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## The Application of Prophetic Pragmatism: The Intersection of the Theologically-based Education of the Black Church Leader, The Black Church, The Community, and Social Action

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THE APPLICATION OF PROPHETIC PRAGMATISM: THE INTERSECTION OF THE  
THEOLOGICALLY-BASED EDUCATION OF THE BLACK CHURCH LEADER,  
THE BLACK CHURCH, THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ACTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Education Leadership, Counseling, and Research

by  
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I remained committed to my sure calling, “The Church has a responsibility – a divine mandate – to positively impact and transform its community spiritually, morally, and economically.”

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study addressed how the academy (specifically theologically-based higher education), the Black Church, and typically oppressed communities can act as a coalition that produces positive social change. This is an investigation of the training and education that ministerial leaders receive in theologically-based institutions of higher education, how that training and education affects the philosophy and activities of the local church, and ultimately how those connections translate to advocacy and activity for social change. Benjamin Mays' career in the academy and the church is shown as the type of socially conscious leader that is necessary for social change. Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism provides the theoretical framework for moving from the academy to the community, or from theory to praxis. Qualitative research methods were used to determine what practices are currently working and what strategies can be utilized for future success.



## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **The Problem and Purpose of the Study**

It is true that societies are still stratified by various degrees and for various reasons. While certain segments of the population appear to prosper people who live outside of what is deemed acceptable struggle with the various conditions that are the result of prevalent, persistent poverty: crime, drug addiction, under and low employment, improper health care, and tenuous education systems. Most recognizable in the United States is the way that dominant segments that for years have benefited from white-male privilege tend to enact policies and maintain norms that strengthen the socio-economic political position of the privileged and prove detrimental to the underprivileged. The issues that continue to support hegemonic conditions go beyond race, gender, and sexual orientation to economics; which confirms the trite saying, “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

While the city of the researcher experienced violence by and against police and a natural disaster in a short period of time that would provide ample data for a study such as this; the study undertaken examines socially conscious religious activity in various cities and situations across the country. The researcher chose this direction in order to provide a more historically broad view of the social conscious activity of the Black Church.

This study addressed how the academy (specifically theologically-based higher education), the Black Church, and typically oppressed communities can act as a coalition that will produce positive social change. This social change includes, but is not limited to addressing problems that typically plague disenfranchised communities such as predatory lending, inequity in criminal justice systems, drugs and violence, and HIV/AIDS advocacy. To be sure, the effort to create such positive change requires critiquing and protesting those situations that are deemed

unjust and unequal; while at the same time addressing internal deficiencies within the community.

This study investigated the training and education that ministerial leaders receive in theologically-based institutions of higher education, how that training and education affects the philosophy and activities of the local church, and ultimately how those connections translate to advocacy and activity for social change. The study did not just report findings, but provided models that can be employed.

Theologically-based higher educational institutions are important because they are likely the entity that prepares church leaders for local parish work. These institutions should provide a space for innovative research that leads to practices at the local church level that produce positive change to improve the quality of living for people living in impoverished conditions. In this manner, the church becomes the conduit between what is developed in theologically based academia and what is realized in the community. Far too often, students at theologically based institutions are merely trained to maintain the status quo of denominations and churches without much critical consideration of solutions that will lead to social change. When graduates of these institutions are trained to merely sustain traditions and rituals communities do not benefit. Contrariwise, communities are strengthened and even transformed when church leaders are educated to lead congregations to remain socially responsible in addressing the needs of the community.

The Black Church plays a role in community transformation through social action because it is quite often the mechanism that can provide the social capital, the strategy, and the resources to initiate the social action that can improve the quality of life for persons who live in oppressive conditions. This entity played a role in nurturing many people who had meager

beginnings but developed substantial livelihoods. Many congregations have the unique composition of persons with little means and persons who have station and status in their communities. The Black Church may be the only entity in impoverished communities whose membership has the intellectual capacity, the social networks, and the agency to contribute to mechanisms that will generate social change. In order to avoid creating patriarchal environments persons who are indigenous to the community must be involved in the planning and activation for social change.

### **Key terms and structure of study**

The term, “theologically-based higher education institution” is used throughout the study. It is employed to refer to schools that offer curriculum, certificates, and degrees that are rooted in theology. The term theology is the intellectual-spiritual activity that helps the church to live creatively and faithfully between its worldly situation and its particular sources of wisdom and hope (Hall 2003). These institutions are ordinarily denoted as either seminary or school of divinity. In addition, this study explained the meaning and the relevance of the terms Black Church, higher education, and prophetic pragmatism.

This study included an explanation of the issue, how the researcher investigated, and offer solutions concerning the issue. The second section includes a review of relative literature that will provide evidence concerning theologically-based higher education, the Black Church, Benjamin Mayes, and prophetic pragmatism. Lastly the study shows the methodology that was employed to conduct the qualitative study and report the findings.

### **Position of the researcher**

The researcher enters the project with a critical perspective. As a pastor serving a community that is chronically challenged by the effects of poverty, as a graduate of an accredited

seminary, and as a student of higher education, the researcher entered this engagement with some preconceived notions of how church and the academy should interact in order to produce, develop, and enact strategies that will improve the quality of life for people who live in disenfranchised communities. The researcher is aware of the attributes and successes, as well as the frustrations and shortcomings of trying to connect scholarship, religion, and community engagement.

The researcher acquired practical experience in a 20 year career in Christian ministry at churches in poverty-stricken communities in Baton Rouge. For two years the researcher was assigned to work as youth minister with the charge to include and incorporate the children who were not members of the church, but who lived in the community into the programs of the church. In addition, for three years the researcher served as the assistant pastor in a congregation that intentionally worked to engage persons who live in the community that surrounds the church. For the past sixteen years the researcher has worked as the pastor of churches that work to frame its social activity in social justice lenses. The members of the churches seek to meet the immediate needs of people while at the same time working against community maladies such as predatory lending, drug addiction, and gun violence. It should be noted that while the researcher is situated in Baton Rouge, this study addresses the issues from a broader perspective. The issues that are mentioned about Baton Rouge are prevalent in cities across the United States where there is high poverty and the results thereof.

Because there was no training that related to social justice at the theologically-based higher education institution where the researcher was educated, he has intentionally studied and applied Holy Scriptures, theories, and methods that lead to equality and justice. Throughout seminary studies the author supplemented the curriculum with personal readings from

sociologist, theologians, and practitioners that address the unequal treatment of segments of society. The researcher deliberately sought subject matter that shared similar themes in higher education during doctoral studies.

The supplemental material included listening to sermons and speeches, as well as studied the practical work by noted social justice leaders within the Black Church setting such as Gardner Taylor, Samuel DeWitt Proctor, Jeremiah Wright, Jr., Gina Stewart, Frederick Haynes, III, Charles Adams, Cynthia Hale, and H. Beecher Hicks, Jr.<sup>1</sup> The researcher also read works that spoke about issues particular to the needs of African Americans such as public policy, religious life, civil rights, and higher education. These text included *The Souls of Black* (W.E.B. Dubois), *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Carter G. Woodson), *Prophetic Imagination* (Walter Brueggemann), *True to Our Native Land* (Brian K. Blount), *Prophesy Deliverance* (Cornel West), *Too Young to Be Black* (Brandee Jasmine Mimitzraiem, in *Walk Together Children*) and *In Shade of Blue* (Eddie Glaude, Jr.).

### **Research questions and method**

The primary question of the study is, “How do the Academy, the Black Church, and the community inform and support one another in alliance for social change?” The proposition is that theologically-based higher education institutions should be the place to educate innovative leaders who will lead local congregations to work with community members to produce social change that will improve the quality of life for residents in community where they serve. Other questions considered include:

1. How does the theologically-based training of the local Black Church leader influence the intellectual-spiritual activities of that leader’s congregation to produce positive social change in disenfranchised communities?

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<sup>1</sup> This is a list of noted African American clergy that are known for social justice work.

2. How does leadership in both the academy and the Black Church affect this interaction?
3. What are students enrolled in schools of theology taught about the role of the church as an agent for social change?

The methodological structure for the study is the case study method because it allows the researcher to investigate theological education of a specific group of Black Church leaders as well as how their knowledge and scholarship affects their philosophy of church and community relations. It also allowed the investigation and measurement of how the education of the leaders translates into the local church's interaction and cooperation with members of disenfranchised communities to produce positive change. The researcher explored real-life situations within church settings (Creswell 2014). Data was collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews, as well as through examining artifacts.

The theoretical framework is taken from Cornell West's notion of prophetic pragmatism. West utilizes religious principles and language to frame pragmatic thinking that will encourage social action that results in change. Prophetic pragmatism is relevant to this study because the researcher seeks both examples and potential models of how theological education affects congregational practices that produce positive change in oppressed communities.

Lastly, this study shows the model of spiritually and socially conscious higher education in the person of Benjamin Mays who as a pastor, a civil rights leader, and the president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia from 1940 to 1967 embodied the spirit and ideas of this study. Mays both promoted and exemplified the connection that can occur through socially conscious higher education, religious beliefs, and social change.

### **Higher Education**

Higher education refers to the course of study that is engaged after a person successfully meets the requirements of completing K through 12 grade education. Institutions of higher education are ordinarily divided between undergraduate studies and studies for those who have earned an undergraduate degree. Theologically-based higher education is that which is framed in theological concerns and applications. This study focused on the training and education that is provided by theologically-based graduate schools, called seminaries or divinity schools to higher education leaders and local church leaders who display a propensity to socially conscious ideals and activities.

Higher education institutions make definite contributions to the larger human community. First, colleges and universities have a significant impact on local communities in the manner that they produce educated people who are likely to earn higher wages, create local jobs, and increase local expenditures (Ambargis, McComb, and Robbins, 2011). The financial health of community colleges, colleges and universities, and professional schools have a direct impact on local spending habits, local spending, local community gross domestic product, and the local jobs market (Ambargis, McComb, and Robbins, 2011). In addition, Brennan and Teichler (2008) suggest that higher education graduates have advantages such as a means of social mobility that otherwise would not be afforded to them. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reported that people ages 25-34 who earn a bachelor degree earned 69 percent more per year in 2011 than their counterparts who earned a high school diploma (Doubleday, October 7, 2013).

Secondly, higher education institutions can be and can produce persons who are agents that produce creative strategies that will solve problems that are prevalent within our society (Ratchford, 1969). As Brennan and Naido (2008) suggest, higher education institutions provide space and opportunity for new ideas that lead innovation. These changes in the perception of

reality can eventually lead to new practices that allow positive progressions and developments within society.

Lastly, the social contributions of higher education institutions to the larger human community include the production of persons who are equipped with scholastic and intellectual tools to move knowledge from theory to praxis in order to improve society. Higher education institutions should produce leaders that will foster community growth and development. (F. Harris, personal communication, November 13, 2013)<sup>2</sup>. This growth and development is achieved through leaders who foster and insure the implementation of ideas that address those areas of society that yield unhealthy, unequal, and unjust outcomes for any individuals or communities.

It is also presupposed that except in the case of student or faculty-led rebellion, those who lead higher education institutions help to determine how particular higher education institutions respond to social issues. The pursuit of positive impact on society is more than likely lead by an individual who leads with a sense of social consciousness. Social consciousness refers to an individual's awareness of their environs and how they conduct themselves in relation to both physical and abstract constructs (Mead, 1912). Freier (1970) takes the notion a step further with his idea of *critical consciousness*, which refers to the way one perceives social, political, and economic contradictions in society, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.

The role of theologically-based higher education is critical to this study because it indicates how education contributed or did not contribute to the philosophy and activities of socially conscious persons who are administrators at theologically based institutions of higher education or in the local church. The researcher demonstrated the ways that the training received

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Forrest Harris is the president of American Baptist College in Nashville, TN and the director of the Vanderbilt Divinity School Kelly Miller Smith Center for Black Church Studies.



by the leaders in seminary or divinity school inspired their theological perspective and their present work.

Some will protest that higher education is not a requirement for leading local congregations. However, Mamya (2006) asserts,

For black churches and denominations, the education of clergy is one of the most significant factors for ministry in the 21st century. Studies have shown that community outreach programs of black churches, working with government and foundation funds, and advancement on the issue of supporting women as pastors are highly correlated with the level of clergy education. Further, only educated black clergy know about community resources to refer their most troubled members to for psychological counseling. The complex issues of public policy such as welfare reform, gay marriage, abortion, war, affirmative action, human rights, etc. demand a critical level of intelligence on the part of the clergy (p 31).

In order to successfully lead congregations to address what are obviously complex social issues that have political and economic ramifications, the local church leader must be equipped with critical thinking skills that allow leaders and organizations to innovatively address the issues that plague poor communities. Du Bois (1989) and Woodson (1993) agree that formal education of leaders is important to the advancement of the Black Church. Du Bois (1989) said, "...can there be any possible solution other than by study and thought and an appeal to the rich experience of the past? Is there not, with such a group and in such crisis, infinitely more danger to be apprehended from half-trained minds and shallow thinking than from over-education and over-refinement?" (p. 89).

Potential clergy must be educated to do more than maintain church traditions and rituals. This will require that theologically-based institutions of higher education include areas of study such as public policy, business administration, social work, and sociology in curriculums. Sebastian (2010) posits that the contemporary seminary should develop leaders that are prepared with more than biblical/theological and historical resources. Elements of business, the

humanities, and even political science are what it will take to successfully lead the contemporary church.

To be sure, theologically-based institutions of higher education prepare graduates to assume a dynamic role in society. Unlike most vocations, there is a different dimension connected to the desired outcomes for such institutions. The primary aim is to train persons who will lead people to live according to established moral and ethical standards. For Christian agents the aim is to see people receive and practice salvation. Whereas secular higher education institutions do not seek to proselytize, the primary function theologically-based institutions of higher education is to persuade people to believe and to follow the doctrines of the deity, Jesus Christ. Therefore, graduates of theologically-based institutions of higher education have the responsibility of leading congregations to address moral and ethical conditions, as well as social conditions.

### **Black Church**

As was pointed out in an earlier work, Lincoln and Mamyia (1993) say that the term “Black Church” is sociological and theological shorthand for black Christian churches in the United States (Domingue 2012). Cone (1985) and West (1982) insert that the Black Church has its roots in the slave churches<sup>3</sup> that combined Christian faith with African roots to develop a theology focused on liberation, justice, and equality. For the purpose of this study, the definition of the Black Church will include those congregations that embrace a theological construct of liberation that is practiced through efforts to deconstruct systems and structures that place certain communities and individuals in socially disadvantage positions. This includes churches that find their genesis in the American slave churches, those congregations whose parent denomination is

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<sup>3</sup> These churches were founded among the population of the enslaved during American slavery.

traditionally European (i.e., Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopalian), and non-Christian congregations. This study specifically focused on Christian congregations that use social-economic-political theology as a theoretical and practical point of convergence and that maintain congenial and working relationships with disenfranchised communities.

People who are a part similar religious culture – shared religious rituals and rhetoric (especially the Black Church) - have a role in the development and maintenance of social policy and a responsibility to engage in social action that will energize and empower people in order to improve the quality of living. This “call to arms” is based on the church’s profession to keep the commands and follow the principles of a deity of justice and equality. Given the nature of the current political, social, and economic climates in the United States with home foreclosures, jobless rates, and high-school dropout rates ascending to record numbers, those who are innately familiar to the plight of the people must play a role in securing policies and actions that will support better opportunities for better living.

The Black Church has this responsibility because it was born as an entity that provided spiritual, social, and political support during North American slavery and legalized segregation. Its history is found in providing both spiritual and social answers for people who were confronted with difficult social, economic, and political positions in society. It has been documented that the Black Church has always been the incubator for social consciousness and thus public awareness for African Americans. It can be said that the slave church was the propellant of messages of freedom that stood against the policies of chattel that restricted Africans in the United States. The Black Church has always been a spiritual refuge with social consciousness which has at times and places been more pronounced than at others (Lincoln and Mamyia, 1990).

Historically, the Black Church has played a role in both the spiritual and social development of African Americans. In many Black communities the church became the womb and the incubator for benevolent societies, businesses, schools, libraries, social gatherings, social services, vocational training, even the practice of quasi politics (Domingue 2012). For example, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the African Meeting House in Boston, MA was the location of Abiel Smith's school for African children and hosted Abolitionist speakers such as William Lloyd Garrison, Maria Stewart, and Fredrick Douglass (Bower & Rushing, 1980). In addition, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century church leaders Father Malcolm C. Dade, Reverend Horace White, and Reverend Charles Hill were at the forefront of assisting African-Americans to secure rights with the United Auto Workers in Detroit (Dillard, 2007). This work was mostly accomplished by a semi-educated clergy and a limited educated congregation.

Not only so, but access for Black people to resources and decision making was more limited for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than presently. Those who were traditionally limited in access to political capital and social mobility now occupy elected and appointed positions in the American political systems and economic middle and upper middle class at a higher rate than previously possible. This suggests that those who compose congregations in the Black Church are more educated and more intellectually sophisticated. The composition of this congregation requires its leaders to be more educated and intellectually sophisticated.

### **Summary**

This study demonstrates that the training gained in theological-based higher education affects the way the Black Church approaches engagement in social justice activity with persons and organizations that are situated in disenfranchised conditions. The study is theoretically structured in prophetic pragmatism because this philosophy combines Christian ideals with

practical applications to yield change to structures that produce injustice. In an effort to demonstrate the importance of socially conscious leadership in this coalition of academy, Black Church, and community, Benjamin Mays is used as a model because of his scholarship, position in both the academy and the Black Church, and his civic engagement.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

“If black theologians and black pastors are serious about black people’s survival and liberation, then they ought to risk the comfort and prestige of their respective enclaves of academic and ecclesial privilege and commence a new moment, an integrative moment that brings together the revolutionary insights of the black intellectual and the institutional strength of the black church”

Raphael Warnock,  
*The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*

## **Introduction**

The study is an inquiry into the connection between the development of ecclesiastical leaders in schools of theology with the philosophy and practices of the Black Church, and the impact of the Black Church as an agent of social change for communities in which citizens may be deprived access to services and opportunities that lead to upward mobility. This study examined the seminary training/experiences of local church leaders as well as what is currently taught, how those lessons transfer to the social consciousness and social action of the local Black Church, and how partnerships are formed with people and organizations who work for social change in the community.

The researcher learned how the three entities, higher education, the Black Church, and the community form a coalition to improve the quality of life for persons whose lives are adversely affected by poverty. Ultimately the research discovered and developed best strategies and practices to implement in continual contention for justice and equality for persons who live in disenfranchised communities. Churches can pursue and accomplish these aims 1) by identifying and utilizing existing and potential resources; 2) by building capacity through partnerships, and 3) by creating alliance with stakeholders within communities. In this manner the Church will have the resources, capacity, and alliances to operate programs that address addiction recovery, job preparedness, and adult learning; to affect public policy that will lead to economic development, better K-12 educational outcomes, stem the tide of neighborhood violence, and provide healthy food and healthy living options.

The scope of the study was limited to those churches that have leaders who have demonstrated teaching and leading the congregation in social engagement. The study looked broadly at the areas of engagement, such as working against predatory lending, voting rights

activities, K-12 education issues, and criminal justice reform. From this broad perspective the researcher hopes to find both unique efforts and common efforts among the participants in the study.

This section reveals a survey of available literature that will inform the researcher of scholarship that addresses the specified subject. Specifically, the review of literature covers what has been published concerning higher education and social action, theological-based higher education, the Black Church, Benjamin Mays, and prophetic pragmatism. The literature on higher education provides a foundation for the literature on theologically-based education. It is employed to demonstrate that what is learned (or not learned) in theologically-based education affects the church leader's and thus the church's disposition towards social action. Literature on the Black Church is included to show the both the tension and the harmony between theologically-based education of church leaders and the social action of the Black Church congregation. Prophetic pragmatism, which proves what is truthful by its utility, provides the theoretical framework for the exploration of the social conscious and social action of the Black Church. In addition the prophetic leadership of late of Morehouse College president Benjamin Mayes is treated because his life and work provides an illustration of socially conscious leadership in both academia and the Church.

Literature demonstrating higher education as the foundation for theologically-based higher education is presented to show how higher education institutions impact communities with intellectual, technological and human capital. The inquiry into theologically-based higher education is important for this study to show how training received in these institutions translates to social action by the congregations.

### **Higher Education as the foundation for theologically-based higher education**

This study connects the collegiate theological education with the social awareness and operation of the leader and local congregation. According to Finke and Dougherty's (2002) assertion seminaries cultivate social capital and provide religious capital for graduates. Social capital is the network of persons who share like interests and concerns, and religious capital is mastery of religious literature, polity, and culture. Culture is composed of the rhetorical, interactional, and material tools that are employed for social action (Patillio-McCoy 1998). These tools will include beliefs, ritual practices, language, and stories that are organized for strategic action.

Patnaik (2007) says that "...higher education as a transaction between teachers and students, which occurs at specific locations called colleges and universities, and in the course of which teachers impart and students receive a certain training, which enables them to improve their skills and get better placements in the job market" (p. 3) However, these institutions play a much more vital role than simply supplying a quality workforce. Higher education institutions, including theologically-based higher education institutions can play a major role in addressing societal issues by developing persons who are dedicated to leadership, service, and justice in the global society. These institutions can operate in a meaningful way if they are driven by notions of educating and training generations of persons who will develop ideas that will solve problems, function as change agents in society, and promote economic development for communities in which they are situated (Ratchford, 1969). Higher education institutions provide meaningful resources in community development such as an educated workforce, expertise in specific areas of concern, and in-kind service such as space to host meetings and administrative services (Amijo 2005). Mission statements from a select group of theological institutions demonstrate this



point as they all report that they help students to develop faith, as well as skills and awareness to address social issues ( see Appendix A).

Likewise, Brennan and Naido (2008) suggests that higher education institutions, including theologically-based higher education institutions have a role to play in that they should create and export sustainable ideas that lead to practices that makes society more equitable and just for all citizens. That is, the seeds of social transformation should germinate in the halls of academia and bloom in the practices of those who are trained by those develop the ideas. This is achieved through including community based activities into courses, orienting scholarly activity to address community concerns, and developing community partnerships between higher education institutions and community stakeholders (Hartley 2009).

Higher education in general and theologically-based higher education specifically can (should) be a catalyst for social reform that allows for greater opportunities for equality and justice for all persons in a community. The mission statements of the seminaries and divinity schools mentioned earlier all say they prepare leaders to serve the Church and society.

The idea of theologically-based higher education is used distinctively from the notion of Christian education because the latter refers to internal church teachings that can be led by laypersons, as well as professionally trained persons. Christian education ordinarily occurs in church settings and is most-likely led by persons who do not have advance academic education. Theologically-based higher education is ordinarily led persons who have advanced academic degrees in their particular area of expertise; and those persons could very well have practical experience as well. The purpose is to provide students with academic tools necessary to engage issues within local communities that require moral, ecclesiastical, religious, cultural, and interconnected global responses (Haney 2005).

Theological education is considered the graduate-level training for persons who are already engaged or wish to enter into the clerical work of the church (Wheeler, 1993). Seminaries are usually established by a denomination and are not directly affiliated with other institutions of higher education. Divinity schools are usually connected to an established university. Both religious training institutions are designed to give professional credentials to ministers. It is in these institutions that individuals are trained to complete the vocations of their particular denomination. In many ways institutions that offer theological higher education can be considered professional schools. Professional schools are those that use curriculum that will prepare persons to contribute to society in a particular field through specialized training (Blau, P., et al, 1979).

Higher education institutions and religious training were originally tied together in American higher education. Religious education was included in the curriculum for higher education institutions in America from their very inception. In fact, many institutions were founded by particular religious groups in order to educate and train persons in the theological theories of their own denominations (Thelin, 2011).

The complexity of issues in this contemporary age will require multi-faceted theological education that includes theology and social sciences. In order to address the consequences of poverty in many communities where Black churches are situated, the leaders will need exposure to the theories and practices in disciplines such as public policy, business, and social work. One of the challenges of the Black Church is that many of its ministerial leaders lack formal theological training. In a study conducted in the 1930s Mays and Nicholson (1933) reported that 80 percent of clergy had not attended college and 86.6 percent were not trained in the seminary. Some decades later a study conducted by Lincoln and Mamiya (1993) concluded

that only 35.9 percent of clergy in Black churches held graduate degrees from an accredited seminary or divinity school. In addition, statistics from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) show that between 2013 and 2015 only 12.7 percent Black clergy graduated from theological institutions accredited by the agency.<sup>4</sup> ATS approves institutions to offer Master of Divinity, Master of Art, Master of Theological Studies, Theological Masters, Doctor of Ministry, Doctor of Missions, Doctor of Philosophy, and Theological Doctorate degrees.

However Mamiya (2006) reported that the education of clergy is one of the most significant factors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century among churches and denominations. Given the complexity of challenges that face disenfranchised communities in the present age professional seminary training is critical for Black Church leaders. In addition, the rise of educational attainment in the Black community among persons outside of the clergy will demand a better educated pulpit in terms of communications skills and strategic acumen.

Social action against what is deemed unjust and unequal is weaved into the fabric of the Black Church's tradition. For example, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) was formed in Philadelphia in 1787 in protest against Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others being removed from worshipping at the St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church (Lincoln and Mamiya 1993). In order to remain aligned with the unique tradition of the Black Church to address social issues, clergy will have to be trained in order to resolve 21<sup>st</sup> century issues including the persistence of white supremacy, predatory lending practices, and high unemployment/under employment rates among people of color. The next section will demonstrate how theological education should inform and inspire church leaders to work and encourage congregations to work for social change.

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<sup>4</sup> The Association of Theological School is the recognized accrediting agency for theological institutions in North America.

## **Theological Education and Social Change**

Theological education should include curriculum that will connect what is learned in the academy to the socially-conscious leadership and practices of the institution's graduates. Like any form of education, theologically-based education provides and builds knowledge, skills, experiences, and relationships through training (Finke and Dougherty, 2002). Theologically-based education is usually based in a school that is meant to fit persons for professional or vocational service in faith communities (Beaven, 1935). Theologically based education is meant to prepare and inspire perspective church leaders to instruct people in social insights and enterprises (Beaven, 1935).

As Brennan (2008) says about higher education generally, theologically based higher education has the responsibility to create and transfer knowledge that will result in ideas, policies, and actions that have a positive impact on society. The quandary for theologically-based higher education through seminaries and divinity schools is that they avoid merely training individuals to function in a manner that continues the status quo of the church without imparting the critical thinking skills that allows individuals to engage the major social issues in an intellectual and strategic manner. In the same way that the role of the higher education for African Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was viewed, seminarians and divinity school students were trained to keep religion and religious persons in their place in society (Matthews, 1933). Matthews (1933) says that seminaries train ministers to become not much more than propagandists of revelation (preachers), as well as conductors of ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. While these functions are important, this study seeks to show the value to society at large of training seminary graduates that lead congregations and denominational organizations to address the needs of the community where they exercise their

vocation. In order to truly serve society by supplying leaders for local churches and denominational organizations, theologically based institutions should produce graduates that have been trained to approach community issues in creative and effective ways.

If higher education institutions in general should be the place where innovation is prevalent, the same is true for theologically based higher education institutions. In both the general and particular sense, the ideas that are produced have the potential to develop into actions that resolve social problems. As van Rooij (2014) asserts about colleges and universities in general, the same is true for seminaries and divinity schools: “they not only need to provide trained manpower and publications to society, but also new products, new processes and new services that create firms, jobs, and economic growth” (abstract).

Those who want to apply their scholarly and practical education to the work of social change should find training and opportunities through theological education. Wuthnow (1971) delineates what he calls the activist seminarian who looks beyond parish ministry to areas of work such as urban renewal, ghetto education, revolutionary tactics, or critical journalism. In order to fulfill these pursuits the scholastic tools that are necessary to perform quality research and make relevant attempts at making improvements in the quality of life for underprivileged individuals and communities should be an integral part of the curriculum in theologically-based higher education. Institutions should produce activist seminarians.

### **Curriculum Effects**

Quite often theologically-based higher educational institutions reflect the theology and the philosophies of the denominational sponsor. As result, curricula will produce trained leaders that purport the theological doctrines, but will also reinforce the socioeconomic-political mores of the persons who lead the organizations. On the one hand there are conservative leaning

denominations that support socially conservative agendas and curricula. In such circumstances, the curriculum ordinarily does not include any academic exercises concerning public policy, organizing for social change, or community engagement. For instance, a traditionally conservative Baptist seminary that is situated in the South offers no courses on social justice or addressing public needs, but the curriculum does include courses such as Baptist Life and Faith, Christianity in the United States, and the Biblical and Theological Basis of Evangelism and Discipleship (<http://www.nobts.edu/resources/pdf/academics/GraduateCatalog.pdf>).

Likewise, those persons that lead religious organizations with more progressive ideologies will seek to produce church leaders that advance their particular theological ideals. While it may be that theologically-based higher education institutions may include components of education, psychology, and social work in their curriculum, it will not encourage social justice and social action advocacy if that is not the leaning of the persons that compose the decision making bodies of the institution. For instance, a non-denominational institution in the Mid-West includes in its curriculum courses entitled The Church and the Urban Poor, Justice: A Vision for a Sustainable City, and Social Issues from a Systems Perspective (<http://www.cts.edu/about-cts/history-mission.aspx>).

Crocco (1990) asserts that to include any perspective other than white males of European descent into theological education is to dilute the true meaning of the American theological experience. His assumption is based on the notion that the struggles of the white male of European descent not only tell the story of building this nation, but also of theological/philosophical perspectives in American. Such an intellectual stance does not allow for a complete understanding of the robust nature of what he calls the “American tradition.” A true understanding of nation building and theological foundations has to include Indigenous,

Asian, Latino, African, women, and gay perspectives of theology. Taken from Crocco's perspective, theology in this country is formed and informed from a dominant (top-down) position. A more honest perspective of the formulation of this country and its theology is found when the theories and philosophies of those who are other than the white/straight/Christian male paradigm are included, especially in the curriculum of seminaries and divinity schools.

Another challenge that must be overcome in theologically-based education and in the local church setting is the historical use of the sacred scriptures to support patriarchy, domination, and the notion of manifest destiny.<sup>5</sup> Just as there was an attempt in American slavery to use sacred scriptures to justify slavery, some of the same ideologies remain subliminally prevalent. Christianity and its related literature has been, and to a certain degree still is, used to justify the domination of some demographics of society over others (Wilmore, 1974; Felder, 1991; and Hopkins, 2000). This is accomplished by using the sacred scriptures to support the divine appointment of social systems that favor one group above another. It is seen when elected officials misrepresent Matthew 26:11<sup>6</sup> from Christian scriptures to justify their support of the concerns of the wealthy elite above the needs of the masses of people live around or below the poverty line.

African-American Christian faith is in many ways a response to such false notions (Evans 1992). It is necessary that theologically-based education project the equality of all persons and people groups while at the same time rejecting any theories that message domination, inherit good and evil, patriarchy, the manifest destiny (see Footnote 5) of one people group above another.

### **Pertinent Theories**

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<sup>5</sup> The researcher asserts that the term that was used to justify European expansion and imperialism in North America is grounded in so-called divinely mandated expansion Israelite that is recorded in the Bible.

<sup>6</sup> For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always (New King James Version).

The premise of this study argues that theologically-based curriculum should include study in theories such as critical social theory. Incorporating critical social theory into theologically-based curriculum will grant students exposure to ideas, theories, and research methods that encourage combining theological theories with social theories that will lead to effective creative practices at the local church level that promote social change. Critical social theory is multidisciplinary in nature and seeks to promote and promulgate the liberating feature of knowledge (Leonardo, 2004). This theory provides that persons may take an alternative view of a given issue in society by applying criticism to the issues in the search for equity and justice. The idea is to critique social arrangements that are oppressive to any particular group in order to present alternate social structures. The aim of critical social theory is to create social change. Critical social theory allows individuals to compare social structures and systems that exist with objective possibilities of human development and what would be considered the ideal rational society (Scott 1978).

Meisenhelder (1982) attaches the idea of hope to critical social theory. He suggests those who engage in looking critically at social settings do so with the idea to change those settings that are unequal or unjust. Hope is described as a mood-state that allows one to primordially consider and encounter one's existence in the world with the idea that situations don't necessarily have to remain unequal or unjust. Moltmann (1967) suggests that it is the idea of hope that is the cause and motivation of persons who seek social change for both individuals and communities.

From critical social theory students may be taught to explore and apply other branches of social theory such as social movement theory and social justice. Social movement theory supports the study of movements within society that are oriented to cause significant change to



social configurations that leave certain people or segments of society at a disadvantage as it relates to securing the goods and services to live comfortably (Sawyer, 1988). The goal is to move persons beyond mental and academic conceptions of what is true about particular situations to changing mere theory into practice. It is a framework that seeks to build an infrastructure of material goods, services, policies, and programs that will transform the living conditions for persons who live in a disenfranchised state of being (Mohan, 1992). Social movement seeks to challenge existing systems that are not beneficial for all by either changing the existing system or creating an alternative that will best fit the need of the day. It moves persons beyond complaining to actually trying to replace dysfunctional arrangements with more beneficial plans, methods, and implementations.

Social movements require and involve a critique of present conditions and a conclusion that situations or systems are not just or equal (Brueggemann, 2001). It is the critique and evaluation that leads to the resolve to effect change. It is in social movement exercises that people of little individual means are given to fully participate as actors and not victims in history. The employment of mass movements has allowed people of supposed ordinary existence to change the realm of their living conditions by engaging in mass movements (Pivens and Cloward, 1977).

Social justice implies the operation of a system of treatment that purports fairness, respect, and dignity for all persons of a given society (Iheduru, 2006; Hendricks 2011). However, this ideal goes far beyond the ritual of public politeness; but leads to the assurance of access to similar economic, political, legal, and social advantages for every member of a given society based upon merit (Sadurski 1984). In other words, the access to the same economic, political, legal, and social advantages based upon the membership in a given society. This line of thinking

suggests that every person of every social group of any society is given the same rights, support, opportunity, and protection of every person in a given society. In this manner, rules and policies are developed and enacted with both legal and human elements in mind.

Social justice provides away to study the distribution and access to public goods and services to the population, and whether such distribution and access is a reflection of the social values of the various groups that comprise a society. Iheduru (2006) suggest that tensions arise between two ideals concerning how this should take place. On the one hand there is a set of values that suggest individuals should have sole responsibility for themselves and their well-being. On the other hand there are those who believe that the community has a role to play in the well-being of its citizens. The study of social justice will allow those engaged in theological-based higher education to explore ways in which marginalized persons and communities can gain access to systems, goods, and services that will improve the quality of living.

Summarily, Haney (2012) states, “Contemporary Christian ministerial training and theological education (the latter encompassing seminary education, schools of religion, and schools of theology) are expected to provide students with the academic tools necessary to engage issues within local communities that require moral, ecclesiastical, religious, cultural, and interconnected global responses” (p 39). Institutions that fall short of such standards transgress against the very communities that depend upon the leaders that the institution is supposed to produce. Critical to this enterprise is the leadership of the higher education institution. The model of Benjamin Mays is utilized in the next section to demonstrate the critical role of leadership in connecting the academy, the Black Church and the community for social change.

### **Benjamin Mays**

One of the functions of higher education is to develop persons who are concerned with positively impacting society. Although there is disagreement as to the importance of the academy (Warnock 2014) to the work of the church, the academy-church/community paradigm benefits when leaders are properly trained in both theological and social academic arenas. The enterprise of social change is only enhanced with socially conscious leaders are equipped with research, analytical, and strategic skills to advance positive change for the community.

An environment that can foster and nurture such ideals is both supported and disseminated by the leadership of higher education communities. If higher education communities are going to respond to social concerns and social needs; and if these communities are going to be at the forefront of positive social change, it will require a leader who harbors and shares the same perspective.

One such leader was Benjamin E. Mays. He is important to this study because his life and work exemplifies the model of leader that is necessary for social change. Mays' example shows that socially conscious leaders have a profound effect on the social consciousness of a multiplicity of persons. During his lifespan and career, Mays was a civic leader, Christian minister, college professor, and college administrator (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2003). He combined his faith and his commitment to make positive change for the community in order to provide a positive model that would remind both employees and students that their mission was to do something unique and distinctive in order to positively affect society (Mays, 1983 as cited in Rovaris, 2005).

The model set forth in the life of Mays fits this study because his life and career embody the triad of the academy, Black Church, and community. He completed doctoral studies in religion at the University of Chicago and finished an extensive study entitled *The Negro's*

*Church* in 1932 (Rovaris, 2005). In addition, Mays served as the pastor of a small urban church in Atlanta for three years at a time when the Black Church served both the social and material needs of its congregants (Mays, 1971). He worked as the executive director as the National Urban League and with the YMCA<sup>7</sup> during his life. Lastly, as president of Morehouse College Mays sought to connect Christian ethics, with scholarship; and he espoused the necessity of students, faculty, and alumni to positively affect their communities (Rovaris, 2005 and Mays, 1971).

Like many leaders for social change, Mays' determination to make a meaningful contribution to the struggle for dignified and equal living for people of color in the United States stems from experiences while growing up in the South in the early twentieth century (Mays, 1971). He said that he witnessed the dehumanization of people firsthand, including watching a lynch mob at age five (Mays, 1971). "Few men have observed and experienced more indignities in Negro-white relations than I, choosing to live in the South, though hating...the injustices and brutality heaped upon Negroes during my lifetime" (Mays, 1971, p. lv).

Mays is important to this study because he was able to model and encourage others to understand the importance of scholarship and commitment of social justice. He earned a bachelor degree from Bates College in Maine and a doctorate of philosophy degree in Religion from the University of Chicago. After earning his degrees, Mays began his career as a math instructor at Morehouse. Mays, who also served as the dean of the School of Religion at Howard University, served as the president of Morehouse College from 1940 to 1967. It was during this period that Mays served as both a theorist and practitioner of a socially conscious higher education leadership. He was able to build the physical plant and the social capacity at Morehouse that

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<sup>7</sup> The National Urban League is a civil rights organization in the United States. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was founded to promote Christian character through sportsmanship and scholastic achievement (<http://www.ymca.net/history/1870-1890s.html>).

allowed for the education of African American men to make a difference in the world (Rovaris, 2005).

During this period, Mays had a hand in influencing and training some of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., former mayor of Atlanta Maynard Jackson, and civil rights leader Julian Bond. (Savage 2007). To Mays' surprise, King not only listed Mays as a great influence, but also King considered Mays his spiritual mentor (King, 1958). King spent most of his formative years on the Morehouse campus while Mays was the president. During these years Mays was able to impact King's life when Mays spoke to the college's community at Chapel services, but also in private conversations at the president's home (Mays, 1971).

As the president at Morehouse, Mays used once-per-week, campus-wide meetings in the college's chapel to encourage and inspire the university community, as well as to espouse his convictions on a number of social matters, including civil rights (Mays, 1971). It was during these gatherings that Mays tried empowered the members of the Morehouse community to work towards social change. Because of his excellent oratorical skills and unique ability to motivate, he impacted the thinking of students through his idealistic and pragmatic Tuesday speeches (Colston 2015). The purpose of many of the speeches was to inspire the persons in attendance to employ intellect, strategy, and courage to change social systems that oppressed African Americans and other minorities (Mays 1971). It was in this role that Mays employed the charisma that is necessary to inspire others to move beyond tier perceived limitations (Northhouse 2004). Some documented illustrations of Mays' chapel comments include,

“There is a more valuable freedom which the state cannot take away. This freedom cannot be given. It must be achieved. It is of the mind. It comes from God. Only the

disciplined mind is free. Free minds have a sense of what is right and what is wrong”  
(page 44).

This statement identifies the need for the academy to train church leaders to think critically and develop strategies to address the issues and that affect people who live in the communities in which the churches are situated.

“You can be a Williams, a governor, a King or a slave. And you can be poor, pushed around, segregated, and discriminated against and still be free. We want Morehouse men to develop keen minds, steel girded character, a social conscience, and above all, we want Morehouse men to be free. The mind is its own place and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven” (Page 45).

Theologically-based higher education institutions must do more than enhance faith and increase knowledge, but they must also help students to develop and maintain a healthy view of themselves; which will allow them to assist congregants and community members to develop healthy perceptions of the community and self.

“I do not know what happiness is, and I do not think it is important to be happy. But it is important that you find your work and do it as if you were sent into the world at this precise moment in history to do your job. If happiness is to be achieved, it will be found in a job worth doing and in giving and not in receiving” (page 75).

Theologically-based higher education should help students to understand that vocation is driven by their ability to do their part in improving temporal matters for people, as much as spiritual matters. In another instances, Mays expressed a similar, “No man is ahead of his time. Everyman is within his star, each in his time. Each man must respond to the call of God in his lifetime and not in somebody else’s time” (Cook 1995).

In addition, a great deal of Mays' scholarly work was published in *The Journal of Negro Education*. This journal was founded on the campus of Howard University in 1932 to address educational concerns of blacks in America (<http://www.journalnegroed.org/generalinfo.html>). The journal provided an avenue for scholarly publication and public discourse for African American scholars.

Although Mays was a contemporary Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Dubois, it is not apparent that he was influenced by their work. Mays was a practical theorist. His worldview allowed assumptions and conclusions about the way the academy should assist in advancing humanity based upon his empirical knowledge of positive and negative attributes of society (White, 1997, as cited in Babbie, 2008). A great deal of his scholarship is built upon his own life's experiences, observations, and assumptions. He used these experiences, observations, and assumptions to create questions that help to anticipate assumptions about social change. For example, Mays was inspired by his own financial difficulties as a college student to help as many young people as he could to finance their own collegiate experiences (Mays 1971).

In addition, Mays can be categorized as an intellectual activist in the manner that he sought to bring about social change through participation, research, and action (Calderon, 2004). Cook (1995, p. 120) said in explaining Mays' approach and resolution to both use his platform and educate others to correct social ills, "Benjamin Elijah Mays, with fierce determination and total self-surrender to the will of God and God's creative and redemptive love, persistently and courageously confronted various corporate evils, entrenched social wrongs, oppressive systems, institutions, and organizations, institutionalized corruptions, wicked forces, and demonic ideologies like racism, with unrelenting, aggressive, unyielding, and uncompromising 'new tables of the law.'" Much of his contribution to moving our country towards a more just and

equitable society for all citizens was the product of his willingness to challenge unjust social systems through his capacity to articulate ideas in writing and speech. Rather than resorting to violent means, Mays used his intellect as the weapon of choice to combat oppressive structures and practices.

Mays wrote about the social concerns that faced America during his lifetime. Chief among his concerns were the rights of people who were treated to a separate and unequal life from mainstream American society. He contended that racial segregation was immoral and worked against any efforts to make the human race as strong as it could be (Mays, 1956).

He asserted that the actions of one group to treat another group as inferior based upon race worked against the morals that should be the guide for human existence (Mays 1956). As a scholar and practitioner, Mays instilled in the students at Morehouse College the ideal that their opportunity for higher education gave them the responsibility to help others achieve a higher standard of living, even in a segregated society (Colston, 2011). In a 1961 speech to Morehouse College graduates Mays said (Cook 1995),

May you perform so well that when a man is needed for an important job in your field, your work will be so impressive that the committee of selection will be compelled to examine your credentials. May you forever stand for something noble and high. Let no man dismiss you with a wave of the hand or a shrug of the shoulder.

Mays' ontology was determined through living in America as a Black man in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, his educational experiences, and his religious convictions. Mays' theology was shaped by his belief and experiences in the Black Church. His leadership in both the academy and the Black Church provides a model for this study. The next section will explore the role of the Black Church in social action.

### **Black Church**



The proof of whether the innovation that is developed in seminaries and divinity schools is useful its praxis through the churches where the graduates work their vocation. The focus of this study is how the innovative strategies are implemented by the Black Church to transform impoverished communities. Innovation and the Black Church are especially considered because in many cases the church is either situated or has roots with communities where resources are limited and access to paths of advancement is minimal. This will, of course require both the academy and the church to form meaningful, sustains partnerships. “If black theologians and black pastors are serious about black people’s survival and liberation, then they ought to risk the comfort and prestige of their respective enclaves of academic and ecclesial privilege and commence a new moment, an integrative moment that brings together the revolutionary insights of black intellectual and the institutional strength of the black church” (Warknock 2014, p 185).

### **Definition of the Black Church**

As stated in a previous work, the Black Church is not a monolithic entity (Domingue 2012). It is not merely defined by the “race” of its regular attendants but more so by its theological construct, the way in which the members view the person and the activity of God. The Black Church’s theological construct is derived both from Christian faith and African roots. That is, persons who were slaves in colonial America developed a view of God based upon the Christianity to which they were exposed (in some cases was forced upon them), their knowledge of African religious traditions, and their present social condition. Cone (1985) argues that it is the combination of these elements that allows persons to see the gospel message of Christianity through the lenses of liberation. “Black religious thought is not identical with the Christian theology of white Americans. Nor is it identical with traditional African beliefs...It is both – but

reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people's struggle for justice" (p. 755). Thus the Black Church forms its thoughts of God around the idea of justice and freedom.

According to West (1982), "This church, merely a rubric to designate black Christian communities of many denominations, came into being when slaves decided, often at the risk of life and limb, to 'make Jesus their choice'" (p 15). The African roots and traditions, the identity with slavery and segregation, drives the black church to seek liberation, justice, and equality for all people who are placed in a disadvantaged position (Domingue 2012).

However, one ought to be careful to not define the black church merely in terms of its social action/justice position, without giving attention to the nature and character of the church – what West called the existential character of the church. One has to consider that the Church has a spiritual mission at its core.

Diversity is seen in doctrinal beliefs, styles of worship, social context, and approaches to social concerns. Today the Black Church designation is more diverse in that it can now include various denominations within Christianity, and to a certain extent a sect of Islam called the Nation of Islam.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of the Black Church will include churches that find their genesis in the American slave churches<sup>8</sup>, those congregations whose parent denomination is traditionally European (i.e., Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopalian), and non-Christian congregation. It will focus on those congregations that embrace a theological construct of liberation that is practiced through efforts to deconstruct systems and structures that place certain communities and individuals in socially disadvantage positions. This study will specifically focus on Christian congregations that use social-economic-political theology as a

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<sup>8</sup> These churches were founded among the population of the enslaved during American slavery.

theoretical and practical point of convergence and that maintain congenial and working ties to disenfranchised communities.

As stated in a previous work, the Black Church is not only defined by its theological construct, but also by its culture and rituals (Domingue 2012). The culture addresses the idea of these groups gathering while using the same language, symbols, and cultural tools to address spiritual needs within the context of social reality. Barnes (2005) asserts that the Black Church culture is a conduit between commonly held beliefs, rituals and experiences among African Americans and subsequent processes and plans to address pressing social problems. The idea of the culture is to produce within the congregants a sense of belonging, loyalty, and reproduction in the system. Thus members of the Black Church are encouraged to become a part of the congregation, to remain faithfully committed to the deity and the church, and to recruit others to do the same. Unlike many social institutions, the Black Church provides a space where stratification exists, especially as it relates to class issues; yet persons are allowed equal access and participation in the church's activities. This stratification is ordinarily derived through cultural considerations, as opposed to socio-economic-political considerations.

The culture is developed through the use of rituals and cultural tools. "Rituals and tools are used to both justify and encourage congregants in the pursuit of social change. Reliance on spirituals, call-and-response, gospel music, prayer and scriptural references that evoke both prophetic as well as priestly activity emerged as African Americans appropriate elements of Christianity and African religions to address their social reality" (Barnes, 2005, 970).

Chief among the rituals of the Black Church experience is the gathering for sacred meetings. These meetings are comprised of persons who come together for various expressions of worship through the use of cultural tools. The cultural tools include prayers, songs, and

rhetoric based on interpretations that help to solidify belief in the sovereignty of the deity while at the same time encouraging congregants to address social issues (Barnes, 2005).

While styles of congregational worship may vary within the Black Church, Barnes (2005) points out that scripture is essential in all settings. Prayers, songs, and rhetoric based on interpretation are all based upon scripture. It is through prayer that individuals and groups engage in sacred conversation with the deity in hopes of a change in various situations. Pattillo-McCoy (1998) asserts that this faith expression covers a multitude of concerns for the one(s) engaging in prayers. “Prayers often focus not on individual salvation but on the needs of the family, the neighborhood, and even African Americans as a racial group” (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998, 773).

Also, songs are based upon scripture and the social context of the day and become a source of encouragement. This creative expression allows the congregants to share beliefs while eliciting courage. Sacred rhetoric (sermons) is used to assure and challenge congregants to apply “the message” to address not only their personal concerns, but the concerns of the community. This rhetoric is used to “break the silence” and provide hope on issues that concern the community. Bruegemann (2001) argues that the prophet uses the instrument or the weapon of the voice/word to contradict depressing or oppressing realities of a community.

In addition, the songs that were learned and performed had social and political consequences behind their lyrics. These songs seemed on the surface to speak about other worldly realities such as heaven, when in fact they spoke of the hope of freedom for every person who was in bondage. Religious slave songs shared images and expressions that appealed to ardent hope (White, 1983). For example, McKinney (1971) explains that when slave sang this song, ““I got shoes, you got shoes, all God's chil'un got shoes. When I get to heaven, I'm goin' to

put on my shoes, but everybody talkin' about heaven ain't goin' there,” they were expressing their belief that God created them to be free and not slaves. This is a critique of the hypocrisy of a religious system that would purport the worship of a just and loving deity while at the same time support the dehumanization that was prevalent in the American slave industry.

The sermons, lyrics, and prayers were put into practice when ministers and laypersons of the slave church participated with abolitionists in the Underground Railroad, a system of networks that was used to help escaped slaves to reach the North.

## **History**

It can be said that the slave church was the propellant of messages of freedom that stood against the policies of chattel that restricted Africans in the United States. Because spirituality was used to confirm bondage, the North American slave was forced to develop an alternative theology to that of the slave owner. It was a theology that declared liberation, as opposed to bondage. The Black Church was birthed through provision for unity within the community and through expression of rebellion and protest against social and legal structures that dehumanized Africans and their descendants (McKinney, 1971).

Moreover, the Black Church played a role in the Civil Rights struggle of the mid-twentieth century. Many of the prominent leaders and participants of the movement were either ministers or laypersons in local congregations. The rhetoric, rituals, and symbols that were previously mentioned were used to encourage participants to protest for changes in the social and political structure of the land that rendered them second class citizens. In fact, a great amount of the transformation in the United States that was the result of the Civil Rights Movement was envisions and orchestrated by lay persons and ministers of the Black Church (Pinn 2002).

Moreover, the Black Church may have enjoyed its perceived greatest influence in challenging and changing public policy through social action during the Civil Rights era. However, there has been a sharp decline in the advocacy for social change through the Black Church since the end of that period (Smith, 2004). Since the end of the Civil Rights era the Black Church has had a limited voice and role in the shaping of policy that affects the people of predominately poor and predominately black communities in areas such as public education, fair housing, policing, and the delivery of social services. For example, in the modern era, the Black Church is muted while the overwhelming real and abstract violence in this country is meted out through the likes of the #BlackLivesMatter and Occupy Wall Street movements.

### **Critique**

The Black Church is responsible for living up to the creeds of its deity because it is one of the only institutions where masses of people gather on a consistent basis. A 2009 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life says that nearly 90 percent of African Americans believe in God and over 50 percent attend worship at least weekly. Most faith communities gather at least once per week, while many host gatherings multiple times during the week for various events. It is at these meetings that relevant information can be disseminated and synergy can be created to bring about desired change.

The Black Church may very well be the only viable civic institution that can provide the spiritual impetus and human capital that is necessary to deal with the socio-economic-political that plague disenfranchised communities in this day. Other efforts such as government-funded programs and civil rights organizations have arisen in these communities but none have been able to meet the entire needs or provide “wholistic salvation” for individuals and communities. Barnes (2004) appropriately asserts, “Regardless of ideological or denominational bent, the

historic Black Church has been found to be an important economic, political, social, and psycho-emotional buffer for African Americans that often provides community outreach via social services” (p. 202-203). One could very well argue that changing attitudes about respect for life, interaction with other community members, and taking responsibility for one’s well-being and those in one’s employ are properly learned through spiritual principles. Barnes (2004) uses Lincoln and Mamyia’s (1990) description of priestly-centered and prophetic-centered churches. Priestly-centered churches focus on worship and maintaining the spiritual life of the persons in the congregation. On the other hand, prophetic-centered churches use sermons, church events, and in some instances political and social speakers from the community to inform and encourage persons to engage social problems such as poverty and unemployment in practical and tangible ways. The Black Church has traditionally provided social services such as child care, monetary assistance, after-school programs, in addition to spiritual guidance.

The activity of the Black Church is the main consideration in this study because its genesis depends upon the notion of liberation. Its history is found in providing both spiritual and social answers for people who were confronted with difficult social, economic, and political positions in society. It has been well documented that the Black Church has always been the incubator for social consciousness and thus public awareness for African Americans (Lincoln and Mamyia 1990; Pattilio-McCoy 1998). However, with all of the attributes, the Black Church is not exempt from critical analysis.

It should be mentioned that there remains a prevailing argument in the United States that the concerns and the operations of the Church should remain separate from the concerns and operations of the state. Hauerwas and Baxter progress George Will’s argument that religions

should be private and subordinate to the political order and capitalism<sup>9</sup> (Dyson 2004). However, as previously mentioned, there has been a political component to the Black Church since its founding during the American slave era. The Black church has for the most part always played a part in addressing the legal and policy issues that negatively affect the lives of people, especially people of color.

The activity of the Black Church is the main consideration in this study because it may be the only remaining legitimate indigenous institution that still has the social capital to affect change through connecting the training that happens in the academy to disenfranchised communities. It is James' (2000) contention that social capital is derived from the relationships one develops with those who share similar background and/or present circumstances. It is characterized by the amount of time, emotional investment, and reciprocity that evolves in a relationship between two or more people.

Social capital in the Black Church perspective is built upon congregants and communities sharing life experiences and by investing in one another's lives. In addition to support, the Black Church provides a space where social identity can be affirmed for those who otherwise feel marginalized by other social and political systems.

Portes (1998) says that is through social capital that the involved persons can gain access to economic resources such as subsidized loans, investments tips, and subsidized markets; can increase their cultural capital through contacts with individuals and institutions that help to refine world perspectives.

### **Moral and ethical shortcomings.**

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<sup>9</sup> Will, G. (1990, April 22). Scalia Missed Point but Moved Right Argument on Separation of Religion, *Durham Morning Herald*, sec. F.



However, the Black Church must face and overcome its own moral and ethical shortcomings before it is able to assume it is able to operate and have the impact that it should. There are certain external challenges that seek to dilute the impact and influence that the church can have; but internal challenges such as patriarchy, classism, sexism, and homophobia cannot be ignored. Hopkins and Thomas (2010) state that the praxis and theology of the Black Church must be deconstructive to imperialistic and hegemonic systems and structures that promote (even through silence) the “isms” that cause place certain groups at a disadvantage.

For example, despite the fact that most women comprise 60 to 70% of the membership most instances, the notion of inherit dominant position of the male in the Church is an issue that continues to be debated in the Black Church (Pinn 2015). Useless debate persists concerning the role of women in leadership, especially as ordained ministers, when women prove to be valuable in every aspect of church life. Quite often women lead in the sustainability through mission and fundraising efforts. Therefore, the Black Church is challenged to seek equality and full human liberation that includes race and gender.

The theories advanced in this study require the efforts of churches that are composed of healthy people. In addition, sexuality and the humanity of all persons must be confronted in the Black community generally and the Black Church specifically. Dyson (2004) states that the Black Church must change the tradition of revulsion, exploitation, and demonization of people who are same-sex lovers. In the same vein, the Black Church cannot ignore the plight people who are sexually abused by predators who are a part of the church.

### **Theology of individualism.**

The Black Church is important to this study because it is one of the few institutions of impoverished communities that offer a space for collective economics. While credible figures are

difficult to obtain (because of lack of reporting), it is conceivable that millions of dollars are contributed to black churches and subsequently deposit into the banking industry. With the right mission and focus these funds could be used and combined with other sources of funding to bring about significant social change in areas such micro-loans, providing healthy food alternatives where food deserts exist, and competent supplemental educational activities such as after-school programs.

However a shift in attitude that in many instances has moved the Black Church away from social advocacy and social action can be contributed to at least two reasons. On the one hand, in many instances the focus of the sacred meetings has moved from the community to the needs, concerns, and desires of individuals. Therefore, the songs, prayers, and sacred rhetoric now focus on how individuals can have their needs met, as opposed to concerns for the greater good of the community. On the other hand, in some instance the message of the church has moved to focused on a more capitalistic driven theology – prosperity gospel – that increasingly focused on material wealth. A popular South Louisiana preacher draws capacity crowds by including in his messages the philosophy of work-free prosperity with the phrase, “Money cometh to me” to exuberant followers. This can be attributed to the fact that there are increasing numbers of African-Americans that attend churches who obtain a certain level of social acceptance into the American mainstream through educational and economic gains, and thus have little concern for those who are affected by poverty. As a consequence, church leaders feel a need to placate to the superficial needs and desires of their upwardly mobile congregants. This perspective mirrors the overall view of the dominant culture where religious doctrine is used to support and justify social stratification.

In essence, if the Black Church is to remain a relevant entity in promoting the humanity and dignity of all persons, especially those who are a part of marginalized and disenfranchised communities, it must address and overcome what Savage (2008) terms the “illusion and metaphor” of the Black Church. In many respects, the notion of the Black Church can be mythological because of fierce loyalty to independence and autonomy. In many Black Church settings disunity is priority such that denominations remain separate from one another, churches will not unite with one another, and as mentioned earlier, there is division within the individual local church.

Since most of the Black Church is not composed of wealthy persons, the key to the next phase of the Black Church is the ability to create unified efforts to solve unmet community problems. It is through organized and unified power that indigenous financial, educational, and social work institutions can arise to create change from within the community. The authority and dominion that is necessary to produce social change is the result of collective efforts to produce and support indigenous businesses that deposit in indigenous financial institutions that invest in the community.

### **Seminary training of minister.**

The scriptural hermeneutic and social consciousness of the leadership of the local congregation is often times key to the church’s perspective of how sacred scripture should be interpreted and applied to living. Those congregations that are engaged in the affairs of the community in which they are situated are generally led by ordained persons who interpret scripture and teach social responsibility. If the ministerial leader has formal training this view can be developed or enhanced. The role of formal training in the connection between theology and social responsibility is essential element of the study.

Pertinent to this study is the discovery of whether curriculum in theologically-based institutions of higher education includes the dissemination of knowledge concerning a connection between the interpretations of sacred scriptures and how the poor should be treated as it relates to the difference between mere benevolence and justice. While the ministerial leader may not specifically learn to recognize and address social inequalities through formal training, this study will seek to discover the impact of exposure to such theories on the philosophy and practice of the leader in the local congregational setting. Prophetic pragmatism is used for the theoretical framework of the study because the researcher seeks to discover if socially conscious philosophy works through the local church setting to create social change.

### **Prophetic pragmatism**

Prophetic pragmatism is relevant to this study because the researcher seeks both examples and potential models of how theological education affects congregational practices that produce positive change in oppressed communities. Prophetic pragmatism provides the theoretical framework for moving from the academy to the community, or from theory to praxis. It provides a theoretical bridge between the innovation of the academy and the practice of church and community.

The term pragmatism is derived from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning action from which English words ‘practice’ and ‘practical’ are derived. Therefore, the pragmatic philosophical tradition points to the idea that theory should translate into concrete answers. The pragmatist seeks and employs ideas that lend themselves to concreteness and adequacy, to facts, to action, and to power (James 1907).

The philosophical tradition of pragmatism provides a bridge between theory and practice; and thus between the academy and practitioners. In addition, pragmatism provides a link

between those who find knowledge and being in abstract ideas and those who see the truth only through experience. James (1907) makes the distinction in terms of the “tender-minded” and the “tough-minded.” The “tender-minded” is a moniker for rationalists that James describes as intellectualistic, idealistic, optimistic, religious, free-willing, monistic, and dogmatic. The “tough-minded” is James’ way of describing empiricists that he characterizes as sensationalistic, materialistic, pessimistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic, and skeptical.

It was John Dewey who expounded upon the notion that “the truth is what works. “If a notion or a theory make pretense of corresponding to reality or to the facts, this pretense cannot be put to the test and confirmed or refuted except by causing it to pass over into the realm of action and by noting the results which it yields in the form of the concrete observable facts which this notion or theory leads” (Dewey, from Boydston, 1984, p. 12). Pragmatism is important to this study is the focus on finding and implanting those practices that are generated in the academy, made operational (pragmatic) in sacred circles, and bring about positive results in the community.

Dewey found no use for ideas that merely repeated previously known facts. On the contrary, Dewey posited that ideas should form the basis for future observations and experiences (Dewey, from Boydston, 1984). West (1990) points out that Dewey and James sought to explain a reality that is open to change and embraces human aspirations. It is founded in empiricism that does not seek to prove what is already known, but what leads to future positive consequences. Those theories that will lead to practice, and thus generate positive change cannot be cemented in notions of how to maintain or survive within the status quo, but must advance progressive ideas.

In certain terms, Dewey (1920) promotes that society can only be strong when all of its members are given access and opportunity to the full limit of their capacity. As long as segments

of our society are disenfranchised and immobilized we remain vulnerable to horrid results of internal strife that promotes division and sometimes even destruction among its citizens. Thus, prophetic pragmatism that unites realist philosophical ideas with religious ideals is employed in this study.

Pragmatism is used as the philosophical support for political views that are framed by theological conception. Those who view biblical scriptures from the vantage point that Christianity should encourage social change would agree with this point of view. It makes faith an ideal that is practiced beyond the individual basis, but a social entity that is meant to improve the quality of life for those who would be forgotten and dismissed. “Religious institutions play a critical role...the church is important – the prophetic church. It means to nurture and educate persons to love, care, render services to others; sacrifice, risk, community, struggle for justice and promote solidarity” (West 1993, 23).

The significance of prophetic pragmatism to this study is that it leads to Freire’s pedagogical theory of critical consciousness in which Freire challenges students that they should not internalize the ideals and philosophies of the dominant culture. Instead students are to operate as reflective actors (Freire 1993). That is, students of theologically-based institutions of higher learning should not just learn to function in established roles, but should determine how knowledge reflects and relates to current living conditions; and how that knowledge can be used to cause positive social change.

Freire (1974) contends that critical consciousness views facts empirically and that critical consciousness can lead to critical action. Rather than merely repeating rituals and traditions, theological-based institution graduates can be equipped to apply knowledge to solving

contemporary issues. For instance, the goal of the institution should be to equip students to apply theological concepts to sociological issues, such as homelessness, crime, or health and wellness.

West presents pragmatism in a re-shaped Judeo-Christian frame that he calls prophetic pragmatism. Religious principles and language are utilized to frame pragmatic thinking that will encourage social action that results in change. “The distinctive hallmarks of a prophetic pragmatist are a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditioned-ness and a critical consciousness that encourages relentless critique and self-criticism for the aims of social change and personal humility” (West 1990, p 170). Prophetic pragmatism provides the theoretical framework to discover if the theological education of local leaders translates to social action in the church, and in turn produces positive change for the impoverished communities in which many Black churches are situated.

West’s theory of prophetic pragmatism is not without critique and criticism. Wood (2000) contends that its grounding in liberation theology is not stable in that liberation theology contends on the one hand to utterly dependent on Deity, while on the on the other hand promoting self-actualization.

“By arguing that human beings must assume responsibility for their own liberation...and yet also maintaining that humanity’s fate rests in the hands of God...prophetic pragmatism, like other theologies of liberation, presents a problem that has profoundly secular implications: either our development is subject to forces beyond our control...or we possess the capacity to understand and master these forces” (Wood p 37)

In addition, Wood (2000) perceives that capitalism is an obstacle to pragmatic prophetic Christianity. On the one hand, Wood contends that “individual self-creation” requires access to resources that are necessary for the creative work to produce true democracy. Secondly, Wood

suggests that the work of democracy would require equal access to ownership and equal desire for societal development. “Capitalism as the dominant mode of global socioeconomic organization, is structurally incapable of achieving these goals” (Woods p 6). He contends that the nature of capitalism is to create competition that will lead to inequalities; which will work against the intent of prophetic pragmatism.

However, West is able to frame his personal faith commitments in pragmatism not simply for socio-political aims, but because his Christian beliefs provide existential sustenance through what he perceives as truth in biblical scriptures that lead to concrete change. “I see political relevance in the biblical focus on the plight of the wretched of the earth...like James, Niebuhr, and to some extent Dubois, I hold a religious conception of pragmatism” (West 1990, p 170-171). West’s prophetic pragmatism is important to this study because it forces the development one’s faith and philosophical foundations to “encounter the underside of American life...grapple with the tragic dimensions of our living...and grasp the realities of white supremacy and other forms of oppression. (Glaude 2007, p. 5). In this manner faith becomes more than theoretical vapidness. Instead faith drives the inclination to produce social change.

Pragmatism is founded on the belief that an idea is not the truth unless it results in a concrete difference in someone’s actual life (James 1904). The truth is realized when one’s life is changed. “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify - false ideas are those that we cannot” (James 1904, p. 77). This is suitable for this study because innovation is useless for church and community if it does not produce concrete benefits for the people who live in disadvantaged situations. Glaude (2007) asserts that ideas are useless unless they have ethical significance and motivate the choices that shape the world. For Glaude (2001), reality is not represented until the purposes of beliefs are manifest in life experiences.



Glaude (2007) says that American pragmatism began to mature at a time when the ideals of the country did not match its practices. In some sense, this duality is still prevalent, albeit more subversive. There are still the warring ideals of democracy and imbalanced stratification, as well as the notions of equality and what Glaude termed “Anglo-Saxonism” (p. 2).

Prophetic pragmatism that is grounded in the Christian tradition allows one to maintain connection with all people, and not just the privileged or upwardly mobile. In personal confession, West (1990) says that prophetic pragmatism is located in the Christian tradition for two reasons: 1) on the existential level, the self-understanding and self-identity that flow from this tradition’s insights into the crises and traumas of life are indispensable to remain the same; and 2) on the political level, the culture of the wretched of the earth is deeply religious and to remain in solidarity with them it requires acknowledgment of what they are against, and appreciation of what they are up against.

Prophetic pragmatism seeks tangible change in the social structures that move to more balance and equality existence. When pragmatism is framed as prophetic the purpose is to eliminate power through a more equal distribution of wealth and power, assault white supremacist ideals and practices, push back against homophobic and patriarchal structures, and develop a cultural renaissance that gives a more free, just, and ecologically sound future (West 1993). Prophetic pragmatism produces the truth that all human life is to be respected and appreciated.

### **Summary**

The literature bears witness that higher education institutions exist to develop new theories and methods that can be implemented to produce positive social change. In like manner,

theologically-based higher education institutions should be citadels of innovation. In addition, the literature shows the importance of these institutions graduating persons who can act as leaders in local churches and in denominational organizations who will work for positive social change for dispossessed persons. For the purpose of this study the measure of the validity of the innovative ideas is the results that are produced through the working of the Black Church.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The study discovered the connection between the development of ecclesiastical leaders in schools of theology with the philosophy and practices of the local Black Church where they serve, and the impact of the Black Church as an agent of social change for communities who citizens are deprived of privilege and access that lead to upward mobility. This study examined the seminary training/experiences of local church leaders as well as what is currently taught, how those lessons transfer to the social consciousness and social action of the local Black Church, and how partnerships are formed with people and organizations who work for social change in the community. The researcher learned how the three entities, higher education, the Black Church, and the community in which particular churches are situated form a coalition to improve the quality of life for persons whose lives are adversely affected by poverty. This improvement includes increasing opportunities for socio-economic and political mobility in the form of assisting with educational pursuits, access to healthy food and health care, economic development, as well as employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Ultimately the research determined some best strategies and practices to implement in continual contention for justice and equality for persons who live in disenfranchised communities.

The scope of the study was limited to those leaders who have graduated from an accredited theologically-based institution of higher education and lead churches that demonstrate a philosophy and practice of social engagement. In addition, two leaders of theologically-based institutions of higher education were included in an effort to gain knowledge of what is taught to develop philosophy and practice of social engagement among students. The study looked broadly at the areas of engagement, such as working against predatory lending, voting rights activities, K-12 education issues, and criminal justice reform. From this broad perspective the researcher found both unique efforts and common efforts among the participants in the study.

## **Research questions**

The Methodology section discusses the intent to collect and apply information for the study. This section shows how the information will be collected and applied to answer the question of relevance and effectiveness for the church and higher education theological institutions that develop and employ social action strategies and techniques. For the sake of this study the primary question is, “How does the Academy, the Black Church, and the community inform and support one another in alliance for social change?” The proposition is that theologically based higher education institutions should be the place to educate leaders that will guide local congregations to work with community members to produce social change that will improve the quality of life for residents in said community. My specific research questions:

RQ1: How does the theologically-based training of the local Black Church leader influence the intellectual-spiritual activities of that leader’s congregation to produce positive social change in disenfranchised communities?

RQ2: How does leadership in both the academy and the Black Church affect this interaction?

RQ3: What are students enrolled in schools of theology taught about the role of the church as an agent for social change?

- a. Does the curriculum cover subject matter such as poverty, justice, public policy?
- b. Does the curriculum provide opportunity for to study business administration and public policy, along with?

## **Qualitative Analysis**

The researcher conducted a qualitative study in an effort to determine if the academy, the church and the community can form a formidable force in combating the social ills that plague communities that face the reality and the effects of poverty; and if so to determine what ideas and best practices are employed. Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to understand how the subjects in the view their vocation and organize people for activities that relate to social outreach. In addition, qualitative methods will provide a way for the researcher to understand whether or not the theological education of the leader impacts the level of the church's community engagement.

Qualitative research is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns in relationships (Babbie 2008). For the purpose of this study, qualitative design is employed to determine history, attitudes and behavior of participants through the collection of data in the form interviews, observations, and artifacts (Patton 2002). Qualitative studies allow the research to observe participants in their natural settings and thus may allow for a true depiction of attitudes and behaviors towards a given subject. Interviews will allow for direct quotations from people about the experiences and opinions; observations produce detailed descriptions of people's actions and interactions, and examination of artifacts gathers information from both official and unofficial documents (Patton 2002). Official documents may include programs, correspondents, sermon notes, hymns, publications, agendas and reports. Unofficial documents may include hand-written correspondents, diaries, and graffiti.

In qualitative analysis, new ideas and grounded theory are generated from data collected during fieldwork (Johnson and Christensen 2008). The objective is to explore, discover, construct, and describe. The focus is to examine the breadth and depth of phenomena to learn

more about them. Qualitative methods are used in attempts to study behavior in natural environments and study the context in which behavior occurs and to study factors as they operate together in natural settings. Data is collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and open-ended questions. In this mode the researcher is the primary data-collection instrument in an effort to find patterns, themes, and holistic features. The results are reported in narrative with contextual description and direct quotations from research participants.

Qualitative research permits the researcher to have a greater understanding of phenomenon or subjects because it allows for the study the social processes as well as for the examination of nuances and behaviors (Babbie, 2008). Qualitative research also allows for adjustments and flexibilities as needed to insure accuracy in data collection. Lastly, accurate, relevant data can be collected and utilized with simple inexpensive tools.

This qualitative study provides accurate data that depicts how theologically-based higher education impacted the philosophies practices of church leaders and congregations concerning the church and community cooperation. The researcher engages with an appropriate knowledge based upon personal and vocational experiences. The researcher is a part of the Black Church experience and therefore is provided particular insight into the institution's efforts to assists persons through involvement in local and state public policy initiatives as well as supply immediate benevolence such as clothing and food pantries, paying utility bills, and sponsoring public transportation passes. In addition, the researcher is a graduate of a theologically-based graduate school that did not emphasize the need to connect the understanding of connecting spiritual beliefs to social concerns. Therefore, philosophies and ideologies on such matters were development through life experiences and personal study. There is the possibility of this study

leading to future inquiries concerning how communities benefit from the theological education of Black clergy.

There are limitations inherent with the study. First, the study, like most qualitative inquiries, required the researcher to guard against subjectivity based upon biases and opinions. Secondly, the researcher worked to insure the accuracy of the data because a conversation with key leaders of a congregation may not accurately depict the views and actions of the whole congregation. Lastly, qualitative studies are difficult to repeat in future studies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Prophetic pragmatism is based upon providing hope for the wretched of the earth and creating a culture of justice and equality by means of critical intelligence and social action (West 1989). This philosophy is employed as a theoretical framework for this study because it combines the Christian faith with philosophical tenets to seek tangible positive change for oppressed people. Prophetic pragmatism is used to develop strategies that can be implemented to change societal structures that unjustly effect people such as underfunded education systems and disproportionate criminal sentencing.

Because theologically-based institutions of higher education prepare graduates to succeed in their vocation, the ability to recognize and analyze things as they are remains an important element of education. Paulo Freire's critical consciousness (*conscientizacao*) is the ability to both recognize and address oppressive social structures and conditions that allows one group to dominate the other (Freire 1974). It is the ability to "lift" the consciousness of students to have self-awareness, as well as to possess an awareness of the world around them in order to properly address issues with which they are confronted. In addition, critical consciousness affords the ability to recognize that knowledge and narratives about the quality of living for how "people

are” and why “things happen” are not neutral; but are positioned and purported for the advantage of some groups over others (Petchauer 2011).

Cornel West the progenitor of prophetic pragmatism, said that conscientizacao is the “unique fusion of social theory, moral outrage, and politics...in which objects of history constitute themselves as active subjects of history, ready to make a fundamental difference in the lives they individually and collectively live.” (Leonard and McLaren 1993, p. xiii). This philosophical underpinning is critical to the researcher’s assertion that theologically-based pedagogy should produce persons who lead local congregations to exist as agents of positive social change. Even those persons who enter theologically based graduate studies with consciousness for social change would benefit from exposure to curriculum provides for growth in the areas of public policy and social action.

Pragmatism was conceived in this country as a means of finding ways to address the various problems that the people faced (Pratt 2002). The problems were as critical as how to survival in a land that was vastly different from that which was left behind, as well as developing ways for all of the people groups to interact with one another. In this manner, philosophy necessarily had to produce ways to exist and overcome. The only way this could be possible is if the philosophical tenets of various people groups were fused in order to produce a way of living that would be beneficial. Europeans had to learn from even those that they considered less than human. “The story of the origin of American pragmatism is the story of a struggle among radically different people, and the character of the struggle, when it involves reflection on differences, practices, and ideas, is in part philosophical” (Pratt 2002, p. 19).

Prophetic pragmatism seeks tangible change in the social structures in order to advance to more balance and equality existence. When pragmatism is framed as prophetic the purpose is to



produce power through a more equal distribution of wealth and power, assault white supremacist ideals and practices, push back against homophobic and patriarchal structures, and develop a cultural renaissance that gives a more free, just, and ecologically sound future (West 1993). Prophetic pragmatism is meant to foster the idea that all human life is to be respected and appreciated.

In addition, the research applied critical consciousness because it allows for the examination of how what is taught in theologically-based institutions of higher education relate to the reality of persons in communities where many Black churches are situated. Graduates of these institutions should be armed with the ability to critique unequal and unjust social structures, while at the same time applying theological-based and socially-based knowledge to offer solutions that create social change.

Prophetic pragmatism and critical consciousness relate closely to qualitative methodology because the latter allows the researcher to ascertain a true depiction of the church leader's philosophy through the social action of the church. Interviews, observations, and the examination of artifacts in the local setting will allow the researcher to see if the theories and messages of the leader are translating to community engagement and partnerships by the local church. Interviews and the examination of artifacts will help to determine if the congregants and other community stakeholder are inspired to work towards alleviating the various effects of poverty in the communities where the local church is situated.

### **Use of case study**

The researcher will focus on a select group that meets the following criteria: 1) the ecclesiastical leader holds a graduate degree from an Association of Theological Schools<sup>10</sup> institution; 2) the ecclesiastical leader serves at a Black Church that is engaged in social action. In addition, the researcher will seek to interview at least two higher education administrators whose ecclesiastical position matches the previously mentioned criteria.

The participants include: three ministers who graduated from an institution that educates traditionally white, conservative ministers, yet they serve in urban, impoverished settings; four ministers that graduated from institutions that traditionally educate progressive-leaning ministers, and two administrators of progressive-leaning theologically-based schools of higher education.

The case study method was employed to answer the research questions mentioned earlier. Case study method is applied when the research wishes to focus attention on one or a few instances of some social phenomenon (Babbie 2008). This method is used to describe what the researcher observes or give explanation to a particular phenomenon. Karbo and Beasley (1999) are more specific when they say that case study is a method of obtaining data through an empirical examination of a real-world phenomenon within its naturally occurring context, without directly manipulating either the phenomenon or the context. In this instance the researchers seek to both describe and explain how social justice is taught in academic settings, as well as how it is taught and applied in congregational and community settings.

Stake (1978) suggest that like other methods, case studies can be used to affirm hypothesis. For the purpose of this project, this method of inquiry will be employed to support the researcher's notion that the academy, the church, and the community can form an effective

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<sup>10</sup> The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is the recognized accrediting body for theologically based institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada.

triad in producing change necessary to improve the quality of living for persons who are struggling against pervasive poverty. The case study method will be employed to highlight those entities that are at present actively involved in such collaboration; as well as to point out how what is learned in academic settings translates to social justice practices for ministers and local congregations

### **Participant observation**

Participant observation allows the researcher to become immersed in local church and community settings in order to understand the participants' attitudes and behaviors concerning collective social action. For this study the research observed two areas: church worship and work activities, and community engagement and activity from the minister and the church. Participant observation allowed interaction with those who participate in the study and thus allow the researcher empirical knowledge of the subject. The researcher engaged the study as a moderate participant. The moderate participant maintains a balance between being a participant and observer (Spradley, 1980). That is the researcher will be present, while maintaining limited participation in worship meetings and work activities. Specifically, the researcher tried understanding through language used in formal messages and meetings, through interaction among inter and intra activities between the leader, congregants, and members of the community who are not members of the congregation.

Data collected through case study method was used to describe the theories and practices of particular churches, church leaders, and theological school entities that are engaged in the teaching and the work of social justice. Data was collected through participant observation. The participant observer combines examining artifacts, interviewing of informants, direct participation and observation (Patton 2002).

### **Examining Artifacts**

The researcher asked permission to examine all documents that may be beneficial to the study. This documentation may include natural as well as electronic records of programs, activities, programs, of study, and curriculum.

In the church setting the researcher will seek data in historical records of community engagement, programs of events, sermon and study notes. This information may provide insight into the church's philosophy and activities that relate to social justice.

### **Interviewing**

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with theological school administrators, as well as face-to-face interviews with local church leaders. Two of the persons targeted for interviews are unique in that they serve as either the president or the dean of a theological institution as well as pastors of local congregation. Their insight is necessary for the study in that they can speak from the perspective of both theorist and practitioners. In addition, their insight will be valuable to the study because they can tie scholastic leadership to the direction of curriculum at their particular institutions.

Pastors of local congregations were interviewed. The thoughts and philosophy of the congregational leader has bearing on the congregation's attitude towards social justice. The researcher also connected the pastor's theological training with the pastor's attitude towards social justice initiatives.

The researcher conducted all interviews. In this way funding were not procured and the one who made the questionnaire was the one to administer the questions. The interviews happened in two phases – an initial interview and an exit interview based upon the results.

Interviews was conducted in private settings. The researcher requested that both academic and church leaders choose a space that is convenient and comfortable for them. The researcher/interviewer recorded all answers on a digital tape recorder as well as recorded handwritten notes. In at least four instances, interviews were conducted via electronic means for convenience. The recording device was stored in a locked cabinet with access limited to the researcher. In addition, the data was stored on a password-protected computer.

The researcher asked the participant open-ended questions so that the respondent could provide their particular thoughts on the subject. Probing questions were utilized for clarification and elaboration. The questions were read to the participants and the participants were allowed time to respond.

The researcher engaged in an initial interview. The meetings took place at a convenient time and place that is arranged through personal contact with interview participants. In some instances, a concluding interview was conducted in order to clarify accuracy the data collected. Participants will be provided a copy of the transcript to insure accuracy.

### **Sampling procedure**

The researcher used a combination of criterion, critical case, and theory based sampling strategies (Creswell 2013). The criterion strategy was used because there are a specific group of ministers involved that engage a specific theory of church and community relations to yield necessary data. The critical case was employed because a specific sample was selected to maximize the quality and quantity of data. The theory based strategy was utilized lace so that it can be determined how the education gained in theologically-based institutions of higher education can be channeled through the social action of the local church to produce change in impoverished communities.

### **Data analysis**

All notes from interviews, observations, and examinations were coded to determine themes that lead to categories. Transcripts were produced from tape recorded interviews. Transcripts were examined to determine if research questions were answered or if new theories and questions are derived. In addition, transcripts were returned to participants to check for accuracy. Data was examined to determine where West's prophetic pragmatism and Freire's conscientizacao are vivified through the actions of the congregations and the community stakeholders.

### **Summary**

The researcher conducted a study to determine what factors are presently working and what strategies can be developed through the Black Church, theological institutions, and community partners to improve the quality of life for residence of communities that have been adversely affected by poverty. The researcher employed qualitative research methods, namely participant observation to gather and analyze data. The method of inquiry will consist of in-depth interviews of academic, congregational, and community leaders.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This study addressed the ways that the academy (specifically theologically-based higher education), the Black Church, and typically oppressed communities can form and operate as a coalition that produces positive social change for people who live in the above mentioned communities. This social change includes, but is not limited to addressing problems that typically plague disenfranchised communities such as predatory lending, inequity in criminal justice systems, drugs and violence, and HIV/AIDS advocacy, and health and wellness disparities. To be sure, the effort to create such positive change requires critiquing and changing those situations that are deemed unjust and unequal; while at the same time addressing internal deficiencies within the community.

This study is an investigation of the training and education that ministerial leaders receive in theologically-based institutions of higher education, how that training and education affects the philosophy and activities of the local church, and ultimately how those connections translate to partnerships, advocacy, and activity for social change. The study does not just report findings, but will suggest models that can be employed.

The study was used to answer three questions:

- RQ1: How does the theologically-based training of the local Black Church leader influence the intellectual-spiritual activities of that leader's congregation to produce positive social change in disenfranchised communities?
- RQ2: How does leadership in both the academy and the Black Church affect this interaction?
- RQ3: What are students enrolled in schools of theology taught about the role of the church as an agent for social change?

### **Description of data collection**

The researcher interviewed nine persons who are either church leaders/practitioners or academicians in the areas of theology in general and the Black Church in particular. Participants were selected because of their knowledge of the subject matter. Each brought a unique perspective to addressing the research questions.

Participants were chosen based upon the following criteria: 1) earned a graduate degree from an Association Theological Schools (ATS)<sup>11</sup> accredited theologically-based institution of higher education, 2) work as a practitioner in an church situated in a disenfranchised community, or 3) works as a leader in an ATS accredited theologically-based institution of higher education; and 4) leads a church that creates opportunities for people in disenfranchised communities which leads to equitable treatment in policy, access, and funding in areas of social concern such as education, policing and crime, healthy food options, economic development. Participants are indentified by their title and a number designation. Church leaders/practitioners are labeled CL1 through CL7 and academic leaders are labeled AL1 and AL2. Institutions are labeled CH1 through CH7 for churches to correlate with the designations of the leaders, and AI1 through AI2 for academic organizations.

**Table 1**

Criteria for participants

<b>Characteristics for Participants</b>	<b>Characterized by</b>
Graduate degree ATS accredited institution	Earned Master's Degree or higher
Work as practitioner	Experience as ordained leader in local Black Church setting
Work as academic leader	Experience as director, dean, or president of ATS accredited institution
Social Conscious work	Lead outreach efforts with social action/social justice emphasis

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<sup>11</sup> Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is a recognized accrediting agency for theologically-based higher education institutions.



Participants were contacted through face-to-face interaction and by letter inviting them to participate in the study. In addition, follow-up communications by telephone and electronic mail were utilized to confirm the receipt of the invitation letter. Once persons agreed to participate in the study a convenient time was arranged to conduct the interview.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via telephone. An interview protocol that listed the date, time, place, interviewer, interviewee, position of interviewee, and eighteen standards questions was designed and used for every interview (See appendix). All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and notes were taken on the interview protocol in some instances. The recordings were transcribed by a transcription service. Participants were sent copies of the transcript electronically for their review.

The data was distributed under seven specific categories in order to synthesize for meaning. The data was then codified by color into six classifications in order identify specific themes. This was done to see how the themes correlate with prophetic pragmatism.

**Table 2**

Data categories explanation

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Characterized by</b>
Participant's vocational information	List participants vocational experiences as relates to institution (s) and years served
Setting of church	List the socio-economic condition of the community where institution is located
Social action work of the church	List activities to educated, address policy, and provide access to funds, goods, and services
Participant theologically-based education experience	List personal experience while attending theologically-based institution of higher education
Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum	List thoughts on what is currently taught in theologically-based institutions of higher education and recommendations for what can/should be taught
Miscellaneous	List answers that were directly tied to specific questions, but pertinent to the study

Advice for study	List participant's insights that would help in the study
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### **Church leader/Church I (CL1/CH1)**

#### **Interview setting**

CL1 agreed to have the interview conducted in the office of the researcher after CL1 lead an evening church service. The office is a quite space with books on shelves along two walls. Even though people are still meandering around after the church service and the building is situated in a community where noise is prevalent, the space is quiet enough to conduct the interview. CL1 took time to wash and change clothing before settling into the blue office seat in front of the researcher's large desk. He is known across the United States church circles as a dynamic speaker who expends energy during his presentation.

The researcher observed CL1 as the speaker for the church service. The title of the message was, "It Goes Down in the DM."<sup>12</sup> The message was delivered just weeks after Alton Sterling was killed by police<sup>13</sup> (Lau and Stowe 2016). During the message CL1 relayed the story of an African American business executive who was accosted, accused, and nearly arrested for burglary by police with their guns drawn because he accidentally set off his house alarm. In an effort to cause awareness of what he deems injustice, CL1 said, "There is a legacy of occupation and oppression by a policing system in this country. I'm not talking about individual police, but a policing system that criminalizes, demonizes, and weaponizes black bodies."<sup>14</sup> The congregation responded with applause and vocal affirmation.

#### **Participant's personal vocation**

<sup>12</sup> The speaker used the title for a contemporary Hip Hop song by Yo Gotti to convey the message that even in the midst of chaos that is caused by injustice the Christian Deity works for people personally and communally.

<sup>13</sup> Alton Sterling was a black man that was killed by two white police in the early morning hours of July 5, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Exert from sermon delivered at Elm Grove Baptist Church on July 19, 2016.

CL1 has been the senior leader of a large church (CH1) in a metropolitan city for 33 years. He became the leader of the church soon after earning a Bachelor of Arts degree at an institution in the same city. The church started with less than 100 members and now has grown to over 12,000, according to the participant. This is the only church where CL1 has worked in a full time capacity. He is a board member of national organizations that address social justice issues and lectures at college and universities on religion and social justice.

### **Setting and work of the church**

CH1 operates two locations. One facility is used primarily for worship services, Christian education opportunities, and planning. CH1 has occupied this facility for less than 20 years. It is situated across the street from low-income apartments and in the vicinity of a middle class neighborhood. The neighborhood is populated predominantly by Black and Hispanic people. In addition, the church is situated near the border of two suburbs that house people who are in the middle-to-upper middle class economic bracket.

The second location is the original place that was used for worship. It is deemed a center for human services and social justice. This facility is situated in an area that is plagued by poverty and is characterized by the result and effects of poverty, namely prostitution, gangs, and gun violence. Additionally, two high schools that are challenged with crumbling facilities and low academic performance are located in the vicinity of the church. It was at this facility that the occurrence of a murder across from a building that congregants that congregants occupied that gave the impetus for the socially conscious outreach activities of the present church. CL1 explains the event,

“Monday night, church lets out and, across the street, is a crime scene. Found out the next day three young black men had been tied up in a tub shot in the head. Gangland style murder. I'm like, "Okay, there's something wrong with this picture." In the apartments across the street, three brothers get killed, and we in church praising God. That's dead

wrong. I just told the church. I said, "I can't put up with this no more." We decided we're going to take this community back. We began a process that was multi-layered."

CH1 did not have a history of socially conscious outreach. However since that watershed moment CL1 has led that faith community in a number of such efforts. The church is intentionally involved in both educational efforts and activities that seek to improve the quality of life for persons who live in disenfranchised communities. CL1 admits that when he started at the church his focus was on serving the community through benevolent activities. However, now he says that the church is focused on moving beyond charity work to justice activities. Conversations with nationally recognized community activists caused him to question why the conditions of poverty exist in the first place. "My whole thing began, 'I'm gonna start asking why.' Why are people hungry? Why are black men in prison? Why? The whole why piece..."

At present the CH1 members work to address predatory lending, economic development, and child poverty. CL1 explained that the child poverty issue is a priority for the church's socially conscious outreach efforts - "We're putting the spotlight on child poverty and looking at the structural causes behind child poverty, because it's not an issue of feeding a few people here and there. We've got a real serious problem if we lead the nation in it."

In addressing economic development, the church hosts an event to imitate Black Wall Street.<sup>15</sup> On a Sunday CH1 hosted black business owners and allowed them to "set up shop" so that congregants could engage them between worship services. CL1 says the event was profitable for both the venders and the church. The church has a goal to recreate a Black Wall Street in the area where the church is situated. They have purchased 60 acres of land for residential and commercial usage in an effort to gain "economic control."

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<sup>15</sup> Black Wall Street is the moniker given to the Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa, OK that was a model for economic success for Black communities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Theologically-based education experience**

As an exception to most other participants in the study, CL1 received theologically-based higher education in both undergraduate and graduate schools. In fact, he leans more on his undergraduate experience of the early 1980s as an influence on the work that he is doing today than his graduate school experience of the 1990s. It should be noted that CL1 attended graduate school while he was working full time in the local church. He says that the personal influence of administrators and instructors along with reading assignments in undergraduate school helped to shape his theological leanings.

CL1 is a graduate of a theologically based higher education institution that is operated by a fundamentalist leaning, socially conservative Christian denomination. He admits that the educational experience was beneficial in some areas of his vocation, but did little to help prepare him for socially conscious outreach. “Even the president of the school told me, ‘You’re not going to get much here that’s going to speak to your context.’ Now, A, to admit that is honorable; but B, to be satisfied with that reality is problematic.” When CL1 compared the work necessary to be successful at socially conscious outreach in his surroundings and the graduate education he received, he was not prepared. “Here I am studying liberation theology basically on my own. I’m in ministry, and this is what really got me. It just showed me that I’m not academically prepared for this.”

He admits that he supplemented the reading for graduate school classes with outside reading material that covered subjects that related to liberation theology and the social justice work of the Church. He also read books at the urging of his mentor that covered subjects such as psychology, sociology, and economics. He credits this reading with shaping the way he approaches his work today more than the curriculum of the institution where he earned the

degree. The extra, self-assigned reading influenced him in ways that he felt that his experience at the theologically based higher education institution should have. When he described the above mentioned socially conscious outreach efforts of CH1, he repeated the refrain that he “didn’t get that” from the institution where he studied.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

CL1 suggest that theologically based higher education curriculum should focus on justice. “For me, it would be a theology of, number one, of justice. For justice to be in the Bible from 1200 to 2000 times, depending on the translation, it must be important.” He says that students should graduate with an understanding about what God says about poverty and what God says about systems that make allowance for the oppression of people groups. He then suggests that this theological grounding should lead to addressing public policy and to activity “in the streets – A theology that works and walks in the hood.”

He said that the development of organizations that are categorized by government designations 501c3 and LLC<sup>16</sup> should be included in the curriculum. CL1 said that these specific tax designations allow organizations access to resources. In addition, he suggests that students in theologically based higher education programs should be taught to navigate and affect public policy. He relays a story about the CH1 ineffectiveness in maneuvering city council ordinances because there was no knowledge of policy making as an example.

### **Church leader/Church II (CL2/CH2)**

#### **Interview setting**

CL2 was interviewed in his office in the afternoon before he conducted a marriage counseling session. His office is located in the rear of a building that houses a sanctuary and an

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<sup>16</sup> 501c3 is a government tax status afforded to recognized non-profit organizations that exempts the organization from paying federal taxes. LLC is another tax status with limited tax and personal responsibilities for the organizations operators.

area for fellowship. The office has the image of sufficiently lighted work space with computers, a television, and golf clubs. The interview is conducted at a round table that has a book cases on two sides that are filled with books both text books and books that cover a wide range of subjects.

### **Participant's personal vocation**

CL2 has worked at the same church (CH2) for 16 years. In the first six years he was bi-vocational, working full time job as well as working as a minister. He admits that the bi-vocational arrangement did allow him to dedicate time to the work of the church. Now he dedicates time and resources to serving in the church and community. "This gives me more time for ministry."

The subject has roots in the community where the church is located. CH2 is located in the same community where CL2 lived and went to school as a child. His family home in the community is still occupied by his mother. He was baptized at the church in the mid 1970s. He left the area and the church as a young adult but returned to both and worked with young people in the community through the church in the late 1990s.

### **Setting and work of the church**

According to CL2, the church is situated in an area that is financially depressed. "The residents are elderly homeowners and transients, who are just renting. They're here for a few months and then they're gone. There are retired teachers and other professionals that live in this area, but those who are actually working today are those of menial labor: restaurant workers, factory workers, things of that nature."

The community where CH2 is situated is walking distance from the central business district of city and is along the route of efforts to revitalize without the input or consent of the residence of the community. In addition, the community recently witnessed the closure of emergency medical services at the hospital that served many of the residence, leaving them to have to travel a distance through traffic to reach the closest facility that offers emergency medical services.

Although he holds to a commonly held belief that the Black Church has a tradition and history of socially conscious outreach, CL2 admits that the church where he serves does not have a rich history of such a focus and activities. However, he believes that Black Church should revive its early traditions and history.

“I think the Black Church has to be involved. I think it always has been involved. I think the only advancements that we've made as a community, has been led by the church. I think that, for a large extent, the conditions in which we find ourselves today is because the Black Church took a backseat after the Civil Right movement. At that time, it's just my belief, that we said, ‘Okay, now we've got lawyers. Now we've got politicians. Now we've got other people who can take the torch and run with it.’ The church sat back and said, ‘Now we're just going to concentrate on saving souls, on worshiping, on this prosperity gospel and other segments of life.’ Instead of saying, ‘We have to be advocating of all social movements in our community or improving the lives of individuals - not only their heavenly life, but their life while they're here on earth waiting to ascend to heaven.’ I think that the church has to be out front.”

CH2 serves as a liaison between the community and government to “voice the concerns of the community.” The Church hosts community meetings and forums in order to hear and synthesize concerns, then present those concerns to local and state officials. “We’re organizing so that we can voice the concerns with one voice instead of having five different people saying the same thing.”

In addition, the church hosts an annual symposium that allows community residents to be educated by experts in the areas of their concerns. Members of the community of all ages meet at



the church for three hours every day for a week in order to be updated on current issues around their concerns, hear from experts about best approaches to produce change, and develop strategies to move from discussion to action. Subject matter includes adjudicated and blighted property in the neighborhood, crime, economic development, and HIV/AIDS awareness. In addition to people who live in the community, participants and presenters at the symposium include elected and appointed officials, attorneys, law enforcement officials, representatives from the hospital where the emergency room closed, and representatives from two local universities.

The researcher attended one night of the week-long event. At the appointed time members of adults gathered in the sanctuary to meet with government officials and community organizers. The first session covered blighted properties. The second part of the gathering was used to discuss health care concerns for the people of the community.

The meeting consisted of the dissemination of information and impassioned question-answer exchanges among all on both topics. The meeting was an exhibition of the concern that the representative of the church and the community to see the quality of living improve for persons in that community. No certain strategies were developed during the sessions, but committees were formed for further investigation that would lead to action.

In addition, the elected officials that were present insisted on the civic engagement of the residents of the community and members of the church. Their message was that change occurs through participating in public meetings and through the electoral process. Some members of the audience were receptive to the message and some visibly and verbally rejected the notion.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

CL2 earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from a land-grant college and graduated from theologically-based higher education institution while he worked in his present position. The institution of his graduate studies is operated by a fundamentalist leaning, socially conservative Christian denomination. Although he did not agree with some of the tenants of the institution, CL2 says he attended the institution because it was the only choice for ATS accredited graduate studies in theology in his geographic area.

He says that he entered graduate studies with a social justice orientation but had to purposefully maintain such an intellectual stance considering his studies at the institutions. “I had to work to keep that mentality but it helped that every time that I left the seminary and came to this church I’d look around and say, ‘Okay, there’s work to be done.’”

CL2 says he benefited from the experience at the institution because he learned to prepare and deliver sermons more effectively and how to strategically pursue evangelistic efforts. “But what I did not learn was how to deal with the social issues in my community.” The social focus of his studies was three subjects: divorce, homosexuality, and abortion. ““My eyes and my heart were focused on what I saw every day. However, I still recognized the importance of the degree. But in the area of social justice I recognized that what I’m being taught is not going to be useful.”

CL2 supplemented his graduate education experience with readings and attended conferences that were outside of the assignments but addressed the work in the community. The additional readings were especially selected to provide insight about best practices for socially conscious outreach. His extra reading included works such as *God in the Ghetto* by William A. Jones, *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman, and *God of the Oppressed* and *A Black Liberation Theology* by James Cone. In addition, CL2 continued constant contact with people

who lived in the community and people who had been engaged in socially conscious outreach longer than he.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

CL2 accepts that theologically-based higher education institutions can work in tandem with the Black Church and the community to produce positive social change. “I think if the Church and the academy work together on that, the Church can show the academy the need for this, and then the academy could find a way to incorporate it into its studies. I think it would go a long way in improving the academy and improving those who are graduating from seminaries.” However, he suggests that leaders of the theologically based higher education institutions will have to “come into the community and walk among the people and really see what’s going on in order to work with the Church, in order to move forward.”

He suggests that it should be mandatory to seminary students to study “real issues” in the community. He believes that too many seminary students are not connected to social issues. “I think that there's got to be a way in the academy to open the eyes and almost deprogram and reprogram.” The approach should be to incorporate social justice into every part of the studies rather than creating a separate part of the curriculum.

### **Church leader/Church III (CL3/CH3)**

#### **Interview setting**

The interview was conducted using the speaker feature of the researcher’s cell phone in the afternoon just before the subject had to leave his office to go to another meeting. The researcher was located in his office in a separate city from the participant. The conversation was registered on a digital recorder.

#### **Participant’s personal vocation**

The subject has been the pastor of an historic church along the eastern seaboard of the United States for 26 years. He previously worked with elementary and high school students at the same church under the tutelage and leadership of a world renowned religious leader. He also worked as pastor for a short period with another congregation. The city of his early vocational years afforded him exposure to and contact with a number of persons who were nationally renowned as religious leaders.

CL3 He is a board member of ATS. He is also a tenured professor at an ATS accredited theological seminary where he teaches preaching and has taught at several other theologically based institutions of higher education. He is also been a board member of the institution where he earned his graduate degree. He said, “I have a pretty good handle, I think, of what’s going on in theological education.”

### **Setting and work of the church**

The church is located in a community that was historically populated by mostly African Americans, then was densely populated by African immigrants in the 1990s and early 2000s, and is now populated by European immigrants. CL3 attributes the first transition in population to the crack epidemic when “you start to see the exodus of black families out of the neighborhood...As a result of abandoned buildings and housing stocks, this is the last repository of brownstone houses in [CITY]. Speculative buyers of other races came in to buy houses here. As a result of that, in the last five to seven years, there’s been a 600% increase in people of European descent.” He said that the first \$1 million home was sold in the 1990s and now almost all brownstones sell for \$1 million.

CL3 admits that the city has experienced economic improvements because of the technology industry and a new sports arena. However, “People who are not in those industries or

real estate, for that matter, are finding that they are getting choked out for the most part.” He says that even with the high price of housing there is still a need for social services in the community. The church still works to provide protection and healthcare for senior citizens and to provide quality education for children, according to CL3.

CH3 has a history of socially conscious outreach that continues into present circumstances. Its areas of outreach include a charter school that dated back almost 50 years before it recently closed, a foster care program for children that is 26 years old, and a 32-apartment assisted living facility for senior citizens. All of those initiatives began as partnerships with public entities, but were eventually controlled completely by the church.

He says that the proper disposition of the Church is to be socially engaged. “The Church is supposed to be the salt of the earth, we supposed to be light and seed that doesn’t sit, that does not go under a bed, but sits up on the candle stick. I think to be Christian is to be engaged in the redemptive work of the world,” he said.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

CL3 studied at a theologically-based institution of higher education that traditionally supported the social responsibility of faith communities. He admits that he chose to attend the institution because certain members of the faculty specialized in Black Liberation Theology. “The reason I went to [INSTITUTION] is because I wanted to spend time with them,” he said.

He said the historical and social context of the institution provided the impetus for his understanding of the relationship that should exist between the academy, the Church, and the

community. According to CL3, it was a time when the Black Power Movement<sup>17</sup> and Black Liberation Theology had just emerged, yet after the Civil Rights Movement when the Black Church membership was in its “heyday.” However, he suggests that an anti-institutional attitude of that day mirrors what many institutions, especially churches face today.

CL3 entered his graduate studies with a religious social conscious disposition because of his prior experiences in the Black Church. He said, “I grew up Black Baptist. What people classify as social action is just a part of what we understood it meant to be Christian.” His seminary experience merely refined and enhanced his beliefs of the way that the Church should engage social issues, according to CL3. “I think what happened in seminary is that for some of the stuff I was felling innately...I got a lexicon, a vocabulary, and a theoretical framework for understanding some of those things, he said.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

CL3 stresses the importance of the study of theology and history as a means of educating leaders for churches that will partner with community entities to produce social change. Rather than more practitioners, CL3 suggest that there is a need for more Black scholars to educate and train practitioners. “We need Black scholars to do scholarship about Black Church and Black Church history, as well as Black Church theology in a way that meets it on its own terms as opposed to making it an aberration or some kind of strange departure from ‘true theology’ or ‘pure theology.’”

He sees the proper view of theology as the foundation for pragmatic practices. “If you can understand theology, you can talk about anything,” he said. The “proper” view of theology allows the leader to address economic and political realities for all people. He contends that the

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<sup>17</sup> The Black Power Movement (1966-1975) was characterized by various groups who sought to address social, cultural and political issues on half of Black people in America through encouraging independent institutions as well as equality in American public institutions.

work of the Church will address social issues when there is an understanding that theology and social justice are not mutually exclusive, but should work hand-in-hand, especially in the Black Church setting.

CL3 says, “One of the kinds of traps of the institutionalized racism is to tell Black people they don’t have the right doctrine. They teach them the doctrine that has nothing to do with their social location. It has nothing to do with changing or transforming the systems that keep Black people on the other side of history and in the place of disenfranchisement in this country.”

He also maintains that effective scholarship should “take seriously the history and the life of Black churches, because social justice is not an add-on to be gender theology for Black people it is a necessity.” According to CL3 a proper understanding of the history of the Black Church would enhance the understanding of the connection between social justice and religious life. “Black Churches have always been interested in ortho-practices and having the right kind of practice in the world,” he said.

CL3 suggests that theologically based higher education should include what he terms “relational intelligence” that would allow scholars to go to churches in order to ask critical questions and to allow the Church to ask critical questions of scholarship. For example, “How did you write this book about theology and not ask what the Black people are thinking?” In like manner, CL3 purports that the academy must be willing to learn from the Black Church. “There are some great things going on all over the country right now and there off of most people's radars because we're talking about the sensational stuff,” he said.

Lastly, he says that the academy has to be global in its understanding of a theology of justice. A curriculum that includes an understanding of how Islam can help in gaining and understanding of racism outside of one’s religious tradition. CL3 would also include courses to

connect theology and social justice through the lenses of people who are indigenous to the Americas, Latin America, and South Africa.

#### **Church leader/Church IV (CL4/CH4)**

##### **Interview setting**

The interview was conducted using the speaker feature of the researcher's cell phone in the afternoon. The researcher was located in his office. The conversation was registered on a digital recorder.

##### **Participant's personal vocation**

The subject (CL4) is the lead minister of a Black church (CH4) that is a member of a traditionally white Christian denomination for the past 12 years. Before working in the church, CL4 was employed as a policeman in a low income housing development. He said that this position allowed him to see "the mistreatment of Black people" firsthand.

CH4 is an extension of a larger congregation in a nearby metropolitan city. Previous to working with this faith community, CL4 worked on the staff as an associate minister of the above mentioned larger church. CH4 is located in a city that has faced economic and political instability over the past two decades.

##### **Setting and work of the church**

"The word that comes to mind is 'blight' on all levels," he said. The Midwestern city where the church is located lost its main employers and it has resulted in the depopulation of the area. CL4 says that the 2010 census reports that the population has decreased by 50% and the unemployment rate is around 25% since the main employers began to exit the area. "There are a slew of abandoned buildings...whole blocks at a time of abandoned buildings that people have raided for copper and things like that. It's pretty tough. It's pretty tough (Repeated for



emphasis).” In addition, CL4 says that the dominant conservative political party tries to “strangle” the minority, more progressive political party in the state.

The predominant role that CH4 plays under these circumstances is to serve as a public space for various organizations to meet so that members of the community to can gather, plan, and speak, according CL4. The church cooperates with other social justice organizations in the area in order to lobby for policy change on the city and regional levels. CL4 said, “I see the church first as a public space, but then a megaphone to people in particular political positions to hear the concerns, the needs, and the cries of the people.”

In addition, CH4 is involved in doing charity in the community. The church serves a hot meal to persons in the community once per week. There is also a service that provides clothes to those who are in need.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

CL4 earned a bachelor’s degree from a liberal arts university, and a master’s degree and a doctorate degree from ATS accredited theologically based higher education institutions. He started graduate work while still working full time as a policeman and before working in an official capacity at a church. He says that he had already developed a socially conscious perspective of how faith should work in the world around him, but received very little re-enforcement in his graduate studies. “There were some specific differences. The issue of racism, white supremacy, is not addressed in my experience, in the academy. The way I experienced it. Especially being a police officer, going to classes. I’m trying to balance two worlds.”

He considered his religious background to be conservative as it relates to scripture interpretation; and is appreciative for the progressive perspective on interpretation that he learned in graduate school. “The seminary helped open up my view of God, of theology and of my faith

and so I'm just indebted for that, but for my context and pastoring people of color, African Americans, there was a lot that I wish I could have had that seminary did not provide.” In order to supplement his graduate school curriculum, CL4 read additional materials as well as attended lectures at his church that spoke to conditions of being Black and Christian. “I operated in seminary that the curriculum and the readings I was faithful to that, but I had to keep a separate line of notes and I kept up some extra reading so where other people were not, I had the benefit of being under [LEAD MINISTER OF CHURCH] so what we had once a month, with what is called a ministers in training.” CL4 said the group read books such as *The Politics of Jesus* by Obrey Hendricks and *If It Wasn't for the Women* by Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. Additionally, there were certain professors at the theologically based higher education institution who encouraged CL4 in his studies.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

CL4 suggests that the academy and the Church can work together to ensure positive social change in that the academy can help church leaders in the areas of critical thinking and analyzing issues and the Church can give understanding to what happens “in real time.” He says that the academy should be more accessible to clergy and church leaders. This can be accomplished through making theologically based higher education more affordable and by offering opportunities for study and other resources through online study.

He insists that there should be number of additions to curricula. For instance, given the contemporary climate in America, he suggests that grief counseling, especially in the area of death by violent means, should be more prevalent in theologically based higher education. He says that the seminary should teach leaders to assist people to deal with violence that occurs at the hands of police.

CL4 contends that personal and corporate financial management should be a part the studies at theologically base higher education institutions. In the area of personal finances he says that the curriculum should include managing debt and clergy tax law. He also suggests that church leaders should be educated in the area of educated on how to manage church budgets and how to work with volunteers.

CL4 recommends that theologically based higher education institutions should train clergy and church leaders in community building. This includes providing hands-on opportunities such as creating community gardens to fill the gap in healthy food choices. It also includes learning public policy in order to navigate local and regional ordinances.

### **Church leader/Church V (CL5/CH5)**

#### **Interview setting**

The participant (CL5) was interviewed in his office which is located at the church where he is the lead minister. The office is furnished with a small desk, a small sofa, and two chairs for guest to sit. The space is memorabilia from various organizations and events that have meaning to the participant.

#### **Participant's personal vocation**

CL5 is a product of the church where he works as lead minister. He says that except for a brief time of living away from the city where the church is located, he has always been a part of the church. He has been the lead minister at CH5 for 22 years. It is the only church position he has worked.

Additionally, CL5 worked in state government in both elected and appointed capacities. His positions included work for person with disabilities, governance of health services deliveries,

and rebuilding and recovery after a natural disaster. In addition to duties at the church, CL5 has worked on several community based boards of directors.

He is also the chief operating officer of a nonprofit organization that is designed to produce positive social change through the planning and activities of people who live in the community. The work includes addressing education issues through parental support, leadership training, issues that relate to Black men and boys' health and wellness, and consulting with local congregations about community outreach.

### **Setting and work of the church**

CH5 is located on an intersection that is adjacent to a neighborhood that has traditionally been home to a mostly African-American community. However, the church was founded in the said mentioned neighborhood in the mid twentieth century. According to CL5, approximately 25% of the current congregation still lives in the neighborhood of the church's genesis. CL5 attributes the move to the new location, though not far from the old location, to making the church "more accessible" to people; and by default to church growth.

CH5, though predominantly African American, has wide socioeconomic demographic within the congregation.

"In terms of the socioeconomic, we have people who are fighting poverty to people who are owners of their own business, and executives in government and bureaucracies, who do well for themselves. We have elected officials and the People who vote to put them there. It's just a real interesting hodgepodge of people...very diverse through virtually any lens that you would look at it."

CL5 contends that in most instances the Black Church remains located within or near the community, was historically a viable economic force in the community, and usually the highest profile organization within the community. "I think inherent in all of that is a responsibility to give voice to the interest of the people," he said. To that end, CH5 has intentionally "begin to act

in partnership with the community” to respond to the various issues that face people who live in the community adjacent to the church. Groups are formed within the congregation to address and ameliorate the problems.

The researcher observed when CL5 lead the congregation to move their weekly Bible Study and prayer from the confines of the sanctuary to the street corner where Alton Sterling was killed by two police officers during the height of unrest and protest. Even though the area was beginning to fill with rowdy protestors, CL5 lead about 30 members of CH5 in reading sacred scripture, singing, and praying. There were no confrontations as some members of the community joined the services. In addition, the church members provided cases of bottled water for use by the protestors. CL5 and members of CH5 maintained a presence at this protest sight in the days following the Bible Study.

In addition, the researcher observed as CL5 provided a space for local community activist to meet in order to share information and plans during the protest. CL5 did not facilitate the meeting. This gathering happened around midday, as persons who were representing Alton Sterling’s family and persons from various organizations engaged in a disorganized and territorial-driven discussion. While the space was provided and the various entities gathered, little progress was made in terms of collaborative efforts of protest.

Persons within the congregation are encouraged to their employ abilities and talents to act as “spiritual entrepreneurs to make a difference in the life of people around us.” The congregation works to eliminate blighted properties, works with single mothers no matter that socioeconomic condition, and conducts classes on financial literacy. CL5 says that they have created a network of women who may or may not be members of the congregation but identify with single motherhood in order to support one another “in an authentic way.” In addition,

persons that have participated in the financial literacy courses have become homeowners, and have invested in their families through owning savings accounts and insurance policies.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

CL5 is a proponent of church leaders obtaining formal education that pertains to their vocation. He said that these educational experiences should not be limited to theologically based higher education institutions. “I shall never forget that a remark was made to me, ‘A call to ministry is a call to preparation.’” CL5 earned both bachelor and master degree in an effort to prepare for work at the church while he worked full time at the church. He attended a theologically based higher education institute that is operated by a fundamentalist leaning, socially conservative Christian denomination. “I wanted to go to seminary, and so I was able to by God's grace enroll.”

He says that the experience gave him a better understanding of the scriptures that Christians hold sacred and helped him to better explain that understanding to congregants. In addition, CL5's educational experience helped him to understand and operate in the role of pastor of the church. “The science of the technology of church leadership, and relationships, and structures - seminary was invaluable to me for that. I needed to understand how to walk in this place and conduct the business of being a pastor.” CL5 says that the seminary challenged what he believed theologically through critical thinking which solidified his faith. “I'm a better pastor because I went to seminary. Some of the lessons that I would have had to learn the hard way, I don't think that this ministry would have progressed the way that it did absent the training that I received at seminary,” he said.

However, he said those intangible benefits did not immediately transfer into the culture “in which I did church.” He laments that during his entire experience at the institution he did not

have a single African American instructor and thus no one who could speak to the Black Church experience. “There was not a lot in terms of the application of technology I secured that would allow me to easily transfer it to the context in which I served,” he said. He said that his studies were almost irrelevant to the issues of the community where he works.

CL5 strengthened his educational experience by reading works by Black Church leaders. However, he said that his most valuable assistance came from interaction with church leaders in the community that gave him both practical advice and reading material. He made a practice of meeting personally with more experienced church leaders in an effort to learn pragmatic approaches to issues within the church and the community.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

The participant thinks that the academy and the Black Church should inform and support one another to produce positive social change. He says that the academy can take some cues from the Black Church in order to know what to include in curriculum offerings. In like manner, the Black Church can benefit from the resources that are available at theologically based institutions of higher education.

CL5 extols the Black Church and its position to have meaningful impact on the lives of people who live in disenfranchised communities. In the same manner, he believes that the academy (particularly the institution that he attended) “has become conscious of the deficit of context and has attempted to be more creative and flexible about positioning seminary students to where they get real life experiences within the context with which they would be applying the fruits of the academy in their regular life.”

CL5 suggests that curriculum should stress the importance of context in terms of understanding the location and the population of the local church. “I think people need to

understand demographics. How do you look at census data and other community data to really begin to understand the people who live around you?” This supports his assertion that the Church should play a role in transforming communities and not settle for providing “emotionally ecstatic moments.”

### **Church leader/Church VI (CL6/CH6)**

#### **Interview setting**

The interview was conducted in the hotel where the participant was attending a meeting for a national religious organization. The researcher and participant found a large unoccupied room to conduct the interview between the sessions of the meeting. A makeshift desk was set up using a small table and both the researcher and participants used chairs that were positioned for another meeting. At least three times, the interview was interrupted by conference participants or hotel employees. The interview compassed nearly two hours.

#### **Participant’s personal vocation**

CL6 is the lead minister at an 87-year old church in a northeast metropolitan city. He has worked in this capacity for the past 15 years. He previously worked in the same capacity at another church in the same city for 35 years. He has worked to organize churches in the community to address the socioeconomic and political issues that have local, regional, and national implications.

He began working in churches while he was a student at a theologically based higher education institution. After difficulty at one church he moved to another in another city to work with an established minister. That experience lasted less than a year before he moved to the institution where he worked for 35 years.



CL6 has intentionally centered his work around African identity, including a yearly commemoration the transatlantic slave trade through music, drama, and scripture interpretation. In addition, to work in the local community and church setting, CL6 is often invited to speak at church services and lecture at theologically based higher education institutes. He says that his focus has been to encourage men in depressed communities to work with the Church to cause change.

### **Setting and work of the church**

CH6 is located in an area that was traditionally populated by African Americans, but is now facing gentrification challenges. “Gentrification is a steamroller and in our area particularly, gentrification is up 800%,” CL6 said. As a result many churches in the area are selling facilities and vacating the area, “even some of the historic Black Churches.” He says that historically, residence have been agreeable to allow congregants to park on the street and in front of homes during church activities. However, CL6 suggests that new proprietors and residence that have little appreciation of the history of the relationship between the church and the community are not cooperative. As a result, participants in church activities may return to their cars and find that they have been ticketed are towed. “The Black Church has been through a storm and hopefully we are coming through it but this is where I minister now,” he said.

CL6 responded to what he sees as the needs of work of the Black Church overall and parallel on the work where he serves. He suggests that the Black Church struggles between two positions that give the illusion of impact and influence. CL6, who labels himself a “critical lover of the Black Church” says that many Black churches are either narrowly tied to old systems that are no longer effective, or they represent “the newer black churches who look like they're doing

something, but they are illusory. I think that's the right word but they are really white churches in black drag.”

In addition to outreach targeted at men, CH6 concentrates its work on two areas that CL6 are critical for personal living: money as well as sex and sexuality. On a communal level, CL6 suggests that Black churches can't fend off gentrification because they lack the resources to do so. On a personal level, he said these issues challenge congregants and have to be addressed in order for the Church to impact communities. CL6 suggests that the lack of attention and effort to address these issues by the Black Church have left the relevance of the Church in question. “When you live in [CITY] you ain't got time to think about heaven. You trying to survive [CITY]. I want to get my life together to go to heaven. We need to get our lives together to live in [CITY]. When we recognize that, then the ministry changes.” he said.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

“Talking about my experience, when I got to [THEOLOGICALLY BASED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION], that's when the death of God theology came out...I get to seminary and God dies?”

CL6 says that his graduate education was marked by racist professors at a northern American institution that held a history of racism. “The thing that bothered me the most in the classrooms was I had to listen to racist professors teach me. Wait a minute, ain't this seminary?” Before his time at the school, the institution only allowed one African-American student per graduating class. However, it was also a time that was marked by protest for equality at the school. Black students occupied the administration building “for two weeks” and were assisted by people from local Black churches so that the institution would change the way African-American students were treated.

Additionally, CL6 says that it was during this period and through his studies that his faith was solidified. “I’d been in church all my life but I found God at [THEOLOGICALLY BASED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION]. Howard Thurman’s book, *Jesus and the Disinherited* was my breakthrough.” He also credits meeting African-American scholars and preachers who served as mentored with his maturation.

CL6 earned a terminal degree at another institution where he worked with another prominent African-American minister scholar. He matriculated in a cohort that included men and women who are considered prominent in church circles today. His studies concentrated on what he termed, “the absence of men in church.”

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

CL6 contends that the seminary should be the “headquarters for social action and social justice.” However, he believes that too many progressive institutions have focused on the political agenda of a particular demographic in terms of study and preparing people to work in churches. He says that seminary curriculum should include helping church leaders to strengthen families, as well as focusing on the health and wellness of the church leader. CL6 that these objectives can also be accomplish through the academy and the Black Church sharing the same spaces for dialogue and education.

### **Church leader/Church VII (CL7/CH7)**

#### **Interview setting**

The interview was conducted in a meeting room at a church in the midtown section of a southern metropolitan city. The space housed a large table and bookshelves filled with books. The subject explained that the books were donations from across the country to replace materials that were lost during a major natural disaster in the city. The building is a renovated recreational

facility that has a large space to meet for worship, a space for fellowship activities, as well as space for classrooms and administrative activities. It should be noted that the interview was interrupted while the participant met persons who were doing repairs to the facility.

### **Participant's personal vocation**

CL7 has worked as a theological academician, administrator, and practitioner for over three decades. His vocation began when he worked as a tutor for high school students through the church and for a university summer program as an undergraduate student. He eventually started the church where he presently works as lead minister.

In addition, CL7 worked on the faculty of various universities and community colleges across the country. He teaches religion, philosophy, and African American studies. He has also worked as the director and interim dean of African American studies and Black Church studies at several higher education institutions. CL7 has also served as a university chaplain.

CL7 focused his work on the academy, the church, and the community in all settings. He says that the three entities should remain in balance with one another. "I have always tried to keep the three in conversation."

### **Setting and work of the church**

The city where CH7 located is still in recovery mode from a catastrophic weather related event nearly 10 years ago. Therefore, the church works with other religious and non-religious organizations to meet immediate needs of people while also addressing systemic social issues. The members of CH7 have met for worship and other activities at various locations since its founding. The present location is situated nearly under an interstate highway.

It appears that the church's activities relate closely to the personal work of CL7. In the year following the weather event he and the church partnered with a Civil Rights veteran to form

an organization that supports local churches and ministers who were recovering from the event. The collaboration seeks to provide resources for rebuilding facilities, provide financial relief for ministers and their families, as well as direct persons to social services. CL7 works as the executive director of the organization.

CL7, and thus CH7 are also involved in an ecumenical, interracial, multigenerational organization that brings people together from across the city to “organize for social action and advocacy.” The group meets once per week at CH7 for a shared meal, to listen to speakers, and to strategically plan to address social issues. “Right now, we advocate for education reform and criminal justice reform,” he said. Additionally, he co-founded another ecumenical group with which he and the church now work “that seeks the welfare of the city.”

### **Theologically-based education experience**

CL7 started working on a church staff while he was an undergraduate student. Although he didn’t major in religion or philosophy, he was able to connect the work that he did with young people in religious and non-religious settings to his vocation. In his work as an instructor at a university summer program, he said that he realized that he was still doing the work of the church. “That’s when I began to see the connection between the academy and the community. I got the idea that the ivory tower experience didn’t mean too much to the rank-and-file person if it doesn’t connect with them where they are. That’s when my calling as being connected not with just the parish and not just with the community. There has to be a combination,” he said.

He earned a graduate degree from an ATS accredited theologically based higher education institution in the northeast United States. He said that at this institution the local churches allowed the students to “run programs” and serve on their staffs, thus in that instance creating the connection between the academy and the church. “I went with the need to prepare

myself for ministry. It was there that I learned the need for social consciousness,” he said. While in graduate school CL7 did “fieldwork” at another local university “helping black students.”

CL7 says that he made another connection between the academy and the church through his studies in seminary. He said that he studied the classical theologians that were held in high esteem at the institution. “I was ready to dismiss them, but I learned that before persons became great theologians they first had to be pastors...before you get to go to the ivory tower...before you get in there, you have to put in work in the community. That’s when I began to see it differently.” He said that his theological framework was formed where he considers that culture and religion intersect.

He then pursued a terminal degree at an ATS accredited theologically based higher education institution on the west coast of America. That experience allowed him to witness the work of the Black Panther Party<sup>18</sup>; as well as become a board member of a national civil rights organization. This experience provided more resolve to keep the academy, the church, and the community “in dialogue with one another” in his work.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

CL7 states that community organizing should be included in theologically based curriculum. “One of the things that should be added for seminarians who either intends to be pastor or to be on multilevel staff is the principles of community organizing to understand the highest good, to understand the enlightened self-interest.” He suggest that student should learn that “...sometimes to get things done, you partner with people who may not have been your partners before and they may not be your partners in the future; but if you make it issue-driven you can work across lines in common interest.”

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<sup>18</sup> The Black Panther Party was formed in Oakland, CA in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century as a means to provide free feeding programs for children, free health clinics, and to monitor police behavior and challenge police brutality.

He also says that management in general and financial management courses should be included in the curriculum. CL7 suggest that people are graduating and getting hired by churches that have no sense of management. “The can visit the hospital. They can preach. But if you can’t put together a budget and do forecasts...if you don’t know what an audit will do or won’t do...if you don’t have a sense of keeping books and records, you could end up in big, big, big trouble.”

Lastly, CL7 says that theologically based higher education should include a component that addresses the mental well-being of the minister. He sees mental health issues among ministers as a part of the larger societal mental health problems. CL7 suggests that Clinical Pastoral Education should become an imperative, rather than an elective or addendum for theologically based higher education.

#### **Academic leader/Academic Institution I (AL1/AI1)**

##### **Interview setting**

The interview was conducted using the speaker feature of the researcher’s cell phone. The participant was situated in his office at the theologically based higher education institution where he works. The conversation was registered on a digital recorder.

##### **Participant’s personal vocation**

AL1 has been the president of the private 92-year old institution for the past 17 years. The institution holds Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU) status and is accredited by the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) and is approved by the United States Department of Education. The school is offers associates and bachelor’s degrees in theological studies and leadership.

In addition, AL1 works as the director of a Black Church studies program at a divinity school that is a part of larger university in the same city as the above mentioned institution. Both

institutions are affiliated with a particular Christian denomination. He has also worked as the lead minister at two different churches at different intervals during his career as an academic administrator.

### **Setting and work of the church**

AL1 articulated theoretical reflections on the setting and the work of the Black Church. He says that the Black Church emerged from communities that have always been challenged socially, economically, and politically with a message of freedom. He says that the church has historically been positioned against white supremacists values. “The very core of the nature of the Black Church brought together a faith and understanding of freedom of life that focused on liberation and salvation that was holistic in order to respond to the crisis or the need that the constituent base of the black community represented,” he said. He suggests that the Black Church was inextricably tied to the life of people who lived in communities occupied by Black people. AL1 explains,

Socio-political issues and concerns in the community have always been linked to the Black Church’s existence; and how the Black Church has existed in the midst of that providing spirituality and hope, and healing. Not just in the institutional church itself, but the black people themselves and their religious experience where it was expressed; whether it was expressed in the NAACP, Urban League, or some advocacy movement. The whole basis of that advocacy was a product of faith.

The subject suggests that the Black Church plays a significant role in the continuing education of congregants in general and in theological matters. “Just like in the academy, every church ought to have a scholar in residence, which ought to be the pastor. He or she ought to keep the church abreast of theological thinking and trends.” He suggests that this educational component should inform people around socio-economic political issues such as Black male incarceration.



AL1 says this was the approach to education among the congregations where he worked as lead minister. He said that the church hosted “weekend intensives” that focused on particular subjects in an effort to bridge the academy and the church. “Then the whole Sunday School curriculum itself would allow the teachers to begin to carve out their own teaching plans, lesson plans that reflected the subject rather than accept the literature in a way that it was neutral to what it means to be Black and Christian.” Then the work of the church would reflect the study, according to AL1.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

AL1 reports that he felt “called to ministry” after witnessing what he terms as systemic and events of injustice while employed on his first job after completing his undergraduate education. “During that period, the Black Church of my childhood seeped into my consciousness in a way that I an urgent sense...called to the church to serve the church in a more specific way,” he said. It he then returned to the academy to earn two graduate degrees. However, he says that that his informal education was as important as the formal. The Black community and the Black Church informed and shaped his theology as much as what he learned in the classroom. “The way in which all of that synergizes, I think, is my sense of how that started evolving into a clear sense of what it meant, or means to be Black and Christian in terms of social justice, serving people, and the systems that continue to oppress black life” he said.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

AL1 says that the institution where he works have been challenged to make their curriculum more inclusive of the Black experience – “not as a marginal tradition amidst the other traditions that are taught in these schools, but as central to an understanding the core issues of Christianity in America.” Divinity schools are now continually challenged by the contextual

realities of oppressed groups, according AL1. He suggests that theologically based higher education institutions can no longer continue to develop curriculum through the lenses of one group at the expense of ignoring other people groups. AL1 contends,

“Now we must consider everyone, including LGBTQ communities as well as a continued issue of supremacist values and structural racism. White privileges as relates to what we are not, experiences in terms of policing and race in America. The current republican and democratic national debates and conventions as it relates to the next president, even. Our faith and our theologies must articulate a sense of what politics and compassion and over against politics that continue to divide and create despair it as mean.”

The participant says that persons who emerge from theological based higher education programs should emerge with the theological tools and reflective tools to think about the realities of the communities where they serve. Those studies should include an understanding of working within new cultures such hip-hop and womanist concerns. He says that at many theologically based higher education institutions there are a “whole host of creative courses that scholars are prepared to offer in the curriculum that will help the way we come at these matters.” However AL1 admits that there is a deficit in the curriculum in terms of administration, public policy, and “how people can bring leadership to those issues that require church leaders to be at the table to negotiate and advocate for public policy change.”

### **Academic leader/Academic Institution II (AL2/AI2)**

#### **Interview setting**

The interview was conducted using the speaker feature of the researcher’s cell phone. The researcher was located in his office. The office is a quite space with books on shelves along two walls. The participant was situated in his office at the theologically based higher education institution where he works. The conversation was registered on a digital recorder.

#### **Participant’s personal vocation**

AL2 has worked in theologically based higher education for the last 40 years. He began his vocation as an assistant professor at HBCU, and then moved to a prominent White theologically based higher education institution in the same capacity. He then made the decision to return to the HBCU setting. "I decided that I wanted to do whatever I was going to do in the academy in a historically Black setting. He was promoted to dean of the school of theology nine years after his return to the HBCU. He has worked in that capacity for 27 years.

The participant contends that theological study in a historically black setting has unique character, unique challenges, and unique responsibility. Namely to merge those parts of the human experience that are usually forced to separate. He says he tries to help students merge those areas that are ordinarily promoted separately such as "head and heart," "spontaneity and order," or "praise and preparation." AL2 said,

"How do you view theological education as for a historically black institution? It is a center of convergence." What I mean by that, the things that are seen as disparate separated and things where the dominant models want to create fracture and force you to line up on one side of the fracture. If you're on the other side of the fracture, you're deficient. If you're on this side, you're educated and intelligent, that fracture that says intelligent people are devoid of emotion."

"Some ways theologically what I'm saying is at some point when we're educated, we should not kill the soul but in a very real sense, we ought to provide soil for the soul, for the spirit and the head to meet each other and to live even in the tension. Not have to wage war on each other, but nourish each other. In some ways, that's happening."

The participant suggests that historically Black institutions are challenged to maintain their particular identity. "Whenever you're struggling for legitimacy, you find yourself torn between affirming your values and constructing yourself both curriculum-wise and policy-wise around standards created by those who were not necessarily committed to justice and your own liberation struggle." He said that in some instances the struggle is whether to arrange the institutions mission on serving the communities or serve the guilds and accrediting bodies.

AL2 said that one of his first assignments at the institution was to design an educational tract that would accommodate bi-vocational ministers. It was an effort to make the seminary accessible to those persons who could not afford to attend the school because of employment obligations. The program was designed to offer evening and weekend classes to allow students to attend around their employment schedule. “You know what that program did? It developed theological curriculum and a certificate program for people who could not get into seminary, but still needed theological preparation,” he said.

AL2 also says that his vocation is informed by his own experience as theologically based higher education student. He says that in his present position he works to be a “resource for other persons’ self-discovery.” He says that he was encouraged to not dismiss his life’s experience in his studies. “This act of self-discovery took place within the context of investigation and that allowed you to use your personal story and journey as data base for theological construction,” AL2 said.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

AL2 is a graduate of the theologically based higher education institution where he works. He attended the school after graduating from a land grant institution in his home state. He later earned a terminal degree from a northeastern theologically based school.

He says that his seminary experience was marked by the Civil Rights era and the country’s struggle over participation in the Vietnam War. In addition, his theological education was influenced by his experienced in the Black Church. He said that the academy was trying to “catch up with where the Church had been” in terms of social justice issues.

During his time of study Black theology and Black power were emerging as mere classes at historically black theological schools, according to AL2. The subject matter was not an area of study, but a part of “the standard things that everyone was doing in order for you to be theologically informed.”

AL2 admits that personal contact with individuals helped where he felt the curriculum may have lacked. “I was touched by some folk with deep passion about the Black Church and Black people. Okay? When I came to this historically black school, I not only gained information, I gained something in my soul that began to push me and stretch me,” he said.

He suggest that in some way he understood that he had to master the content of traditional theological education that was framed through a male European perspective and translate what he learned to the concerns of African Americans. AL2 contends that he had to master the same information and the same ideas “to show that you are capable” without leaving the “altered sense of your person” and doing what was required for transforming your community.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

AL2 thinks that theologically based higher education institutions, especially those with HBCU designations have to work innovatively, even at the risk of being considered “reckless,” in order to strengthen communities through the Black Church. “In the case of our school, we have matured enough in recognizing and are affirmed enough that there are things that we have to do for the sake of the well-being of our communities and take the risk that there'll be some folk who don't agree with it or even might call it reckless,” he said.

He says that schools have to consider restructuring programs so that classes are offered at a time that is convenient for students rather than what is convenient for instructors or what is consistent with established designs. AL2 says this is a matter of inclusion. “You can't have a just educational system where the design of your system automatically excludes certain people,” he said.

He suggests that critical thinking should be an important part of seminary curriculum. The institution should educate students to think critically and construct ideas for themselves rather than just accept the information that is purported to them, according to AL2. This will help in the delivery of services in the context where the church is located and “challenge how we do church,” he says. “The consequence of that is sometimes you even have to critique your own ministry, the church that you love and the theology that’s being delivered by the church which might exclude women that might endorse passivity, or exclude folk who may not go to your church.”

AL2 says that theologically based higher education institutions should also concentrate on teaching graduates to be successful beyond the formal educational experience. The concern should be to help graduates who work at churches to work to “heal communities...to go to a rural church where people have been beaten down and have accepted their own self negation and provide a word that speaks life to them.” He said that seminaries accomplish by including in the curriculum courses that are relevant for the socio-economic and political context of the church, such as addressing the Black Lives Matter movement, how to provide services to persons who are affected by the HIV/AIDS crisis, or helping person through substance abuse.

## **Summary**

### **Personal vocation**

This section is provided to show the participant's vocational experiences as relates to institution (s) and years served. It shows that the participants connect spirituality to their work while they also see the necessity to engage in activities that work to produce social change for subjugated people. They use theological concepts to address sociological issues such as health and wellness disparities, crime and policing, homelessness, and economic development. In all cases there is a desire for justice and equality, a clear understanding of the history of injustice and inequality, and a critique of false notions of the existence just and equal society. They are all focused on celebrating and utilizing the unique tradition and potential of the Black Church.

CL7 said that the relationship between the academy, the Black Church, and the community should remain balanced for the church leader. All of the participants agree on the importance of this intellectual and operational relationship for the theological practitioner and academic. "I have worked to keep the three in conversation with one another," CL7 said.

All of the participants in the study work fulltime in the Black Church setting or in an academic institution that educates persons to work in the Black Church setting. However, in addition to their fulltime vocation some of the participants have worked in a dual roll between the academy and the Black Church. For instance, AL1 and AL2 have both worked as lead ministers in local churches during their tenures as academic administrators. CL3 and CL7 have worked as professors and administrators in conjunction with their time as lead ministers in local churches.

The participants in this study have intentionally focused their work in the local church with producing social change in the community. Not only have they encouraged members of the congregations to develop and operate programs that accomplish this aim, but they are personally involved with community organizations that can be connected to their work in the Church. The

participants have served on boards of directors, formed coalitions with both community-based and ecumenical organizations, and worked with government agencies to accomplish their goals. CL5 is the chief operating officer of a nonprofit organization that works on community development outside of the work of the church where he works.

All of the participants made the connection between academic preparation, work in the church, and community transformation. Both the academicians and practitioners agree that their work is guided by their formal and informal theological educational experiences. They were able to understand how to respond to the community through work assigned in the seminary, through personal reading, or through practical experiences. Their work has been predicated by the real time situations that were both internal and external to their church context.

### **Setting and work of the church**

This section identifies the geographic settings and the work that is accomplished by the churches where the participants lead. This section shows that most of the churches are situated in communities that are characterized by poverty and the affects thereof. All of the church leaders explained that the reasons for disparity range from the closing of industrial plants in communities which led to the loss of jobs, gentrification that made housing too expensive for traditional populations, and traditionally disenfranchised communities.

Most of the congregations in this study have been a part of their community for over fifty years and thus have a history of worshipping and working within the context of poverty. Although every community is unique with its particular issues, all of these churches promote a tenet of prophetic pragmatism that West calls a “democratic and libertarian moral vision” (West 1990, p 170) in the manner that they work to meet educational, financial literacy, health and wellness; and immediate needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. In addition, the congregations



find themselves serving as advocates and liaisons for the persons in their respective communities to address governmental bureaucracy. This agency of the Black Church assists people in their pursuit of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

“I think the Black Church has to be involved. I think it always has been involved. I think the only advancements that we've made as a community, has been led by the church. I think that, for a large extent, the conditions in which we find ourselves today is because the Black Church took a backseat after the Civil Right movement,” CL2 said about what he perceives is the Black Church’s responsibility to the community.

The church leaders said that the work in the community is in response to the need to address immediate needs and to address systemic issues. CL1 and CL6 point out the difference between providing benevolence and seeking justice. Benevolence seeks to meet needs such as helping with the payment of utility bills, providing nonperishable food and hot meals, and giving clothes and blankets. However, the church leaders say that the idea of social justice seeks to respond the question of “why” these services are necessary in the first place. All of the participants agree that the church must address issues from both points of view.

CL1, CL2 and CL4 say that church buildings are used for more than worship services, but provide space for community members to meet, to plan, and to voice their concerns. The church leaders say that the sanctuaries are open to groups and individuals who legitimately represent the concerns of the people in the community to meet with persons who represents institutions that have a stake in the wellbeing of the community. CH2 is the location of an annual event that allows for the collaboration of government officials, hospital officials, community activist, and college and university representatives to address specific problems such as human sexuality, rehabilitation of blighted property, and emergency health care.

The participants say that the Church has the potential to play a vital role in economic development in financially challenged communities. The majority of the church leaders say that the churches where they work provide courses in financial literacy classes. In addition, the participants encourage building and supporting business among the people of the congregation and in the communities where the church is located.

All of the church leaders reported that the Church has to be socially and politically engaged in order to improve the quality of living for persons who live in depressed communities. “When you live in [CITY] you ain’t got time to think about heaven. You trying to survive [CITY]. I want to get my life together to go to heaven. We need to get our lives together to live in [CITY]. When we recognize that, then the ministry changes,” CL6 said. This ideology leads the churches in this study to work to reform policies and laws that allow predatory lending, unjust criminal justice systems, and education systems that are not providing equal education for all children.

### **Theologically-based education experience**

This subsection summarizes the participants’ personal experience as students at theologically based higher education institutions. One of the qualifications for participation in the study is that the individual received a graduate degree from an accredited theologically based higher education institution. The experiences range from schools that were operated by denominations that are traditionally politically conservative, to a liberal institution where the participant still perceived racism, to an institution that is a part of an HBCU.

Of the schools where participants graduated or now work four of the eight (several attended the same school) admit within their mission that they prepare students to work for social justice or social change. All of the institutions seek to prepare students for theological

understanding and church or denominational organization leadership. In addition in curriculums that require an average of 70 credit hours to complete, two of the institutions offer no courses that relate to social justice or social action; four offers between 0-5 courses, and two offers between 6-10 courses.

The data revealed that the participants are aware that there is a unique knowledge base and intellectual tools that are necessary for successful work in churches that are situated in disenfranchised communities. This includes not only understanding the liturgical components of the work, but also understanding the demographics and dynamics of the community; which includes the history, the formal and informal politics, the economic base if any exist, and the key activist and organizers. Therefore, they compared the environment and the issues where they worked with their studies; often discovering that the two were not congruent. All agree that the studies were beneficial, but did not address the specifics of the “context” where they work. “My eyes and my heart were focused on what I saw every day. However, I still recognized the importance of the degree. But in the area of social justice I recognized that what I’m being taught is not going to be useful,” CL2 said.

CL1, CL2, CL4, CL5, and CL6 reported having to supplement their studies with outside reading that addressed the Black Church and social justice issues, as well as with advice from ministers and leaders in the community. Outside studies were not limited to theological issues such as liberation theology, but also focused on African and African-American history, sociology, and psychology such as *the Mis-Education of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson, *The Destruction of Black Civilization* by Chancellor Williams, and *The Black Bourgeoisie* by E. Franklin Frazier. Participants reported learning community organization, public policy, and business administration in their personal studies. CL3 reported that social consciousness was a

major component of his theological education and AL2 says that social consciousness was presented as an addendum to the curriculum.

CL7 contributed that his theological education shaped his understanding of the importance of the connection between the academy and the Black Church in social action. He said that his studies in two different graduate programs included “fieldwork” outside of studying traditional curriculum that was “European male” centered. The work outside of the curriculum was at times formally required through work in the church and at times characterized by personal inquiry.

All of the participants say that they entered theological study with a sense of the social responsibility of the Black Church. This is based upon experiences in church settings. “I grew up Black Baptist. What people classify as social action is just a part of what we understood it meant to be Christian,” CL3 said. In addition, “We mastered traditional curriculum to show we were capable, with an alternative sense of self and doing what was required to transform the community,” AL2 said.

### **Thoughts on theologically-based education curriculum**

This section synthesizes the subject’s recommendations for theologically based education curriculum. The participants’ perspective is based upon their experience as graduate students in theologically based institutions and as academic and church practitioners. These considerations are the result of the exposure to subject matter that the participants think that they should have had as students and as a result of what they think will make persons successful in their vocation.

All of those involved in the study say that social justice should be included in the curriculum as integral part, not as an elective. “For me, it would a theology, number one, of justice. What does God say about justice? What does God say about systems that oppress? What

does God say about systems of injustice? What does God say about empire? A theology, again, of poverty, and what kinds of things can we do so that we treat poverty as God wants us to?”

CL1 said. CL1 and CL3 say that a proper understanding of a theology of justice will help academicians and practitioners alike to respond and approach social issues effectively. CL6 takes it a step further to say that not only should seminary curriculum social issues, but the institutions should be directly involved in actions to address such issues.

The participants all agreed that theologically based institutions can serve the church by becoming more involved in church and community. CL2 suggests that academic administrators should “walk among the people and really see what’s going on in order to work with the church, in order to move forward.” In this way the academy, the church, and the community can instruct one another on best practices to propagate positive social change. “I think that one of the greatest needs for a young preacher is to understand where you are, and who’s around you. If you don’t understand that, the result is these bastions of wonderful self-fulfilling emotional experiences that have no impact of the communities around them,” CL5 said.

Besides the theological approach to studies, the participants say that community organizing, public policy, and financial management are critical for seminary studies. Community organizing involves discovering what other religious and non-religious organizations are working and partnering with those that are compatible, according to CL7. CL1 and AL1 say that learning to work with policymakers at all levels of government is important to successful community action. CL1 relays his experiences with trying to have city ordinances enacted but did not have the knowledge of policy or how the political structures operate. He contends that he should have been exposed to this subject matter in his theological graduate studies. CL4, CL6, and CL7 all agree that both personal and corporate financial management

should be included in theologically based curriculum. “Seminarians are being turned out into churches and on the community and they don’t have a sense of management. They can preach. They can visit a hospital. But if you can’t put together a budget and do forecasts...if you don’t know what an audit will do and won’t do you could end up in big, big, big trouble,” CL7 said.

Additionally, CL4 and AL2 propose that theologically based institutions should work to make studies more accessible to people. Both suggest that many potential students are working in their vocation, with a number of persons in bi-vocational positions. Therefore, it is difficult for those persons to dedicate themselves full time studies. Besides World Wide Web based curriculum, they suggests arranging class schedules to accommodate the needs of potential students. AL1 says that the church should be willing to provide space for alternative delivery of knowledge. CL4 also contends that the personal cost of earning a graduate degree should be considered because it causes undue strain for ministers.

Lastly, the personal health and wellness of ministers should be included in the curriculum. CL6 and CL7 suggest that a hindrance to vocational work is sometimes the health of ministers. They suggest that a class should be mandatory that stresses the importance of physical, mental, and emotional well being.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explains how the collected data answers to the three research questions mentioned above. The participants connect spirituality to their work while they also perceive the necessity to engage in activities that work to produce social change for subjugated people. The practitioners work at churches that are situated in communities that are characterized by poverty and the affects thereof. The administrators base their academic pursuits on the Church’s situation in the same setting. The subjects’ personal theological graduate experiences range from

schools that were operated by denominations that are traditionally politically conservative, to a so-called liberal institution where the participant still perceived racism, to an institution that is a part of an HBCU. All of those involved in the study say that social justice should be included in the curriculum as an integral part, not as an elective. They delineated between benevolence which seeks to address an immediate human need, to justice which solving the issue of why the need exists.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

### **Introduction**

In this study the researcher examined how Black Church leaders are prepared through formal theologically based higher education to guide churches in partnering with community stakeholders to address social injustices and inequalities. The inquiry explored the readiness of the Black Church to bring to bear concrete solutions from theological ideas in order to substantially address and change social conditions that work against the health and well being of persons and communities that are deprived of rights, privileges, and access to the capital and authority that are necessary for personal and communal actualization. The study explored how

Black Church leaders are formally trained to lead congregation practice what they believe about their Deity to acknowledge, critique, and correct instances of injustice and inequality.

In many instances, the Black Church is figuratively situated in proximity to two entities: the academy (theologically based higher education institutions) and the disenfranchised communities where the churches are normally located. The Black Church is uniquely positioned to act as a connector that will allow all three entities to interact in a manner that will improve social, economic and political conditions for people who are ordinarily excluded. As cited in chapter 1, personal communication with Dr. Forrest Harris revealed that the responsibility of the academy is to educate and train leaders that will work in the Church to think critically and analytically as the Church partners with community stakeholders to affect change. The findings from this study suggest that the alliance between the academy, the Black Church, and the community has the potential to proactively prevent change conditions and prevent events that ignore, degrade, and demean the challenges and issues of poorer people of one segment of society while securing the position and privilege of at the opposite end of the social, economic, and political spectrum.

The review of literature revealed that the inception of the Black Church occurred to address the spiritual needs and social and civil rights for enslaved Africans and their descendents in America. Participants in the study indicated that the necessity for the socially active Black Church has not changed in the nearly 250 years since the end of the legalized human chattel system. Systemic and individual conflict to social, psychological, corporal, and mental health remain for persons who lives are directly and indirectly connected to the Black Church. Poverty and the consequences thereof remain a persistent foe to sound and secure living for a large group of people, especially people of color and women. Poor people seemingly have the least



legislation that is passed in their favor. For example Louisiana law still allows predatory lenders leniency in charging interest rates that are not allowed for traditional banking institutions.<sup>19</sup>

According (Mustard 2001) poor people receive more lengthy prison sentences and go to jail more often. The Center for Disease Control and the United States Department of Agriculture consistently report that poor people suffer with more illness and disease and more often than not lack access to affordable healthy foods. In addition, the recovery from events such as natural and man-made disasters that affect entire cities appears to be disproportionately more difficult for persons who were already operating with limited resources (Hardy 2016).

When Black Church leaders are not prepared to guide church in using its social capital, collective voice, and human potential to address the issues it results in either no attempts in generating social change or impotent efforts that yield little-to-no progress or transformation. CL1 reflected that when crime was rampant and overwhelming in the community where the church worshipped, he felt unprepared to address the various issues that arose. However, he decided to educate himself and seek advice about most effective methods of addressing the issues.

When the leaders are not socially conscious this is usually characterized by church leaders and churches that choose to abandon the social responsibility of the church or by the dictation of counterproductive messages and actions of the church by agents of dominant culture that oppose meaningful change. The latter is usually the consequence of the hegemonic entities identifying and cooperating with certain the leader(s) of the community that are more likely to compromise justice for benevolence that never addresses the cause of the injustice. Though there is no official documentation to attest to it, members of the community recognize when calls for

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<sup>19</sup> Louisiana HB 793 allowed predatory lenders to apply unlimited interest rates, while traditional banking sources are limited to 12%.

compromise will result in the loss of true reform. For example, in a closed meeting of community leaders, one individual tried to convince the group to inform and cooperate with the very entities that were the object of the groups planned demonstrations. His idea was ridiculed and dismissed.

Another hindrance to progress in creating positive social change is division among those who should be working towards the same goals. The result is a lack of trust and cooperation between the church and community stakeholders. This phenomenon can also be witnessed in the lack of meaningful interaction between the academy and the Black Church developing and performing strategies to improve the quality of living for people who lived in marginalized, impoverished communities.

This study endeavored to discover whether and how the academy, the Black Church, and the community inform and support one another in a coalition for social change. Theologically based higher education institutions produce graduates who are innovative, critical thinkers that have the theological foundation, intellectual capacity, and social consciousness to lead local congregations to work with community stakeholders in efforts that yield social change that will improve the quality of life for community residents.

The study was used to answer three questions:

- RQ1: How does the theologically-based training of the local Black Church leader influence the intellectual-spiritual activities of that leader's congregation to produce positive social change in disenfranchised communities?
- RQ2: How does leadership in both the academy and the Black Church affect this interaction?
- RQ3: What are students enrolled in schools of theology taught about the role of the church as an agent for social change?

**How does the theologically-based training of the local Black Church leader influence the intellectual-spiritual activities of that leader's congregation to produce positive social change in disenfranchised communities?**

This study indicated that the theologically based education of church leaders does not necessarily influence whether or not, nor the manner that the leader will guide the local congregation to address social issues. While exposure to social justice themed curriculum may enhance the leader's awareness of the need to direct attention and resources to correct issues, intellectual compulsion appears to be an innate phenomenon. The participants started their studies and work in the church with a predetermined conception of the Black Church's social obligation to its surrounding community. In some instances, the theologically based graduate studies did not include any courses that directly addressed social justice training. The participants in the study displayed an understanding of the social responsibility of the church before entering theologically based graduate school.

This perspective was generated in experiences in the Black Church. Participants testified of hearing messages and witnessing actions that tied what was learned in the church to efforts to change social conditions. CL3 and AL1 explained that in their experiences they learned that the Gospel and social responsibility were inextricably tied together. The participants said that this was demonstrated in personal benevolence and in working for justice.

For some participants the experience may not have been direct, but was witnessed through perceptions of how Civil Rights leaders and church leaders appeared to be one in the same. In another instances, the witnessed social action may not have been an official activity of the church but was enacted by people that were members of the church. CL2 described members of the church acting as leaders in community organizations that pursued the health and well-

being of the community. These examples provided an empirical understanding of socially conscious theology.

This perspective is also the result of lived experiences while operating in the local church setting. It is the result of understanding the community that surrounds the local church where one is assigned to work. In most instances, the churches were located in areas that are characterized by the political impotence and economic regression that makes life difficult for residence of the community. This reality makes the church leader look beyond the liturgy and the sacraments of the church to meeting immediate, base needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and educational tutoring as well as working to cause systemic change that perpetuates conditions that create the aforementioned immediate, base needs.

This perspective is bolstered by consuming additional academic material that is outside of the formal plan of study. This additional reading includes books, articles, and audio-visual recordings in the academic disciplines that include sociology, political science, psychology, education, as well as theology such as *The Maroon Within Us* by Asa Hilliard, *Powernomics* by Claude Andersons, and *Race Matters* by Cornel West. The self assignments also include studying the works of practitioners who provide models of how the church can address social issues. The participants achieved in this area through personal interaction, attending conferences, and through internet access to lectures and sermons.

Theologically based higher education provides graduates with tools to critically think and about ideas and concepts. It exposes students to general concepts that are useful in grounding justice issues in theology. However, the participants revealed that their theologically based higher education experiences did little to develop or enhance an understanding how the academy,

the Black Church, and the community can coalesce and work together to build healthy and safe communities.

**How does leadership in both the academy and the Black Church affect this interaction?**

The ecclesiastic and academic leaders who participated in the study agree that the attitude of the leader is critical to the interaction between the academy and the Black Church. Warnock (2014) suggest that the “difficult work” of “meeting basic human need for personal fulfillment and existential meaning, even while challenging systemic structures of oppression in political economy, religious discourse (confessional and academic), and church polity will require Black and Womanist theologians to be in dialogue with Black pastors. One of the ways to create positive sustainable change in the community is combine the theory of the academy with the praxis of the Church and the community. This is only possible with leaders from the academy, the Church, and the community remain harmonious even through conflict.

Benjamin Mays, who was a twentieth century socially conscious higher education administrator that based his philosophy of social responsibility on his Christian theological foundation, is the embodiment of such an assertion. Mays used his position and his faith to encourage persons who were connected the higher education institution where he worked to use their tangible and intangible resources to work for justice and equality. More specifically, he taught students that social responsibility is irreversibly intertwined to the privileges associated with higher education. As stated in chapter 3, he used weekly university-wide convocations and personal conversations with students to instill his ideals.

The social consciousness (or the lack thereof) of persons in leadership positions in both the academy and the Black Church will in most cases determine how the two entities interact in efforts to generate significant change in attitudes, behavior, and outcomes related to the quality

of life for persons living in impoverished communities. As stated earlier, the Black church is uniquely positioned geographically and sociologically to connect the academy, the Black Church, and the community together for meaningful transformation.

The leadership in both the academy and the Black Church can and should determine the knowledge that is disseminated in both institutions. The philosophical inclination of the leader of the theologically based higher education institutions is instrumental in both curriculum and pedagogy. Astin and Astin (2000) contend that the vision of the higher education leader can determine the direction and the desired outcomes of the institution. The same is true for many Black Church settings, where the leader is required to cast the vision for the faith community. In most instances, when the academy/Black Church/Community alliance is paramount for the leader it will become a priority for the institution. Ultimately, the programs of study in the institutions will reflect the vision. In theologically based higher education institutions the curriculum will address justice and community issues. In the Black Church Christian Education events, Sunday School, and Bible Study curriculum will consists of the same.

**What are students enrolled in schools of theology taught about the role of the church as an agent for social change?**

Governing bodies and senior leadership ordinarily determine the mission and object of an institution. The mission and object of the institution is ordinarily a reflection of the theological, social, and political perspectives of the governing bodies and senior leadership. Programs of study are ordinarily a result of the theological, social, and political considerations. The study revealed that some institutions make addressing social issues a focus of course offerings or while others do not address issues at all.

The academic administrators and several leaders in local churches disclosed that their course work included interpretations of Holy Scriptures that included the social responsibility to pursue both benevolence and justice connected to the faith. These programs of study included both lecture and field experience opportunities for students. The institutions stressed the church's responsibility to fulfill both the spiritual and temporal needs of the people in the community where the church is situated. Courses are offered to train leaders to understanding the church's function in helping communities manage social issues such as sex and sexuality, especially as it relates to the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), substance abuse, and the recent uncovering of racial tensions because of violence against Black people. Even these institutions are struggling to make social justice and inclusiveness of all people central to theological instruction.

Other respondents disclosed that their course of study included no reference to social justice or social action. Any reference to social issues was relegated to negative views divorce, abortion, and homosexuality. These institutions were not concerned with training church leaders that are assigned to serve in urban settings. One participant said that the president of the institution unashamedly admitted that the work of the church in an urban context from a Black theological perspective would not be a part of his studies. The respondent remained at the institution because of proximity to his place of vocation, but subsidizes the education with additional informational that addressed his needs.

The theological, social, and political worldviews of the leadership will determine what is taught at theologically based higher education institutions. It is problematic when the only institution that is expedient for the church leader to attend does not include studies that will prepare the leader to address the social issues that affect the community where they work. That

church leader is forced to seek outside resources in order to be prepared fulfill their inclinations of how the church should respond to individual and systemic social issues.

### **Summary**

Theologically based higher education institutions, the Black Church, and the community should form an alliance that will allow the three entities to inform and support one another in the reformation of issues that plague impoverished communities. The study revealed that academic and church leaders entered their personal theological graduate studies with a predisposition of the church's responsibility to improve lifestyles and living conditions for people who live in the vicinity of the church. It is possible to create positive, sustainable change in the community when academic leaders and leaders in the Black Church agree to continually work to combine the theory of the academy with the praxis of the Church and the community. The inclusion of social justice in the curriculum depends upon the theological, social, and political leanings of the governing body and individuals of the particular institution. CL1 was told by the president of the institution that he would not be exposed to any social justice in his studies and CL3 said that he chose a particular institution because members of the faculty was known for their research in social justice. Perhaps the first consideration to creating the bond between the academy, the Black Church, and the community is prepare theologically based graduate students by teaching them scholarship that combines theology, justice, sociology, public policy, as well as management and organization.

### **Implications for practice**

The potential for significant impact for the theologically based higher education institutions, the Black Church, and the community coalition is great. The combination of these three entities will create a formidable force to work against poverty, its consequences, and the



systems that sustain it. The academy, the church, and the community will all benefit from the alliance. The students and personnel of the academy will gain pragmatic experience to match their scholarship. The church will benefit from the scholastic capital of the academy and gain well-rounded ministers that understand both the theoretical and the pragmatic dimensions of the work of the church. The community will profit from the relationship when the events and programs are enacted that will strengthen relationships, improve living conditions, and open access to opportunities.

The students in the academy will benefit from engaging these issues with church and community leaders to learn community organizing, public policy to insure that ordinances and codes are met, as well as financial management in insuring that funding is applied properly to projects. For example, one of the legitimate critiques is that it has too often focused on afterlife considerations while ignoring present material needs. The practice of prophetic pragmatism that critiques disparities in poor communities and offers solutions that work includes the development and operation community gardens in order to shrink food deserts or computer literacy programs to close the digital divide for persons who live in marginalized communities. This will allow students to not only understand theological foundations for social equality, but also work with people to garner funds and resources, enlist personnel to teach the proper skills for success, and manage budgets properly.

The church will grow intellectually from the research on theology and justice that is generated in theologically based higher education institutions. For example, theologically based knowledge that is generated in the academy on environmental justice will be shared with congregations through workshops and extended courses so that it can be combined with the knowledge of public policy to end prevent the unjust placement of waste fields in poor

communities. Whereas persons in the community may have been socially conditioned to believe that they were defenseless against such encroachments, now prophetic pragmatism is realized in the way that communities gain two potent allies with which they can now share knowledge, human capital, and resources in order to fight against unjust policies, gentrification, police brutality, and drug trafficking in neighborhoods.

While it is important to include those persons who have a vested interest in the wellbeing of a given community in the work of transforming the community, the most critical bond in this coalition is the relationship between the academy and the Black Church. This bond is critical so that tangible and intangible resources can be rendered for any community oriented program or project. Tangible resources may include supplies, equipment and human beings to accomplish specific task. Intangible resources may include knowledge of the bureaucracy of government agencies and contacts with expertise in particular areas. The following are recommended practices that will lead to stronger collaborations between the academy, the Black Church, and the community.

**Table 3**

Suggested subjects to be included in theologically based graduate school curriculum and the reason.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Public Administration	Students can learn non-profit organization governance such as 501c3 management
Public Policy	Students can learn how to craft, submit, track, and correct policies that affect the community such as community policing
Business Administration	Students can gain theoretical and practical tools for community economic development such as business incubator development and operation
Sociology	Students can learn how communities are structured and how they function in terms

	understanding important history, spaces, and people
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Theologically based degrees should become interdisciplinary or dually aligned with other academic disciplines. Exposure to academic disciplines outside of theology is critical to assisting theologically based graduates to be successful in correcting or eliminate issues that plague impoverished communities. Among the subject matter that should be studied are public administration, public policy, sociology, and business administration. This list is not exhaustive, but at least proficiency in these subjects allow potential graduates to garner intellectual tools that will allow them to intelligently consider how to best organize people, funds, and resources to meet personal and family needs, as well as address systemic, social issues such as emergency housing for a family or gentrification that makes living in an particular area too expensive for poor people who have traditionally occupied the spaces.

Adding the faculty, facilities, and resources to offer the additional academic disciplines to the curriculum will not be feasible for some institutions. In those instances, theologically based institutions of higher education are encouraged to partner with other higher education institutions that offer such courses of study so that students might earn a dual degree or merely take courses. For example, the theologically based institutions can partner with another institution in the vicinity to allow students to take courses or earn a dual degree in theology and urban studies.

In addition, theologically based higher education curriculum should require students to complete a residency program in a church or community oriented organization that is in a social setting that is similar to where they would eventually work. While there are some theologically-based graduate programs that require field experiences, what is suggested here is a residency programs that specifically focuses on the church's work in the community. This will force the

student to apply theological considerations to the lived experiences of people to produce positive change. The student would benefit from the practical experience through working in the church or community-based organization setting. This arrangement would also allow the student to gain exposure and experience in discerning the demographics, the culture, and the various relationships of the community. In larger church settings the student will experience working in different areas and facets of the church. In a smaller church, the student is able to provide intellect, innovation, and physical presence in a setting that has limited resources. The church benefits because the arrangement allows the church to add another member to the staff that can assist in planning and implementation of community oriented programs. The church can also gain access to the most relevant scholarship that pertains to the work of the church.

Students would be required to complete the residency program in three phases at certain point in their studies. In the first phase the student is required to learn ethnographic research methodology in order to embed themselves with a church or organization. In the second phase the student engages the work and the study for a prescribed period. Lastly, the student is required to report their findings. In this way the student receives practical experience and has the opportunity to add to the knowledge base in the academy/Black Church/community paradigm.

The academy and the Black Church should share one another's space in order to inform and support one another. The academy can open its doors to members of the Black Church who are not seminary students in order to enhance the congregant's knowledge of theology and community and how to apply the knowledge to the work with the community. Congregants and leaders of the church can participate in a two-day conference on the seminary campus that is lead by seminary faculty and staff that addresses subjects such as the Black Church and Hip Hop, or

Teaching Financial Literacy in Sunday School. CL6 said that the church he served and a nearby theologically based institution held such a partnership.

The same can also occur through the Black Church inviting representatives of the academy to offer workshops at the church. Faculty and staff of theologically based higher education institutions can embed themselves with a congregation for a prescribed period in order to teach courses and learn of the work that is happening in the local church. The Black Church is also a prime source to collect data for a variety of research projects that can be used in the work of the pursuit of justice.

Lastly, both the academy and the Black Church should partner with the community stakeholders to practice prophetic pragmatism. That is, the entities should employ their faith in ways that move beyond concepts to actions that will work in improving access to a better quality of living through personal contact and challenging governing bodies. Students and parishioners should practice the learned theories and principles to produce positive change for the community. Rather than mere assertions, the students and the congregants should work with members of the community to do what is necessary for the greater good of the community such as providing financial literacy, hosting a weekly market for the sale of fresh foods and crafts, operating afterschool and summer educational programs for children, assisting with reentry programs for persons who finish prison terms.

### **Recommendations for further study**

This study examined how the theological education of Black Church leaders helps the church to work with members of the community to respond social conditions deprived them of the rights, privileges, and access to the capital and authority that are necessary for personal and communal actualization. The participants in the study indicated that theological studies did not

persuade their understanding of the need of a theological perspective that includes justice. However, the subjects agreed that theologically based higher education is an asset to their vocation. CL5 admitted that while his seminary experience did not address the social setting of his work, he did gain a better understanding of scripture and how to navigate the internal structures of the church.

Participants in the study included persons who have graduate degrees from theologically based higher education institutions and work in the local Black Church or academic setting. The age and amount of experience in the church and the academy varied, but all of the participants were male. A recommendation for future consideration is to include female participants. Female seminary graduates who work in the local church and academia were invited to be a part of the study, but none responded.

The study focused on responding to the issues that people face who live in impoverished communities. Future considerations should include the academy and Black Church work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer communities; as well as women's issues. Attention to these facets of society and the preparation of the academy that leads to the Church's response would enhance perceptions of the importance of both the academy and the Church's social responsibilities.

Poverty was generally addressed in this study. Future inquiries should be more specific in nature to determine how the training combined with lived experiences of Black Church leaders determine the focus of the social action work of the church. The study should specifically examine how CL4's experience as a police officer, along with his theological studies informs the church's activities around policing in impoverished communities. For example, the study should seek to discover how the church reacts to events where there is police officer involved shootings

and mere police and civilian interaction. Another example is how the church works with police to alleviate violence in the community.

Lastly, this study was limited the scope of the Black Church to Christianity. Not only is the Black Christianity not monolithic in its theology and world view but the Black religious experience is even more diverse. Future research should include the connection to the community of other faith traditions practiced by African Americans. Alexander and Finley (2006) point out that African Americans have adopted and practice a variety of faiths including, but not limited to Buddhist, Muslims, Christians, Hebrews, Spiritualists, Afrocentrists, and Humanists. All of these faith traditions maintain connection to communities and seek to improve the well being of people who struggle with poverty and its consequences.

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#### **APPENDIX A: MISSION STATEMENTS FROM SELECT THEOLOGICALLY-BASED INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

American Baptist College  
<http://www.abcnash.edu/about/>

The mission of ABC is educating, graduating, and preparing a predominantly African-American student population for Christian leadership, service, and social justice in the world. The school offers a quality educational program with a liberal arts emphasis, equipping diverse students intellectually, spiritually, socially, and theologically.

Christian Theological Seminary

<http://www.cts.edu/about-cts/history-mission.aspx>

The mission of Christian Theological Seminary is to form disciples of Jesus Christ for church and community leadership to serve God's transforming of the world.

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School

<http://www.crcds.edu/about-crcds/crcds-mission/>

Rooted in the biblical mandate for justice and mercy, CRCDS prepares women and men for ministry in the local church and beyond that is learned, pastoral and prophetic. We equip leaders for transforming ministry that speaks truth to power and stands among "the least of these." We engage the theological disciplines in an ecumenical Christian community of teaching, learning and worship.

Howard University School of Divinity

[http://divinity.howard.edu/2\\_history\\_mission\\_vission.shtml](http://divinity.howard.edu/2_history_mission_vission.shtml)

Howard University School of Divinity, a graduate theological and professional school, educates and forms academic and religious leaders to serve the Church and society, and to celebrate the religious and cultural heritage of African-Americans, the African Diaspora, and Africa.

Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University

[https://www.vuu.edu/samuel\\_dewitt\\_proctor\\_school\\_of\\_theology/about\\_stvu.aspx](https://www.vuu.edu/samuel_dewitt_proctor_school_of_theology/about_stvu.aspx)

The STVU is a historically African American institution that, in with the church and community, endeavors to equip students for service with diverse social contexts through a curriculum that emphasizes academic excellence, spiritual formation, and faithful service in the church and world.

Union Theological Seminary

<https://utsnyc.edu/about/mission-vision/>

Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York is a seminary and a graduate school of theology established in 1836 by founders “deeply impressed by the claims of the world upon the church.” Union prepares women and men for committed lives of service to the church, academy, and society. A Union education develops practices of mind and body that foster intellectual and academic excellence, social justice, and compassionate wisdom. Grounded in the Christian tradition and responsive to the needs of God’s creation, Union’s graduates make a difference wherever they serve.

## **APPENDIX B : PROGRAM FROM LOCAL ANNUAL COMMUNITY SYMPOSIUM**

### **BLACK LIVES MATTER 2016**



**July 11-15, 2016 5:30pm-8:00pm**

Community Clean-Up Saturday July 9, 2016 8am – 1pm

- ❖ Organize Teams -Assign Leaders
- ❖ Divide Neighborhood Into Zones

## **Adults**

Crime Prevention – **Monday 7/11** Sgt. Riley Harbor BRPD

- Number Murders in 2015 and 2016 – Sketches
- Crime Statistics by Zones and Neighborhoods
- Interaction with Law Enforcement
- Voter Registration Drive
- Adjudicated Property Ownership – *Councilwoman Tara Wicker, Attorney Winston Riddick and Sister Judith*

Neighborhoods – **Tuesday 7/12** Attorney Susan Lawson SU Law Center, Mrs. Symil J. LeDoux

- Baton Rouge General Mid-City Update
- Writing of Last Will and Testament
- Voter Registration Drive

Health Care - **Wednesday 7/13** Tanesha Craig Health & Fitness Expert, Dr. Leah Cullins

- Healthy Diet – Chef Gabby
- Exercise – Tanesha Craig 7/13
- AIDS – Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Drug Addiction
- Mental Health
- Voter Registration Drive

Social Justice Organizations – **Thursday 7/14** Education

- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), National Urban League
- Voter Registration Drive

Worship – **Friday 7/17**

- Pastor Errol K. Domingue – Proclaimer of The Word

## **Teens & Young Adults**

Safety & Crime - **Monday July 11** Sgt. Riley Harbor BRPD

- Number of Murders in 2015 and 2016 – Sketches
- Crime Statistics by Zones and Neighborhoods
- Interaction with Law Enforcement

Life Choices **Tuesday July 12** Attorney Robin Campbell, Ms. Reedy Glasper, Mr. Aaron League, Mr. Greg Merriweather, (Facilitator-Antonio Delany)

- Panel Discussion

Health Care - **Wednesday July 13** Ms. Tanesha Craig, Chef Gabby

- Exercise: Physical Health
- Healthy Diets

History – **Thursday July 14** Dr. Okoye Ahmose, Prof. Dr. Leah Cullins

- Race, Ethnicity
- AIDS/HIV, Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Worship – **Friday July 15**

- Spoken Word – Poetry

### **Youth**

- Crime – Decisions
  - Peer Pressure
  - Teenagers – Males & Females (Break Out Sessions)
  - Choices – Former Residents of Neighborhood
  - College Preparation (Southern University Student Affairs)
  - Employment Choices
  - Organizations to Join – Volunteers
  - Education Preparation
  - Scholarships – Programs – Academic, Arts, Bowling, Tennis Golf
- Dr. Okoye Ahmose, Ph.D., Prof. Terrell Johnson, Attorney Robin Campbell, Tanesha Craig, Chantel Crockett

Children

- LSU/SU Agricultural Centers
- Grade Preparation
- DARE Program Baton Rouge Constables Office
- Fire Department – Fire Simulator
- Baton Rouge Clerk of Court – Photo ID's
- East Baton Rouge Parish Library (Book Give-Aways)

## **APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

**From:** Institutional R Board

**Sent:** Tuesday, June 21, 2016 8:58:35 AM

**To:** Errol K Domingue

**Cc:** Roland W Mitchell

**Subject:** IRB Application

Hi,

The IRB chair reviewed your application, The Application of Prophetic Pragmatism: The Intersectionality of the Theologically-based Education of the Black Church Leader, the Black Church, the Community and Social Action, and determined IRB approval for this specific application (IRB# E9961) is not needed. There is no manipulation of, nor intervention with, human subjects. Should you subsequently devise a project which does involve the use of human subjects, then IRB review and approval will be needed.  
Elizabeth

**Elizabeth Cadarette**

IRB Coordinator

Office of Research and Economic Development

Louisiana State University

130 David Boyd Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803

office 225-578-8692 | fax 225-578-5983

[ecantol1@lsu.edu](mailto:ecantol1@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu](http://lsu.edu) | [www.research.lsu.edu](http://www.research.lsu.edu)

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## **APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Date

Study Title: The Application of Prophetic Pragmatism: The intersection of the theologically-based education of Black Church leaders, the Black Church, the community, and social action

Dear \_\_\_\_,

My name is Errol Domingue and I am doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the Louisiana State University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Higher Education Administration, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying how the academy (specifically theologically-based higher education), the Black Church, and typically oppressed communities can act as a coalition that will produce positive social change. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a face-to-face or telephone interview with me. In particular, you will be asked questions about your philosophy of how church leaders should be educated in theologically-based institutions of higher education and about church and community relations. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last 45 minutes to an hour.

I will record all answers on a digital tape recorder as well as take handwritten or electronic notes. The recording device will be stored in a locked cabinet with access limited to the researcher. In addition, the data will be stored on a password-protected computer. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. I will also ask you to participate in a concluding interview in order to clarify accuracy the data collected. In addition, I may ask to examine artifacts such as meeting minutes, brochures, and printed programs. You will be provided a copy of the transcript to insure accuracy. Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the community/society in general will benefit.

Participation is confidential. However the results of the study will be published in the dissertation and may be published or presented at professional meetings. But your identity will not be revealed.

Contact me with questions or concerns at 225-324-0942 or edomin5@tigers.lsu.edu; or my faculty advisor, Dr. Roland Mitchell ([rwmitch@lsu.edu](mailto:rwmitch@lsu.edu) or 225-578-2156) if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), or [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb).

Thank you for your consideration. If you agree to participate, please contact me via email at the above mentioned address and sign and return the attached form to me via email or mail to 1069 North 38<sup>th</sup> Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802.

Sincerely,

Errol Domingue



## **APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR A NON-CLINICAL STUDY**

**Study Title:** The Application of Prophetic Pragmatism: The intersection of the theologically-based education of Black Church leaders, the Black Church, the community, and social action

**Performance Site:** Place to be determined by participants and telephone interview

**Investigators:** The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

- Errol K. Domingue 225-324-0942
- Dr. Roland Mitchell 225-578-2156

**Purpose of the Study:** This study will address how the academy (specifically theologically-based higher education), the Black Church, and typically oppressed communities can act as a coalition that will produce positive social change.

**Subject Inclusion:** Individuals between who have earned a degree from a theologically based institution of higher education and serve in a vocational leadership position the Black Church, and/or a seminary or divinity school . To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Number of subjects:** 9

**Study Procedures:** The study will be conducted in through either face-to-face or telephone interviews.

**Benefits:** The study may yield valuable information about how the academy, Black Church, and the community can work together to produce social change.

**Risks:** The only study risk is the inadvertent release of sensitive information concerning identity. However, every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access and on a password-protected computer.

**Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

**Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**Signatures:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form. Subject

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Errol Domingue

Participant:

## Position of Participant:

**Purpose of Study:** This project is seeks to discover the link between what local church leaders learn in theologically-based institutions and social action in the church where they serve. The theory is that socially conscious church leaders will lead congregations to be socially active in the community where they exist. In addition, the study seeks to learn how the curriculum in graduate school assisted (or not) in developing the social action philosophy.

## Personal

1. How long have you worked in the local church? Academic leadership?
2. Describe the conditions socio-economic/political conditions of the community where the church is located.
3. Do you think that the church should be involved in social activism? Why/Why not?
4. Describe the current social action activities of which the church is involved.
5. Were these social action activities in place before your tenure began?
6. What new social action activities did you encourage?

What are students enrolled in schools of theology taught about the role of the church as an agent for social change?

7. To what degree should theologically based institutions of higher education and the church partner for social change?
8. How does leadership in both the academy and the Black Church affect this interaction?
9. Were/are there any specific courses that encourage potential leaders to guide the church in working for social change?
10. What can theologically-based institutions include in their curriculum to encourage your philosophy of church/community relations?

How does the theologically-based training of the local Black Church leader influence the intellectual-spiritual activities of that leader's congregation to produce positive social change in disenfranchised communities?

11. What philosophies and skills did you bring to your position that informs the work for social change?
12. Who are some of the models (minister/church) that you use as models for social activity?
13. Do you have graduate degree related to your work? What institution?
14. Tell me about the graduate school experience. How did it benefit (or not) your work?
15. Did the philosophy of the institution concerning church/community relations match your personal philosophy of church/community interaction for social change?
16. What are the differences? What is your philosophy?
17. How did you reconcile the differences and maintain your philosophy?
18. Do you have any advice for me as I continue conducting these interviews?

## **VITA**

**Errol Domingue**  
**P.O. Box 65208**  
**Baton Rouge, LA 70896**  
[ekd11@yahoo.com](mailto:ekd11@yahoo.com)

## **EDUCATION**

Ph.D. Education Leadership

Louisiana State University  
Ph.D. Candidate

Master of Liberal Arts	Louisiana State University May, 2011
Master of Divinity	New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary December, 2007
Bachelor of Arts	Southern University-Baton Rouge July, 1989
Fellowships	Harvard University Summer Leadership Institute July, 2008

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Licensed to Preach	New St. John Baptist Church (May 1995) Baton Rouge, LA
Ordained to Gospel Ministry	New St. John Baptist Church (June 1998) Baton Rouge, LA
Senior Pastor	Elm Grove Baptist Church (2000 – Present) New Pilgrim Baptist Church (2001-Present)
Assistant Pastor	Elm Grove Baptist Church (1998-2000)
Youth Minister	New St. John Baptist Church (1995-1998)

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Master's Thesis Louisiana State University	“Social Policy, Social Action, and The Black Church: A Praxis for Social Vision” May, 2007
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## **SELECTED LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS**

Fourth District Baptist Association Summer Biblical Institute	Baton Rouge, LA
St. Alma Baptist Church Biblical Institute	Lakeland, LA

New Guide Baptist Church  
Bible School

Baton Rouge, LA

Louisiana State University  
African American Studies Class

Baton Rouge, LA

New Gideon Baptist Church  
Leadership Institute

Baton Rouge, LA