. As stated above, this might require rethinking some of the ecclesial models currently present in the community in order to facilitate this contact between opposing groups in the community.

The final piece of the missional framework developed above is engagement in a right relationship with culture. This right relationship with culture is largely based on Lesslie Newbigin's "missional encounter with culture" that calls the church to engage in a two-fold posture toward culture.[292] On the one side, the church is called to come alongside and affirm those places in the culture in which the kingdom story is revealing itself. On the other hand, the

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[292]   Goheen, 138.

church is called to live in opposition to and reject those places in culture that stand in opposition to the kingdom story.[293] As such, the church needs to sit in a place of discernment in the culture in order to make sense of those places in culture that are to be affirmed and those places that are to be rejected and opposed.

In the exurban setting the discernment of the kingdom story being lived out in culture is imperative for the church. Both old-timers and newcomers to the community find themselves wrapped up in particular cultural stories. These stories are at odds with one another; however, neither of these cultural stories is in complete alignment with the kingdom story that the church is called to proclaim and live out. In the exurban setting, this underscores the need for the church to offer an alternative way from the cultural stories present in the community. Missionally faithful exurban churches cannot succumb to the temptation to live into one of the two primary cultural stories taking place in the community. To do so would not only cause the kingdom story to be conflated for a cultural story, but also would likely result in a congregation that does not reflect the entirety of the cultures present in the community.

Instead, the missionally faithful exurban church must engage in discernment of the cultural stories present in the community in order to discern where to affirm the kingdom story being revealed and where to reject places that stand in opposition to the kingdom story. The church in exurbia must seek out those places in among both the old-timer culture and newcomer culture where affirmation of the kingdom can occur. On the other hand, the church in exurbia must not be afraid to proclaim the kingdom story in those places where cultural stories sit in opposition to the kingdom story. Doing this in the midst of the rural/urban divide within the

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[293]   Goheen, 151.

exurban context will require discernment from the Holy Spirit and wisdom in how to proclaim in

ways that will bring *shalom* to the community.

Critical Assessment of the Exurban Ecclesial Landscape

Up to this point, this paper has primarily sought to describe the exurban context, identify

ecclesial forms present in Mount Airy, and develop important criteria for exurban churches to

embody within the exurban context. In this section, the dissertation will shift from descriptive to

prescriptive seeking to assess the ecclesial forms listed using the criteria of missional theology

developed above. Prior to entering into this assessment, it is important to note that it is not the

desire of the author to discount the validity of one ecclesial model or state that a particular

ecclesial model is inherently better than others. However, it is the desire of the author to show

ways in which each ecclesial model can seek to more faithfully embody missional faithfulness

and engage with the unique concerns of the exurban context. As such, both strengths and

potential weaknesses of each ecclesial form will be discussed in order that churches from various

ecclesial models might more faithfully embody the mission of God within exurbia. The thoughts

and ideas of this section are intended as a humble offering to the ministry practitioners, pastors,

and leaders doing exemplary work for the kingdom of God in the exurban context. Following

this assessment, the author will share conclusions on what ecclesial models are more naturally

oriented toward the exurban context.

Church as Great Commission Team

The Great Commission Team ecclesial form has important strengths when it comes to

missional theology. Primary among those strengths is what Christopher James calls, "an abiding

commitment to proactive mission as an essential practice of the church."[294] Because Great

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[294]   James, 152.

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Commission Team churches are typically started with an intentional desire to see people hear the gospel and respond in faith, this ecclesial model forms the congregation to see itself as a sent people of a sending God. As such, the trinitarian understanding of the Father sending the Son; the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit; and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church is alive and well in Great Commission Team churches.[295] Even if this classical formulation of the *missio Dei* is not explicitly used in the congregation, the conceptual framework of a people sent by a missionary God remains within the Great Commission Team congregation. Undergirded by the Great Commission of Matthew 28, this ecclesial form places a strong emphasis on being a people who proclaim the gospel to those around them. As such, the Great Commission Team tends to emphasize the need to be a people who tell the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the community around them.

Unfortunately, due to the emphasis on telling, Great Commission Team congregations tend to be less concerned about embodying missional faithfulness or engaging in missional acts that do not explicitly end in proclamation. This represents a more classic approach toward mission built on pragmatics over faithfulness.[296] In addition, this ecclesial form often seeks to cast a wide missional net creating the potential for the congregation to lose some connection to the immediate locale in which the congregation is located. As Leonard Sweet and Michael Beck note, ministry to a specific locale or people ends up reaching further and generalizing for a larger audience.[297] Great Commission Team churches should be applauded for their understanding of

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[295]   James, 152.
[296]   James, 154.

[297]   Leonard Sweet and Michael Adam Beck, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on the Front Lines* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Services, Inc., 2020), 60.

being sent out by God and their willingness to proclaim the gospel story. An increased emphasis on missional being and doing without losing sight missional telling will help these congregations to more fully participate in the *missio Dei.*

The Great Commission Team ecclesial form also has both positives and negatives in relation to peacemaking. Great Commission Team congregations tend to cast a wide net creating many different points of contact in the community. These congregations have the opportunity, due to their size and missional impulse, to create meaningful connections between people of different backgrounds. As such, Great Commission Team congregations naturally tend to facilitate contact between a wide variety of individuals in a community, which is a foundational piece to contact theory. In addition, due to their expansive reach, these congregations have a unique ability to call groups of people from various backgrounds to a common identity found in location and congregation. This ability to facilitate contact between individuals of differing groups and offer a common ingroup identity are key aspects to peacemaking in the exurban context.

Despite this, most of the Great Commission Team congregations in the Mount Airy exurban environment have developed programs that are aimed predominantly at newly arriving suburban and urban individuals to the exurban community. Due to their large size, modern buildings, and programs aimed to reach the "mission field that is coming to [their] doorstep," Great Commission Team congregations are often a point of contention for longtime residents in Mount Airy.[298] Longtime residents tend to feel as if these congregations have misunderstood the heritage of the community in seeking to reach the masses.[299] This underscores the need for Great

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[298]   Paul Foss, interview with author, ZOOM, January 23, 2021.

[299]   Charles "Nip" Burns, interview with author, New Beginning Church of the Nazarene, May 22, 2019.

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Commission Team congregations to effectively engage in a right relationship with culture. There is nothing inherently wrong about well-developed programs aimed at various age and affinity groups; however, there is always a need to critically assess what parts of suburban, urban, and rural culture the church can affirm and what parts the church must reject. In the exurban setting this not only needs to be done on a regional level, but also on a local level asking what parts of suburban culture and rural culture are to be affirmed or rejected.

For Great Commission Team congregations in the exurban context, it is important that they engage intentionally in ways that seek to take the redemptive mission of God to all people groups in the community, especially those on opposing sides of the old-timer/newcomer divide. Great Commission Team congregations can seek to leverage their innate missional impulse in order to intentionally reach out to those people groups in the community that are not currently being served by the congregation. In addition, these churches can seek to intentionally leverage their expansive reach in the community and financial resources in order to intentionally develop events and programs that might bring old-timers and newcomers together in service projects that would help to develop a larger common ingroup identity such as beautifying the town, partnering in local events, or offering a community service. Finally, Great Commission Team congregations can intentionally seek to serve locally as well as regionally. Intentionally showing investment in the local exurban community will help to build relationship with long-time residents and offer a common ingroup identity as residents of the exurban community.

Church as Household of the Spirit

The Household of the Spirit ecclesial form also has strengths in relation to missional embodiment, action, proclamation, peacemaking, and relationship with culture. The Household of the Spirit ecclesial form, while not as explicitly mission focused as Great Commission Team

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congregations, does seek to engage missionally with others through the experience of God's Spirit.[300] Partnering in the *mission Dei* is integrally related to an experience of God's Spirit in the Household of the Spirit ecclesial form. Due to a desire to experience the power of God's Spirit and live out a transformed life as a result, Household of Faith congregations tend to strongly embody the mission of God offering a different way of being for the people of God. In addition, the emphasis on being a "family of faith," encourages members to experience the positive side of the common ingroup identity model. A common experience of connecting with the Holy Spirit offers a family connection between members of the Household of the Spirit congregation offering a common ingroup identity for those a part of the congregation.These congregations tend to develop a common identity based on being the family of faith creating opportunities for Household of Faith churches to bridge divides occurring in the exurban context by welcoming others to join as a part of the family.

Despite these positives, the Household of the Spirit ecclesial form also has places of caution when held up to the missional theological criteria presented above. First, while Household of the Spirit congregations strongly embody the mission of God, there can be a tendency to downplay the importance of doing works of mercy or proclaiming the Kingdom of God as an expression of that missional impulse. This can limit the amount of contact the congregation may experience with the culture at large creating a barrier for conflict resolution in the community. The emphasis on connection to the divine in this ecclesial form must maintain connection with the real-world concerns and difficulties of the contexts in which the congregation finds itself. Intentionally seeking to understand and connect to the concerns and issues of the local context is an important formative practice that will help Household of the

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[300]   James, 104.

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Spirit congregations to engage in missional doing without sacrificing missional embodiment or proclamation as central tenets of the ecclesial form.

Similarly, the development of a common identity as the "family of faith" can help to bridge divides in the exurban context; however, if the "family of faith" secludes itself from the rest of the culture, then the family of faith can become another source of division within the exurban context. Considering that Household of the Spirit congregations tend to view the surrounding culture as hostile to the "family of faith," this underscores the necessity of engaging in a right relationship with culture as a part of a fully formed mission. In order for the Household of the Spirit ecclesial form to represent people from "every nation, tribe, people and language" in the community, there must be an intentional effort to not only embody the Spirit-filled life, but also to engage with the culture surrounding the church so as to invite others to the Spirit-filled life as well.[301] As such, Household of the Spirit congregations should intentionally seek to find those places in the local context that can be affirmed as a part of the kingdom story without fully abandoning a critical eye toward those areas of culture that stand in opposition to the kingdom story. Keeping a more balanced relationship with culture will help to maintain connection to the larger community without losing the distinctives of this ecclesial form.

For Household of Faith congregations in the exurban context, it is important to be intentional about creating points of connection between the "family of faith" and the larger community. These congregations offer an opportunity for a world that has lost a sense of transcendence to recover an experience of God that is active in redeeming and renewing all things as a part of God's missional purposes in the world.[302] Intentionally connecting that

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[301]   Revelation 7:9 New International Version

[302]   Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge (Mass.): Belknap Press, 2018), 20-21.

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transcendent mission to the imminent needs and concerns of the exurban community can be a

powerful missional witness and an avenue to a common ingroup identity found in being a child

of God. Household of Faith congregations can intentionally seek simple ways of connecting to

the exurban town through community service, partnership in town projects, and engagement in

town events that will help to create opportunities to invite others into the "family of faith."

Church as New Community

The New Community ecclesial form also has strengths in relation to missional theology,

contact theory, and the common ingroup identity model. The most significant strength comes

from the largest difference between New Community congregations and those of either the Great

Commission Team form or the Household of Faith form: a positive view toward progressive

culture.[303] This positive, often overly positive, view toward culture cultivates the belief that "God

is present and active in all contexts and cultures."[304] As such, congregations in the New

Community ecclesial form develop contextual ways of worshipping often incorporating pieces of

the culture around them into their worship and the life of the community of faith. This

contextualization is an important piece of missional identity, and it can serve as a powerful

foundation upon which the congregation can seek to incarnate the gospel in the community.

Despite this, New Community congregations often place such a strong emphasis on being

contextually relevant that they struggle to critique culture when necessary. Christopher James

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[303]   James, 169.

[304]   James, 169.

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while paraphrasing missiologist Lesslie Newbigin states, "Even as God is present and active in all contexts and cultures, the gospel also critiques all cultures and contexts."[305]

While New Community congregations need to take care to not allow their positive outlook toward culture to go too far, this positive outlook is helpful in regard to contact theory and the common ingroup identity model helping to facilitate peacemaking and conflict resolution in the community. Because of their heightened sense of God's presence through the community, New Community congregations are likely to seek to develop relationships with other community organizations, businesses, government leaders, and schools regardless of their religious background. This has the potential to create many natural opportunities for people from various backgrounds, including the newcomer and old-timer groups prevalent in exurban contexts such as Mount Airy, to interact and work on meaningful projects together. In addition, due to the positive bent toward culture, New Community congregations are less likely to create barriers between those apart of the church community and those not part of the church community offering space for a common ingroup identity to form that goes beyond church membership or length of time in the community. Finally, this positive attitude toward surrounding culture often manifests itself in New Community congregations becoming highly involved in the local community leading them to many reconciliatory acts of doing in the community as an outflow of the *missio Dei*.

On the other hand, New Community congregations tend not to be as strong in the area of telling as an outflow of the *missio Dei*. Due to their close identification with the surrounding culture, New Community congregations are less likely to proclaim the gospel through words, especially if doing so requires speaking against the culture. New Community churches can

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[305]   James, 169.

effectively use their positive outlook toward culture to help incarnate the gospel; however, congregations in this ecclesial form must ensure that they are maintaining a missionary encounter with culture by discerning the places where the culture is out of step with the kingdom story. In these places, the congregation can powerfully step in to proclaim the kingdom story in the midst of a different cultural story, which may be more likely to be heard by those in the community because of the trust built by the congregation over many years of working alongside the greater community.

New Community congregations in the exurban context have a unique opportunity to engage in intentional common ingroup identity development. Leveraging their positive posture toward culture, these congregations are a natural breeding ground for groups that seek to serve and partner with the larger exurban context. As such, these congregations can intentionally seek to serve as bridges between the ecclesial community and the exurban community at large by developing trust with other community organizations, local businesses, schools, and religious groups. A potential opportunity for this bridging of various groups in the community is the development of a "We love (town name)" group in the community that offers a way for people from various backgrounds to find paths of service in the community. In addition, these congregations could invite congregations from other ecclesial forms to join in this group serving as a bridge for the larger exurban ecclesial community. This, or similar concepts, would promote being and doing as a part of missional engagement, offer opportunities for peacemaking to occur, and identify places where the church can celebrate the kingdom story revealed in the cultural story of the exurban setting.

Church as Neighborhood Incarnation

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While the Neighborhood Incarnation congregations may have strong similarities to any of the three ecclesial models listed above, the primary difference in this ecclesial form is that Neighborhood Incarnational communities are shaped around a deeply contextual desire to incarnate the gospel to the local community in which the congregation is located. As such, the Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial model offers many strengths in relation to missional theology. The contextualized approach to ministry central to this ecclesial form leads Neighborhood Incarnational congregations to embody the gospel in powerful and unique ways dependent upon the community they are located in. In addition, the balanced standpoint toward culture inherent in the Neighborhood Incarnational form creates natural places of partnership in the community fostering many opportunities for doing missional acts while maintaining a posture that will speak out against those places in culture that stand in opposition to the gospel. When maintaining this balanced approach to culture, the Neighborhood Incarnational model tends to promote a congregation that embodies the gospel, engages in missional acts, and proclaims good news to the community.

In addition, due to the highly contextualized nature of the ecclesial form, Neighborhood Incarnational congregations tend to create many points of contact with others in the community. These congregations are highly involved in the local context in which they are present, which creates a foundation for incarnational ministry to occur. Based on contact theory, this offers opportunities for those that come from various backgrounds and ideologies to interact with the congregation creating the potential for reconciliation to occur. Finally, Neighborhood Incarnational congregations naturally seek to identify deeply with their local context seeing that we are all a part of the same community. According to the common ingroup identity model, this also may offer a foundation for those from different subgroups in the community to find a

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common identity with the larger community. As James highlights, "[Neighborhood Incarnational] churches actively seek to connect with persons across the socioeconomic, generational, and cultural barriers that are present within their neighborhoods."[306] As such, Neighborhood Incarnational congregations naturally can serve as effective peacemakers in the community.

Despite these strengths, there are places of caution for Neighborhood Incarnational congregations. First, in the exurban context as well as many other contexts, neighborhoods themselves can be segregated by socioeconomic, generational, and cultural barriers. Many communities have been segregated through historical racism, redlining of neighborhoods, or groups of people being priced out of the market. Mount Airy's exurban context is especially prone to the latter of these three possibilities with many of the newcomers to the community buying and building houses in highly-priced, newly developed sub-divisions. Being too specifically engaged in one particular neighborhood could lead to greater divides in the larger community, especially if that particular neighborhood is not representative of all groups in the community. Care must be taken to ensure that the neighborhood is not defined in ways that would continue cultural fracturing already taking place in the community. In the exurban environment this is especially important since old-timers and newcomers to the community tend to live nearby, but in differing neighborhoods. In order to effectively engage in conflict resolution, encourage peacemaking, and reflect the kingdom story, care must be taken to ensure the neighborhood is defined in ways that will include those of rural heritage and those of suburban/urban heritage.

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[306]   James, 173.

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In addition, it is important for Neighborhood Incarnational congregations to ensure that they are intentional about contextualizing for the sake of missionally engaging with the culture instead of simply trying to be relevant or avoiding conflict with parts of the culture that stand in opposition to the gospel. Maintaining a gospel witness to the culture is essential to the missional congregation as it seeks to incarnate the gospel within specific locations. This is central to the Neighborhood Incarnational community embodying the mission of God in the community.

Similar to New Community congregations, Neighborhood Incarnation congregations have the opportunity to serve as bridges between the ecclesial community and the larger exurban community. Intentionality is key to the identification of a neighborhood that encompasses a variety of people groups in the community; however, if done successfully, these congregations will likely be best positioned to know the needs of the community first. Neighborhood Incarnation churches also can serve as a partner with the town government, other local congregations, schools, community organizations, and local businesses by helping to develop a network that seeks to serve the community in tangible ways similarly to the "We love (town name)" concept described above.

Fresh Expressions

Finally, the Fresh Expressions ecclesial form also offers places of strength and weakness in light of missional theology, contact theory, and the common ingroup identity model. While Fresh Expressions are similar to the Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial form, the Fresh Expressions approach tend to be based less in location and more in affinity. Fresh Expressions seek to leverage existing subcultures and affinity groups within a local context in order to contextualize the gospel in a focused approach. As with the Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial form, the Fresh Expressions form seeks to contextualize the gospel offering an

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embodied witness of the mission of God to redeem and restore by engaging in a focused approach to ministry. In addition, Fresh Expressions are actively engaged in the subcultures they are seeking to reach, which lends itself to engaging in missional acts within the community as participation in the *missio Dei*. Finally, the Fresh Expressions form also holds a balanced approach to the surrounding culture offering spaces for the proclamation of the gospel into the community. Because of the similarity of their approaches, many of the potential strengths of Neighborhood Incarnational communities are also present in Fresh Expressions.

The potential weaknesses of the Fresh Expressions ecclesial form surround their engagement with contact theory and the common ingroup identity model, especially within the exurban context. Travis Collins notes that the Fresh Expressions form looks toward existing, relatively homogenous groups of people within the community.[307] This focus on existing affinity groups in a context can potentially result in Fresh Expressions that continue to perpetuate existing cultural divides within a community instead of offering the church as a place where contact and a common ingroup identity can be formed by people from various subgroups in the community. Collins states that this should not be a concern because "most subcultures of our nation are more inclusive than are our churches! In most populations and affinity groups, there is greater ethnic and socioeconomic diversity than in most congregations you know."[308] While this may be true, it is important for Fresh Expressions to ensure they are not perpetuating existing divides in the culture, especially in the culturally fractured exurban environment that is the focus of this dissertation.

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[307]   Collins, Kindle location 3073.

[308]   Collins, Kindle location 3116.

The Fresh Expressions model is a helpful model in the exurban context in seeking to reach into fractured people groups present in the community. These congregations will need to be intentional about living into the inclusive picture of God's redemptive purposes for all people groups by seeking to offer opportunities for connection with those from differing backgrounds. If Fresh Expressions are able to intentionally seek both newcomers and old-timers in the exurban context, their ability to work through affinity groups as an embodiment of the *missio Dei* may serve as a powerful witness to those who are not currently a part of a worshiping congregation. Due to their flexible nature, there is no end to the possibilities of how to intentionally engage in the larger exurban community. Creation of a community service group, attendance at town events, meeting at various locations throughout the community, and opening up "third spaces," such as cafes, diners, bookstores, and art studios, are all ways that Fresh Expressions could offer places of connection within the exurban community. Jon Ritner also explains that Fresh Expressions congregations are often nimble enough, due to their size and decentralized structure, to be able to innovate and change quickly if necessary.[309] Following the COVID-19 pandemic and entering into an uncertain ecclesial future in the West, this ability to change quickly is a strength of congregations following this ecclesial form.

Principles for Exurban Ministry in Mount Airy

Based on the above assessment of ecclesial forms in the exurban context, it is possible to extrapolate ministry principles derived from the unique nature of the exurban context that are important across congregations from all forms. Some ecclesial forms will find these principles more natural based on the underlying foundations of the form; however, it is the belief of the author that all ecclesial forms can seek to intentionally incorporate these principles within their

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[309] Ritner, 156.

existing form. Considering the blending of small town and suburban dynamics within the exurban environment and the desire to live out a missional theology, four principles for ministry are presented as guides for ministry within the exurban context of Mount Airy. These principles do not constitute a complete model for ministry by themselves, but they are intended to give guidance for important features of exurban ministry in Mount Airy that effectively seeks to reach both old-timers and newcomers to the area while maintaining faithfulness to the *missio Dei.* These four principles are the integration of cultures, presence in the community, development of strategic partnerships, and exploration of innovative ministry opportunities.

Most research on multicultural ministry has focused on the integration of various ethnic cultures within a particular church body. The integration of ethnic cultures, especially between African American and white cultures is difficult due to the history of conflict and subjugation between those cultures. While exurban contexts can have a variety of ethnic demographics, exurban ministry in Mount Airy is a form of multicultural ministry due to the presence of both rural and suburban cultures, which are often at odds with one another. While not as pronounced as the power dynamics at play in ethnic multicultural settings, the exurban context has its own set of power dynamics at work as newcomers and old-timers seek to establish a position of power in order to shape the trajectory of the future of the town.[310] As such, principles developed from pioneers in ethnic multicultural integration are applicable for exurban ministry that desires to integrate old-timers and newcomers.

Exurban ministry, by nature, is multicultural ministry due to the fact that the traditionally rural culture of old-timers is being impacted by the suburban culture of newcomers to the area. This is very apparent within Mount Airy's current cultural situation. Within these cultural

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[310]   Taylor and Hurley, Kindle location 800.

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dynamics, old-timers, who tend toward traditionally conservative values and cultural traits, tend to conflict with the more progressive cultural values and viewpoints of newcomers to the area.[311] In order to move forward as an integrated community of faith, both old-timers and newcomers must acknowledge the viability, importance, and value of the other culture, seeking to understand them better in order to move forward together.[312] The valuing of another's culture, especially when one sees the other culture as a threat, takes intentionality on the part of leadership of the congregation.[313] Congregations must intentionally create opportunities for leaders from various cultures to lead within the congregation, share positions of power, invest in the ministry of the church, and hold each other accountable for living into the multicultural vision of the congregation.[314] In order for this integrated culture to arise in an exurban environment, it requires both old-timers and newcomers to lay down their preferences in order to form a new multicultural expression of ministry.[315] Just as the presence of multiple colors of skin within a church does not make a multicultural church, so too the simple presence of old-timers and newcomers does not ensure an exurban multicultural ministry. True integration of cultures requires intentionality within every aspect of the ministry, including the leadership, decision making process, use of symbols and ritual, music, and presence in front of the congregation.[316]

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[311]   Daman, 39.

[312]   Daman, 30.

[313]   Anderson, Kindle location 420.

[314]   Anderson, Kindle location 483.

[315]   Anderson, Kindle location 328.

[316]   Brouwer, 7.

This is a place where congregations can be intentional about who holds positions of leadership, how decisions get made, and what opportunities are present in the congregation that may foster contact and meaningful engagement among those of different cultures within the congregation.

Because of the multicultural aspect to ministry in Mount Airy's exurban context, Brenda Salter-McNeil's "roadmap to reconciliation" is a helpful tool in guiding congregations to reconcile and integrate cultures. Congregations in exurbia can especially help to facilitate the "catalytic events, realization, identification, and preparation" steps of Salter-McNeil's roadmap.[317] Congregations can help to facilitate, originate, or partner with community events that are likely to create places of contact between newcomers and old-timers in order to foster catalytic moments that can help to jar individuals out of certain ingrained mindsets. In addition, churches have built-in systems of helping to facilitate the realization phase, identification phase, and preparation phase of Salter-McNeil's roadmap through Christian education, Sunday school programs, and small groups. Using these systems in this way will require rethinking the formation of, representation within, and curriculum used in these groups; however, these existing programs in the church can be leveraged as powerful avenues for growth in multiculturalism within the congregation. These groups also can help to equip individuals to be able to impact the larger community as a peacemaking people. While the church in exurbia may not always look multicultural based on skin color alone, exurban ministry requires church leaders to think, plan, hire, and equip in multicultural ways.

In addition to the necessity for integrating cultures within an exurban ministry, a second principle for exurban ministry is the importance of presence. While many suburbanites do not spend much time within the exurban environment, seeing it as a bedroom community, most rural

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[317]   Salter-McNeil, 40.

members of the community spend the majority of their time in the exurban community.[318] The

presence in and importance of the local exurban community differs between these two groups;

however, a ministry of presence within the community is important for engaging well with both

groups. In order to effectively engage in mission toward these old-timers, a ministry of presence

is integrally important because this is the locus of where life happens for most in this group.

Eating, shopping, and attending sporting events locally develops social capital with old-timers

offering opportunity for greater ministry.[319] In addition, it is only through a sustained presence in

the community that pastors, leaders, and congregants will be able to discover where God is

already at work in the community and discern how God is calling them to engage in what he is

already doing.[320]

For pastors and leaders, this presence in the community likely will require a change in

how time is utilized in order to spend more time in relationship with old-timers in the

congregation and old-timers in the town.[321] Meeting people for meals at locally-owned

restaurants, being seen at town events, and structuring life around the community calendar are

important practices for pastors and ministry leaders that are serious about reaching old-timers in

the community. For congregations as a whole, this underscores the necessity of partnering with

and being present at community events that are a part of the social fabric of the town. In Mount

Airy, congregations that are serious about engaging with old-timers in the community should

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[318]   Daman, 133.

[319]   Daman, 133-134.

[320]   Ritner, 163.

[321]   Klassen and Koessler, 47.

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prioritize being present at town events on Main Street, engaging at town council meetings, and frequenting locally owned businesses.

A ministry of presence is also helpful in ministering well to newcomers to the community. Due to living in areas of town that are removed from Main Street businesses and the locus of community life, many newcomers are not well-acquainted to the businesses, parks, and events that constitute life in the community. Through leveraging congregational connection, churches in exurbia have the opportunity to help introduce newcomers in the community to life lived in the community. As shared above, having newcomers engage with old-timers through common attendance and interaction at community events, locally-owned businesses, and parks offers a place of contact through which new common identities can be formed.

Presence within the community is additionally important in light of research conducted by Robert Putnam in his book, *Bowling Alone.* In this book, Putnam shares that community engagement in the United States has been declining since the 1960's as shown through various indicators such as politics, religious expression, and membership in community organizations.[322] One path toward greater community engagement Putnam leaves as a challenge for clergy and churchgoers is to spend more time invested in the lives of others in the community through relationships by participating in the life of the community.[323] Again, this points to the importance of maintaining a physical presence within the exurban community in order to see old-timers and newcomers engaged together in ministry, as well as helping to develop a greater sense of community in town. There are inherent difficulties in maintaining presence among newcomers in the community due to their level of busyness. As such, the development of creative means for

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[322]   Putnam, 25.

[323]   Putnam, 409-411.

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maintaining presence and creating points of contact within the rhythms of life of newcomers is important when considering what a ministry of presence looks like in a particular exurban context.

A third principle for ministry within exurban environments is the use of strategic partnerships in ministry. While some large ministries within exurban environments may have the ability to engage in programs to meet the perceived needs of various age groups and affinity groups, many churches within exurban environments are unlikely to have the resources for this kind of generalized ministry approach. As stated above, many moving to exurban areas are looking for congregations with a full range of ministry programs for various age and affinity groups. While this is likely to create an increase in attendance and engagement among those churches that cater more specifically to a suburban mindset, it is important for various expressions of church to be present and viable through exurbia. This is one way in which strategic partnership can be effective.

It may be beneficial for effective exurban ministries to intentionally limit their ministry offerings and programs in order to leverage the most important ministries; however, this intentional limitation of ministry programs creates the necessity for churches and parachurch ministries to engage in strategic partnerships in order to accomplish ministry better.[324] Through partnership, ministries and churches are able to offer better programming and more effective ministries that can do much more than would be accomplished alone.[325] Not only does this create opportunities for greater ministry effectiveness, but it also develops a spirit of unity and collaboration among churches in the exurban context, which may make the church more

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[324]   Klassen and Koessler, 90.

[325]   Daman, 190.

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attractive and appealing to all in the community. The use of strategic partnerships in this way helps churches to use resources more efficiently while offering effective programming for all age groups and affinity groups. Through this, smaller churches are able to leverage their best qualities for mission and maintain a rural feel without sacrificing important ministries that are necessary to consistently minister well to former suburbanites and urbanites.

In addition to the practical aspects of strategic partnerships, these partnerships can also be leveraged to create opportunities for interaction and engagement across existing divides in the cultures. These partnerships afford greater opportunity for church communities predominantly of one culture, old-timer or newcomer, to have greater interaction with the other culture to promote greater understanding and cooperation in mission. This increases the contact between groups, and it does so in a way that serves a larger common identity. Together this has the potential to create spaces where peacemaking can occur within the larger exurban church as congregations work together as members of the church universal.

In addition to peacemaking opportunities, there can also be mutually beneficial partnerships between churches whose ecclesial models tend toward different postures toward the larger culture. A congregation from the Church as Great Commission Team or Household of the Spirit form an intentionally seek to partner with a New Community congregation in order to help work towards a more balanced approach toward culture. In Mount Airy, this kind of a partnership could be beneficial as many of the New Community congregations are heavily engaged in serving the community in tangible ways while Great Commission Team and Household of Faith congregations are more engaged in the public proclamation of the mission of God. Working together may offer a more fully formed expression of missional engagement for all congregations in the partnership.

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Finally, innovation in ministry is a fourth principle for ministry in the exurban context. While exurban environments have been a part of settlement patterns in the United States for over seventy years, pastoring within exurban environments is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of the global church, and as such, it will require "adventuresome pastors."[326] Since exurban ministry is multicultural ministry, but in a new and different sense of the term, pastors, leaders, and churches who desire to engage in missionally effective ministry in exurban contexts will likely need to rethink models of ministry and be willing to look for innovative forms of ministry.[327] This does not necessarily mean the jettisoning of prior ecclesial forms, but instead points to the critical engagement with inherited forms of church in light of theological faithfulness, contextual relevance, and cultural integration. "Same mission. Same dream. Same truth. Same message. Yet new forms. New languages. New containers. New priests and messengers. New relationships."[328]

L. Gregory Jones defines Christian social innovation as, "a way of life in relationship with God that focuses on building and transforming institutions that nurture generative solutions."[329] The concept of building and transforming institutions is important in light of the exurban context. Exurban churches have the opportunity to transform aspects of the small-town history of the exurb in ways that may effectively reach both old-timers and newcomers to the town. For instance, Robert Wuthnow shares that most small towns are filled with "great good

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[326] Klassen and Koessler, 64.

[327] Klassen and Koessler, 64.

[328]   Gibbons, 92.

[329] L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 13.

places," such as cafes, coffee shops, and community centers that stand as an important piece of the fabric of the town.[330] Innovative ministry utilizing the opportunity afforded through these "great good places" may offer a way of doing ministry that both serves the small town in positive ways and advances the Gospel to both old-timers and newcomers to the community.

Despite Jones' call for the church to engage in innovation as a part of its Christian identity, he calls for the church to primarily seek to engage in "traditioned innovation."[331] Jones states, "Traditioned innovation honors and engages with the past while adapting to the future."[332] He continues saying that traditioned innovation seeks to "discern and clarify what needs to be preserved and what needs to be abandoned for continued faithfulness to God."[333] In many ways, this is the call to the church in exurbia today: to critically assess existing ecclesial forms in light of missional theology, the contextual issues of the community, and the integration of cultures within the church body in order to develop a missionally faithful, contextually relevant and culturally integrative ecclesiology for exurbia. This will require holding on to those pieces of ecclesial forms that are beneficial to ministry in exurbia and jettisoning those pieces that are hindrances to embodying, engaging in, and proclaiming the kingdom story. Dave Gibbons offers a challenge for the church in relation to innovation:

> "The church has an amazing opportunity to become what God is hoping we will become. It'll take the resculpting of our organizations and corporate culture, the incubation of new art forms, new languages and expressions, new symbols, flexible ways of being organized and led, and even a fuller explanation of what we know as the gospel…We

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[330] Wuthow, 125.
[331] Jones, 49.

[332] Jones, 49.

[333] Jones, 51.

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need creative forms, methods, and practices for sharing the truth we love and believe in that will work in the new world and with a new generation. We need fresh counterintuitive ways of leading – in practice and philosophy."[334]

The "Good, Great" Exurban Church

From the theological and ecclesiological analysis above, it is possible to posit some initial conclusions for the development of ecclesial forms in the exurban context. These conclusions do not represent a fully formed ecclesiology for the exurban setting. That pursuit lies beyond the scope of this study. Instead, these conclusions offer helpful building blocks for the eventual development of an ecclesiology for the exurban context. These building blocks for an exurban ecclesiology are based in the pursuit of theological fidelity, contextual relevance, and cultural integration, which has served as the overarching framework throughout this study. In developing these conclusions for how congregations can seek to be theologically faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative, Ray Oldenburg's concept of "great good places" offers a picture of what the church could be within the exurban setting.[335] As stated above, "great good places" are places in the community that have become so integrally tied into the community that it is almost impossible to imagine the community without them.[336] These cafes, coffee shops, dinners, and other locally beloved spaces are common throughout small, rural towns including exurban communities, which at one point in time were rural in character.[337] Through long-term presence and deep identification with the community these staples of the community have

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[334]   Gibbons, 36

[335]   Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1999), 125.

[336]   Oldenburg, 125.

[337]   Oldenburg, 125.

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integrated themselves within the fabric of the community seamlessly. While "great good places" are typically found in rural towns, they are a part of the charm of rural living that is alluring to suburbanites and urbanites moving into the community. As such, "great good places" offer a potential connecting point in the exurban community where the Holy Spirit might draw newcomers and old-timers to interact, share mutual love for the community, and open doors for reconciliation to occur.

While "great good places" offer this opportunity for reconciliation, community identification, and bridge-building, the question that arises is what might it look like for the church to be a place that is integrally stitched into the fabric of the exurban community? What would it look like for the church to maintain a long-term presence in the center of the community in such a way that deeply identifies with the existing identity of the town itself? How might the church seek integrate into the community in such a way as to help bridge divides occurring between Main Street and Wall Street, old-timer and newcomer, and conservative and progressive? A full answer to these questions will likely require years of continued study, experimentation, and learning; however, the following conclusions from the study above are helpful in moving toward the great good exurban church – a church that is deeply integrated into the life of the exurban community through presence, community engagement, and intentional bridge-building between cultures.

In moving toward the great good exurban church it will be necessary to appreciate the missional and sociological benefits inherent in all of the ecclesial forms noted above. The movement toward the great good exurban church is not an attempt to place one ecclesial form over and above other ecclesial forms. None of the ecclesial forms shared in this study should be jettisoned completely as an effective expression of the church in the community. In fact, all of

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these ecclesial forms are needed within the community as they serve as checks and balances to each other. As such, a "mixed economy" of ecclesial forms is the necessary for the church in exurbia to be missionally faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative.[338] The differences in worship styles present between these ecclesial forms will be helpful to connect people from across different backgrounds in the exurban context; however, congregations of different ecclesial forms in the exurban context need to seek intentional partnerships with one another in order to bridge divides in the community and serve as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God. These partnerships are especially necessary for Great Commission Team, Household of Faith, and Fresh Expressions churches as these ecclesial forms can easily move toward sectarianism or have a negative disposition toward culture. This sectarianism and tendency to withdraw from a hostile culture can cause for existing divides in the community to be unwillingly perpetuated in the church community. In the exurban context, a mixed ecclesial economy built on partnerships between churches can offer a beautiful mosaic not only of worship style but of newcomers and old-timers seeking *shalom* in the community together.

This vision of a mixed ecclesial economy based in partnership will require that congregations develop a wider lens through which to view and understand the church in a particular context. In Mount Airy's exurban context, it is imperative for congregations to see that the church in Mount Airy is larger than any one expression. The church in Mount Airy includes congregations from all ecclesial forms and theological traditions that seek to work together as partners in the *missio Dei.* As Jon Ritner writes, "there is only one church in a city – Jesus' church – and it needs many expressions to fulfill its purpose."[339] The more that the church can

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[338]   Collins, Kindle location 716.

[339]   Ritner, 178.

embody this ecclesiological stance, the more opportunity for a mixed ecclesial economy to develop that does not look like ecclesial competition. This posture toward the church offers a foundation through which partnership is more likely to happen as congregations cease seeing each other as competitors and begin to view one another as co-laborers in the *missio Dei*. Instead of being competitors seeking the largest slice of the ecclesial pie, the church in Mount Airy will be show itself as a people across various expressions of church that seek the *shalom* of the town while living out the redemptive and restorative mission of God.

In addition to expanding one's vision of what constitutes the church in a given context, another conclusion that can be drawn in working toward the great good exurban church is the missional and contextual advantage of adopting aspects of the Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial form. While the ecclesial forms studied above offer positive and negatives within the exurban context, the Neighborhood Incarnational model stands as the most faithful to missional theology and peacemaking through contact theory and the common ingroup identity model. In addition, the emphasis of this model to engage critically with the surrounding culture while attempting to incarnate the gospel within the specificity of the local context is something that allows for a high level of contextual relevance and identification to occur similar to how "great good places" deeply identify with the town in which they are located. The beauty of this ecclesial form is that, according to Christopher James' work, congregations with this ecclesial form can have attributes of any of the other ecclesial forms while maintaining deep identification with and incarnational ministry toward the local context in which they are planted. All that is needed is a desire to ask the question of where the Holy Spirit is moving within the context and move toward partnering in those areas.

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While a mixed ecclesial economy is important in terms of reflecting worship preferences and cultural backgrounds, the need for congregations to intentionally engage in incarnational ministry within the specificity of the exurban context is an imperative, especially if old-timers are to engage in congregational community. Incarnational ministry not only follows in the ministry footsteps of Jesus Christ, but also offers an opportunity for the church to foster a common ingroup exurban identity among people of disparate backgrounds. As "great good places" deeply identify with the town in which they are located, so can the great good exurban church seek to identify deeply with pieces of the identity of the larger community.

In one sense, this requires that the great good exurban church in Mount Airy be a people who show up in and are present to the community. While it is not necessary for churches to completely jettison their existing ecclesial form to move in more incarnational ways, it is important for the church to seek to be present in the various cultures present in the community. How can the church in Mount Airy say that we care deeply about the town and are seeking the *shalom* of the community when the church fails to show up and be present within the community in intentional and incarnational ways? In Mount Airy, this underscores the necessity of the church to be present at town festivals such as Celebrate Mount Airy, Oktoberfest, the town carnival, and other events that help to bind the community together. In addition, it means that congregations need to intentionally be engaging in a dual, incarnational ministry seeking to understand and engage in the lives and routines of both old-timers and newcomers in the community since these groups do not always frequent the same parts of town.

In addition, this adoption of principles of the Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial model requires that congregations seek to study and understand the identity of the larger community. Dr. Michael Mata describes the process of paying attention to the details of a location in such a

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way as to understand the story and identity of the context as "exegeting the culture."[340]This

necessitates a localized approach to ministry that seeks first to understand the stories, history,

and collective identity of the town in order to respond missionally in the community. Churches

should seek to learn the symbols and pictures that are used in the community in order to better

understand the history and identity of the community. From this exegesis of the community,

churches can then seek to more closely align with those aspects of the identity of the community

that may be helpful in creating connection with the community and living out the *missio Dei.*

Churches that inherently seek to incarnate the gospel locally, such as those following New

Community, Neighborhood Incarnational, and Fresh Expressions models, can serve as catalysts

for the larger exurban church by inviting other congregations to join in events, service projects,

and other incarnational opportunities in the community as their ecclesial form tends toward a

natural identification with the local community.

Finally, in addition to cultivating an expansive ecclesial frame and adopting aspects of

the Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial form, a final conclusion in the movement toward the

great good exurban church is the opportunity for innovative forms of ministry to find

experimentation in the exurban context. While there are potential issues with the Fresh

Expressions and Neighborhood Incarnational ecclesial forms surrounding the homogenous unit

principle and exacerbation of existing cultural divides in the community, these ecclesial forms

also hold much potential in the ability to imagine forms of church that look different from the

institutional forms that are most prevalent in exurbia. This is a place where Ray Oldenburg's

concept of "great good places" that sit at the heart of many communities serves as a powerful

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[340]   Michael Mata, "Exegeting the Community" (DMin Lecture, Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, May 23, 2021).

picture of how the church might be able to minister within exurbia. [341] Bookstores, cafés, salons, barbershops, and diners often sit at the heart of communities like Mount Airy. These "great good places" are open throughout the week as a place for connection within the community. The traditional church model involves the church being open a few days a week at most with many predominantly open on Sunday only. Creating connection with the larger community is difficult when connection is only able to occur one day per week.

The Fresh Expressions ecclesial form, along with principles of Neighborhood Incarnation, can help to encourage experimentation in the church to either leverage existing great good places or develop new great good places within the exurban context in order to offer places of reconciliation and incarnational gospel witness. Churches could seek to develop incarnational cafes or coffee shops as a form of entrepreneurial ministry offering a place of connection in the community throughout the week. In addition, churches could seek to partner with existing "great good places" in the community to serve as host for small groups, meetings, or community events. Innovative ministry forms such as these not only provide increased opportunity for connection but may serve as a subversive way to increase contact between people of disparate groups opening the door for reconciliation and partnership through the church. Innovative ministry models such as these could position the church as a "great good place" in the community that would attract both old-timers and newcomers to co-mingle offering the beginnings for potential reconciliation and bridge-building to occur.

In Mount Airy, there is currently a resurgence occurring on Main Street as old-timers seek to preserve the identity of the town and newcomers desire to enjoy quaint, small town living. What was once a dying part of town has seen multiple small businesses move in over the

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[341] Oldenburg, 160.

past five to ten years that have helped to generate more activity and viability for businesses on Main Street. While the opening of a bookstore, coffee shop, café, or other great good place may not be possible for one congregation to accomplish on their own due to financial or logistical reasons, the development of an ecclesiological lens that sees all congregations as expressions of the church in Mount Airy may provide a path for multiple congregations to partner in the creation of a place on or near Main Street that would appeal to both old-timers and newcomers to the community. In doing so, such innovative forms of ministry must seek to be contextually engaged through understanding the identity and narratives of the community; however, the opportunity to create space where people from different backgrounds can meet, enjoy community, and naturally have contact with one another may offer a place for missionally faithful peacemaking to occur in the exurban context of Mount Airy.

Oldenburg's "great good places" offers a powerful lens for the church in exurbia to think about what it might mean to become a stitched into the fabric of the community. While Mount Airy's Main Street businesses have experienced a resurgence, the church on Main Street has continued to dwindle in size and missional impact. This creates an opportunity for the church to reimagine ecclesial forms and expressions of church in the community that may be able to innovatively offer places where the church community becomes an integral piece of community life. For the great good exurban church to occur the church must celebrate the mixed economy of ecclesial expressions occurring across the community, seek to partner together to incarnate the gospel in more localized ways, and be willing to experiment with innovative forms of ministry that will embody the *missio Dei* in faithful and relevant ways. In many ways, the church should look at the local context in a similar way to existing "great good places" in the town by asking how these establishments are able to connect with the local heritage and identity of the town

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while seeking to engage with a growing population of newcomers to the community. The great good church might be able to live into the unique identity of the church while contextualizing effectively for the exurban context. In doing so, the exurban church in Mount Airy may have the opportunity serve as a bridge between disparate groups while seeking the *shalom* of the town.

A final note on moving toward this vision of the great good exurban church is in order. Deeply incarnational models for ministry such as those described above are rarely quick fixes likely to see large increases in attendance at weekly worship gatherings. This vision for the great good exurban church in Mount Airy is not based primarily upon traditional metrics such as attendance, giving, and building size. As "great good places" show, deep identification with the identity of the community requires long-term, sustained presence in the community. Especially for old-timers in the community, who tend to be suspicious of anything new to the community, it is important for the church to prove itself over a period of time that it truly desires to be a partner in the cultivation of *shalom* for the community over and above any other desire for growth, significance, or fame.

A Vision for the Church in Exurbia

Reflections on Exurban Ministry in Mount Airy

Mount Airy, Maryland offers a unique context for the study of exurban ministry due to its location and the settlement dynamics taking place in the town. Throughout the study above, the church in Mount Airy has been the primary focus even as certain perspectives and ideas were extrapolated to the greater exurban context. The central question of this study is what the church in Mount Airy should consider due to the exurban dynamics occurring in the town. Due to its unique situation as an exurban community to two major metropolitan cities, it is important to consider the unique ways that the church in Mount Airy can seek to engage in missionally

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faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative ways. Drawing from the analysis above, this section seeks to further apply the principles and conclusions developed above in a focused way for the church in Mount Airy.

In order to facilitate the integration of cultures in Mount Airy, the church must be intentional about how it defines its mission field. Mount Airy is largely segregated between old-timers and newcomers. Old-timers tend to live either near Main Street at the center of the town or outside the official town limits. Newcomers tend to live in housing subdivisions that have been built over the past forty years. In addition to this old-timer/newcomer segregation, there remains ethnic segregation in Mount Airy as well. While the town of Mount Airy is predominantly white, a growing number of Latinx individuals have moved to the town and tend to live in mobile home parks on the outskirts of town.[342] The change of ethnic demographics alongside exurban change will offer an interesting and important new cultural dynamic in Mount Airy.

While the physical church location cannot be in all of these places at once, it is important that the church in Mount Airy focus its missional efforts in such a way that would likely include both old-timers, newcomers, whites, and people of color in the community. The great good church in Mount Airy must seek to be a place where these differing cultures can worship together and seek reconciliation as a picture and embodiment of the kingdom story. This will require the great good church to be present and engaged in both subdivisions, Main Street, and commercial areas of town in order to effectively engage with various cultures present in the community. Most importantly, this will require intentionality on the part of church leadership, ministry programming, and outreach efforts in the community. The kind of cross-cultural

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[342]   "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics."

ministry required of exurban churches who would seek to embody the missional call to all people groups in the community will not occur by accident. Churches, pastors, and leaders must intentionally seek to engage in a ministry of presence that will cross cultural boundaries existent in the community.

The segregated nature of the community underscores the importance of intentionally engaging with and adopting aspects of Neighborhood Incarnational or Fresh Expressions approaches to ministry. Both of these ecclesial forms have the benefit of being intentionally incarnational in nature; however, they also can perpetuate existing divides in the town if not guarded against. This is where the Fresh Expressions approach to ministry could be especially beneficial for the church in Mount Airy. While a true Neighborhood Incarnation congregation may perpetuate existing cultural divides in the community due to the segregated nature of exurban housing, a Fresh Expression congregation or ministry could intentionally be created around a cause or affinity that is shared among various cultures in Mount Airy, such as an "I love Mount Airy" ministry that seeks to beautify the town as an extension of ministry or an entrepreneurial ministry endeavor such as a coffee shop or café that would appeal to both old-timers, newcomers, whites, and people of color in the community. These forms of Fresh Expression intentionally do not pander to existing divides in the community. Instead they seek to create common ground around a shared identity in order to embody the *missio Dei* and bring *shalom* to the community. Ministry forms such as this have missional merit, especially in exurbia, and should be explored more fully by existing congregations and church planters in Mount Airy.

Regardless of whether a new Fresh Expression ministry is developed by a congregation, congregations in Mount Airy should continue to wrestle with ways to engage in continued

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presence in the town. This piece of incarnational ministry lies at the heart of the Neighborhood

Incarnational approach, and it can be engaged with by individuals and congregations regardless

of the operating ecclesial form of any particular congregation. As stated above, the church in

Mount Airy's presence is waning in the center of the town as evidenced through dwindling

congregations on Main Street and interviews with local residents.[343] While there are likely to be

numerous factors at work to create this situation and a full discussion of those factors is outside

the scope of this work, one result of this situation is the lack of church presence within the life of

the community. The Vice-Principal of Mount Airy Elementary School noted in an interview the

activity of the church in Mount Airy helping students and families going through difficulties

such as house fires, loss of loved ones, and other tragedies.[344] While this is great incarnational

work, statements from Town Councilwoman, Pamela Reed, show that there is much work to be

done by the church in order to maintain a consistent presence in the life of the town.[345] It is

apparent that while the church in Mount Airy currently does well to show up in the midst of

tragedy, hurt, and pain, the church has work to do in becoming a consistent presence in the

everyday life of the community. The great good church in Mount Airy must seek to show up in

everyday ways and have a presence in the life of the community even when there is not a tragedy

occurring.

There are many opportunities for consistent and sustained presence in Mount Airy for

congregations to consider. One avenue for this sustained presence would be for congregations to

find ways to have a shared presence as a part of town events. Instead of each individual

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[343]   Pamela Reed, interview with author, April 7, 2021.

[344]   Jennifer Mitchell, interview with author, January 31, 2021

[345]   Pamela Reed, interview with author, April 7, 2021.

congregation seeking to highlight their "brand" within the ecclesial economy, congregations could partner together to have a shared presence at existing town events. For example, congregations could work together to develop, host, and staff the children's activity area of town events working together as the church in Mount Airy. Another avenue that may cultivate sustained presence would be for congregations to approach town officials asking how the church can be a partner for the betterment of the town as a whole. According to Robert Putnam, civic involvement in all areas of community have decreased since the 1960's.[346] As such, there are likely committees, volunteer opportunities, and places of service in the town that would benefit from the church's intentional involvement. In doing so, the great good church in Mount Airy will better embody the kingdom story of the mission of God and seek the *shalom* of the town in such a way that serves as a partner to the larger community.

The development of a shared presence in the town of Mount Airy necessitates that the church develops an ecclesiological lens that encompasses more than one singular congregation. The missional posture advocated throughout this study requires seeing each congregation as an expression of the larger church in Mount Airy which encompasses all congregations seeking to participate in the *missio Dei.* As the church in Mount Airy seeks to become a great good church, it will require the reorienting of ecclesial mindsets toward cooperation and partnership instead of competition. Congregations in Mount Airy exist as part of the larger church in Mount Airy that is tasked with embodying, participating in, and proclaiming the *missio Dei* within this particular exurban context.

While many pastors and leaders would agree with this ecclesial framework, the pull toward building up one particular expression of the kingdom of God instead of the church in

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[346]   Putnam, 25.

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Mount Airy as a whole is a constant temptation. Full participation in the *missio Dei* calls

congregations to think beyond themselves realizing that God's mission in Mount Airy

encompasses all congregations seeking to live out the *missio Dei* in town. The development of

this ecclesiological framework in the laity of the church will likely take time and teaching

requiring pastors and leaders to intentionally seek to broaden the ecclesial horizons of the

congregants in their care. Pastors and leaders in Mount Airy can begin this work through

intentional partnerships between churches that will offer an image of the celebration of the mixed

ecclesial economy present in Mount Airy.

For starters, the development of a clergy association in Mount Airy is a necessary start to

the development of a shared presence and strategic partnerships. The lack of an association of

this kind in town limits the contact between members of different ecclesial forms, theological

frameworks, and denominations to those within existing avenues or individual relationships

developed by clergy. This limits the opportunities for strategic partnerships between

congregations to develop. The development of a clergy association in Mount Airy could offer a

space for the creation of trust between clergy members, the celebration of differing ecclesial

forms and expressions, and the development of strategic partnerships that may offer sustained,

missional presence in the town. In addition, a clergy association could be a place for the

development of shared ministry through working collectively in engaging with town events,

engaging in shared ministry to various age or affinity groups, and bridging cultural divides

between churches that naturally tend toward either urban, suburban, or rural cultures. Strategic

partnerships can grow from this place of collaboration among clergy to include more

parishioners in order to cultivate an ecclesial mindset throughout the town built on kingdom

partnership over competition.

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Despite the absence of a clergy association in Mount Airy, there are other avenues for potential partnership and shared presence throughout the town. An ecumenical food pantry and compassionate ministry center, Mount Airy Net, is a ministry that is supported by many congregations in the community. Mount Airy Net may be able to serve as a catalyst for shared presence and ministry partnerships in the town under a name that does not elevate one congregation over another. In addition, pastors and leaders in the town tend to have a positive relationship with one another. While this has not led to many large-scale opportunities for shared presence or ministry, there have been stories of partnerships that have been mutually beneficial to both congregations and offered a missional witness to the community at large.

An example of this kind of mutual partnership has occurred through the Walk Through Bethlehem outreach at the beginning of December. This event offers an interactive experience of walking through Bethlehem on the night of Christ's birth, and it is located on the property of Damascus Road Community Church, a Great Commission Team congregation with a strong suburban mindset. While it is located on the property of one congregation, multiple congregations come together to volunteer, give, and support in putting on this event. The different congregations that partner together for this event come from different ecclesial forms. Some tend to be full of newcomers, other are full of old-timers, and some have been able to have a mix of old-timers and newcomers. Working together to put on this event offers the opportunity for contact between people of differing groups working toward a common missional purpose as members of a common ingroup identity: the church in Mount Airy.

Another example is visible through the ministry partnership occurring between Marvin Chapel United Methodist Church, a small Neighborhood Incarnational congregation firmly planted in a rural mindset, and New Beginning Church of the Nazarene, the congregation the

author serves as pastor that tends to be more of a Great Commission Team congregation with more of a suburban mindset. While New Beginning Church of the Nazarene's building has been under renovation, Marvin Chapel United Methodist Church offered its facilities for worship; however, the partnership has resulted in more than one congregation simply renting its facilities to another for worship services. Instead, the two congregations have begun to engage in fellowship events, community outreach, and other avenues of ministry together. What makes this partnership and shared ministry more impressive is the fact that this involves congregations of two different ecclesial forms that tend to minister toward two different groups of people.

A final opportunity for expanding ecclesial frameworks to include congregations across Mount Airy could occur through intentional ministry partnerships between congregations. Pastors can offer to share their pulpit with a pastor from another congregation in town offering the opportunity for members of the congregation to meet, interact with, and learn from the pastor of another congregation in the community. In addition, congregations could jointly host a small group, discussion group, or Bible study to create space for interaction between congregations in the town. This could be especially effective for congregations that are culturally different from each other offering not only an opportunity for expanding ecclesial horizons, but also an opportunity for contact between cultural groups, which may help lead toward peacemaking in the town.

Continuing to build upon these kinds of ministry partnerships and opportunities for shared presence is integral to effective missional ministry in Mount Airy, Maryland. The study above offers important principles and conclusions for effective exurban ministry in Mount Airy. The ministry suggestions given above are simply a sampling of the possibilities for the great good church in Mount Airy as the church seeks to incarnate the *missio Dei* in missionally

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faithful, contextually relevant, and cultural integrative ways. While the scope of this study has

centered around Mount Airy's exurban context, the hope of the author is that the information

developed through this study of Mount Airy's exurban context serves as a help for pastors,

leaders, and ministry practitioners in exurban contexts outside of Mount Airy. This section has

offered a picture of what the great good church in Mount Airy might look like. In the next

section, the idea of the great good church will be extrapolated beyond Mount Airy in order to

offer a vision of what ministry in the exurban context could look like as the church seeks to

minister in missionally faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative ways in this

important and growing settlement pattern.

A Vision for the Future of Exurban Ministry

The study above has sought to offer an analysis of the current ecclesial environment in

Mount Airy's exurban context in order to better facilitate a missionally faithful, contextually

relevant, and culturally integrative ecclesiology for Mount Airy. While the scope of this

particular study has been constrained to Mount Airy's exurban context, it is the hope of the

author that this work will serve as a discussion starter for further study into effective ministry in

exurban contexts beyond Mount Airy, Maryland. For many years there has been ongoing

discussion surrounding effective ministry in rural, suburban, and urban landscapes. This

discussion has been beneficial for the church and has led to many cultural expressions of the

church that are missionally faithful, relevant to the context in which the church is planted, and

seeks to integrate various cultures present in the context. The work of the numerous authors who

have written, dreamed, prayed, and invested their lives in the development of urban, suburban,

and rural ecclesiologies should be lauded for its' kingdom impact. Unfortunately, there has been

little written concerning the exurban context and how the church can effectively contextualize

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ministry to this important settlement pattern specifically despite the presence and prominence of this settlement pattern in the United States since the 1950's. Considering the lack of conversation surrounding the church in exurbia, this section seeks to offer a generalized vision for exurban ministry moving into the future to start a conversation toward the development of a fully formed ecclesiology for Mount Airy.

In the development of a vision for ministry in exurbia, it is important to ensure the guiding ministry framework for this dissertation remains central to the discussion. Missional faithfulness, contextual relevance, and cultural integration are important pillars of exurban ministry regardless of the specific exurban context one is ministering in. As shown above, each of these pillars is important in ensuring that the kingdom story remains the story of exurban ministry while working to contextualize ministry to the unique challenges, successes, and dynamics of the exurban context. First and foremost, ministry in exurbia must maintain these three foundational aspects of ministry as guiding principles for the development of ecclesial forms.

In addition, the exurban context is naturally a conglomerate of individuals from varied backgrounds that bring with them the cultural distinctives and ministry forms from their home culture. Instead of reinventing the wheel, the church in exurbia has the opportunity to critically assess various aspects of inherited models of ministry in order to determine their missional faithfulness, contextual relevance, and ability to integrate cultures within the exurban context. Exurban ministry leaders need to resist extremes in the development of ecclesial forms for exurbia. The temptation to either adopt inherited models without critical reflection, on one hand, or attempt to build something from scratch, on the other, both are pitfalls not necessary within the exurban context. Instead, critical engagement with inherited ecclesial forms in order to create

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a hybrid of rural, suburban, and urban forms of ministry offers the best opportunity to engage missionally, maintain contextual relevance, and help bridge existing cultural divides naturally occurring in the exurban setting. In this critical reflection, pastors, ministry leaders, and practitioners can retain the best of various ecclesial forms while intentionally modifying them to meet the local cultural distinctives present in the community. This opens the door for an exurban ecclesiology that allows for greater diversity between congregations as each congregation determines for themselves what forms, programs, and practices lead them to missionally faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative ministry.

Exurban ministry also should intentionally seek to serve as a bridge between differing cultural groups occurring in the community. Exurban ministry cannot look to skin color or ethnicity alone to determine the dividing lines of culture in the community. Instead, exurban ministry requires understanding and identifying nuanced dividers between cultures in the community that may not be based in skin color, language, or nationality. In seeking to be culturally integrative as a picture of the kingdom story in the community, exurban congregations must identify the various cultures present in the community and then seek to serve as bridges between the cultures present in the local context. While this will include various people groups, it will also likely include different geographic areas in the context as well. While church buildings are located in a specific location in the context, the church has the opportunity to seek to be a bridge between different areas of the town and cultures present in the town.

One example could be trying to help create bridges between commercial areas of a town, which tend to be populated by Wall Street businesses, and Main Street areas, which tend to be populated by locally owned businesses. As stated above, the divide between Wall Street and Main Street parallels the divide between newcomers and old-timers in the community. Seeking
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to develop bridges between these two geographic areas of the community may help to create relational bridges between old-timers and newcomers in the community. This may be especially effective if these bridges offer a common ingroup identity for individuals in the town regardless of cultural background, which, as stated above, is an important building block in peacemaking and conflict resolution between groups.

In all, the church in exurbia has been given an opportunity to develop and live into a missionally faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative ecclesiology that can bridge divisions occurring in the culture. Based on Leonard Sweet's statement that the biggest divide occurring in the United States is the divide between urban and rural, the exurban context is on the front lines of that divide.[347] The church in exurbia has the opportunity to offer a path forward for reconciliation and peacemaking to occur in a context where people from urban, suburban, and rural backgrounds naturally collide. The lessons learned through this kind of exurban ministry may offer a path forward for many other places where the urban versus rural conflict is being felt.

Conclusion and Further Study

This study on the church in Mount Airy's exurban context has sought to offer a lens into the ecclesial economy of a particular exurban context that can serve as a prototype for the development of principles for ministry within the exurban context. While it is likely that each exurban context will have its own issues, dynamics, and circumstances, the hope of the author is that this study of Mount Airy's exurban ecclesial economy will be beneficial for the church in other exurban communities as well as congregations in Mount Airy's exurban context. This study has shown that the ecclesial economy in exurbia is largely derivative from urban,

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[347]   Sweet, 68.

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suburban, and rural models of ministry that were either present in the community before exurban change began or were brought into the community through exurban change. This has created a diversity of ecclesial forms present throughout Mount Airy due to this mixing of urban, suburban, and rural forms of ministry. This diverse ecclesial economy is a great strength of the church in Mount Airy, which should be celebrated.

Despite this strength, this study has sought to show that the exurban context requires a contextualized ecclesiology that remains missionally faithful and seeks to be culturally integrative. As such, the exurban context requires critical engagement with inherited ecclesial forms to ensure contextual relevance, missional faithfulness, and cultural inclusion. The adoption of incarnational ministry components is integral to the development of a contextualized ecclesiology for exurbia. In seeking to engage contextually in exurbia incarnational approaches to ministry should be studied and applied to existing ecclesial forms. In doing so, the church in exurbia has the opportunity to serve as a bridge between cultures in the community in ways that identify deeply with the context in which the congregation in planted.

In many respects this study is intended to serve as a conversation starter for further development of an exurban ecclesiology. Further study is needed in many areas surrounding the topic of exurban ecclesiology in order to develop a fully formed ecclesiology for exurban contexts across the United States and beyond. While this study has been confined to Mount Airy, Maryland's exurban context, many of the principles developed through this study are likely applicable in other exurban contexts. Further study is needed in other exurban contexts in order to discern what characteristics are common to most exurban contexts and what characteristics are specific to Mount Airy's context. In addition, deeper study is needed to more fully understand demographic, economic, ethnic, political, and ecological dynamics common to exurban contexts

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across the country. Further study is also needed in relation to the possibility for long-term

exurban conditions and how that relates to a missional ecclesiology. Questions surrounding the

sustainability of exurban contexts or whether they are a transition that takes place in a

community in moving toward urbanization must be answered in order to determine the long-term

effectiveness of exurban ecclesial forms and how exurban congregations should position

themselves for long-term sustainability and missional faithfulness.

In addition to these studies, there are also current events that may impact what the

exurban context looks like in the future and where exurban contexts develop. As stated in the

introduction to this study, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many individuals and businesses

to attempt engaging in remote working as a primary working situation. It will likely be years

before we know how this alters settlement patterns in the United States, but there is the

possibility that increased teleworking may lead more urbanites and suburbanites to move to rural

towns that lie beyond a typical commuting distance from a major metropolitan city since there is

less need to be physically present at an urban working environment. As such, smaller towns in

rural areas may experience exurban change even if they are located beyond the traditional edge

of the metropolitan commuting distance. Should this settlement phenomenon occur, it will

underscore the importance of creating a fully developed ecclesiology for the exurban context.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the exurban ecclesial landscape will need to be

studied further in years to come.

Finally, in Mount Airy specifically, the concepts and opportunities for exurban ministry

presented in this study must be experimented with and tested for their validity and effectiveness.

While this paper has offered various principles and conclusions on what ministry in exurbia

might look like, most of these principles and conclusions remain at the level of theory. There is

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always a need to test these theories and analyses in the real-world exurban environment. As such, it is imperative to continue this conversation on exurban ministry following the development of intentionally incarnational approaches to ministry that stitch the church in Mount Airy into the fabric of the community. Based on the above study, there is a need to begin an incarnational Fresh Expression of church in Mount Airy that seeks to be a "great good place" in the community. Following these experiments, each experimental ecclesial form should be tested as to whether it maintains missional faithfulness, engages in contextually relevant ways, and effectively integrates cultures present in the community. Additional study, reflection, and analysis based on this experimentation is needed in order to develop a practical exurban ecclesiology for Mount Airy, Maryland. This need for experimentation and analysis of real-world ministry will also need to be expanded to include additional exurban contexts beyond Mount Airy, Maryland in the pursuit of an ecclesiology for exurbia.

In all of this, it is the belief of the author that time and energy spent better understanding the exurban context will prove beneficial for the church at large. In the midst of current divisiveness politically, economically, ecologically, racially, and ideologically, the exurban context offers a place where people of different cultures naturally live, shop, and eat in proximity to one another offering the possibility for reconciliation and peacemaking. While the exurban context can often be a place of distrust and conflict between groups, there is potential for the church to offer another path forward that maintains missional faithfulness, identifies in contextually relevant ways, and offers a path toward cultural reconciliation and integration.

The church in Mount Airy has the opportunity to become a kingdom expression in a missionally faithful, contextually relevant, and culturally integrative way in a prototypical exurban setting. Doing so will require the church in Mount Airy to think and minister in

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incarnational ways that connect deeply with the identity of the town as "great good places" often

do in small towns. Through this pursuit, the church in Mount Airy can help to build bridges

between disparate cultural groups and offer a picture of a redeemed and reconciled people as a

sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God. Lessons learned from bridge-building efforts in

exurbia in general and Mount Airy in specific may prove helpful in building bridges between

urban and rural places in general.

As this study comes to a close, the picture of the kingdom of God shared in the

Revelation 7:9-12 serves as the vision and challenge for exurban ministry moving into the future.

> [9] After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count,
> from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the
> Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their
> hands. [10] And they cried out in a loud voice:
> "Salvation belongs to our God,
> who sits on the throne,
> and to the Lamb."
> [11] All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living
> creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying:
> "Amen!
> Praise and glory
> and wisdom and thanks and honor
> and power and strength
> be to our God for ever and ever.
> Amen!"[348]

May the Lord guide the church in Mount Airy to minister with this vision in mind.

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[348]   Revelation 7:9-12 (NIV)

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