FEEDING THE 5,000

A CASE STUDY

SMALL CHURCHES DELIVERING OUTSIZED COMMUNITY IMPACT

Prepared by Leadership Education at Duke Divinity

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

BY REV. DR. SIDNEY S. WILLIAMS, JR.
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Faith leaders play a crucial role in promoting social justice and creating positive social impact within their communities, despite significant resource constraints. They draw inspiration from their religious beliefs and faith capital, which guide their actions and advocacy for equality, fairness and human rights for all people.

This case study examines the work of faith-inspired leaders at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Morristown, New Jersey, and the Spring Street Community Development Corporation (CDC). The study outlines the adaptive reuse of the church kitchen and fellowship hall, and highlights the challenges, strategies and benefits associated with such projects.

Bethel is a congregation with less than 40 active members and located in a wealthy suburban community — with substantial pockets of poverty. Bethel's commitment to social impact has been instrumental in transforming the lives of individuals, as well as addressing systemic issues within the community since 1843. In 2022, Leadership Education at Duke Divinity commissioned this case study to further explore our work and its impact.

SOCIAL IMPACT OF BETHEL AND SPRING STREET CDC

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Through the initiatives of the church and the CDC, numerous community members gained opportunities for intellectual capital development in the form of sharing their innovative ideas, problem-solving abilities, and business acumen. Many of the volunteers and interns were able to secure full-time employment, resulting in a reduction in poverty levels and increased financial stability.

RACIAL EQUITY

Promoting racial equity and building social capital helped bridge divides within the community while advancing racial understanding and collaboration. This effort fostered an environment of respect and unity, leading to increased capacity and cooperation in addressing common challenges.

EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

The educational programs and scholarships offered in these initiatives were a crucial driver of human capital development. Disadvantaged students experienced improved academic performance and higher graduation rates. Many of them went on to pursue higher education or secured better job prospects.

METHODOLOGY

David E. Kresta, an urban studies expert, gathered detailed information through a variety of sources, including interviews, observations, documents and archival records. This wealth of qualitative data enabled him to construct a holistic picture of Bethel and to explore the interplay of various factors that contribute to the observed outcomes or behaviors.

HOW TO USE THIS CASE STUDY

This case study is particularly useful when studying adaptive reuse of religious property and complex phenomena that cannot be easily manipulated or controlled in various ministry contexts. For example: through systematic analysis and interpretation, this study highlights how Bethel went about repurposing its existing building and structures for a different use than their original intended purpose.

When analyzing this case, the FISHing Differently framework can generate new hypotheses, challenge existing theologies or provide nuanced explanations for observed phenomena. Here are some general guidelines and questions to keep in mind as you read:

1. Identify the main issues or problems presented in the case. Take notes and highlight important details. What are you trying to learn or investigate?
2. Draw conclusions about the case. Identify the main findings, lessons learned and recommendations.
3. Share the case study with others. Encourage discussion and engagement to gain different perspectives and insights.

FEEDING THE 5,000: SMALL CHURCHES DELIVERING OUTSIZED COMMUNITY IMPACT

CASE STUDY OF BETHEL CHURCH OF MORRISTOWN

By David E. Kresta, Ph.D.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bethel Church of Morristown, New Jersey, is a small, relatively under-resourced church with outsized community impact. The church and its community outreach arm, Spring Street Community Development Corporation (CDC), have established themselves as community anchor institutions, demolishing the perceived separation between church and community. The case study shows how even small churches can play a role in holistic community flourishing that includes, but is not limited to, the "spiritual." In 2022, 42,000 families received groceries, more than 18,000 meals were served and more than 1,000 backpacks and other school supplies were provided to students. Refusing to be limited by church resources, Pastor Sidney Williams has elevated the work of the church to building multiple forms of capital — Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human — "FISHing Differently" for the common good.

While each church and community are unique, the case study asks: "What can churches, particularly those that are small and underfunded, learn from the Bethel experience?" From the study's conclusion, we read:

> Leaders should develop as much integration as possible between the work of the church and the work of the community, strengthening bonds and bridges through collective action for the common good. In a church where mission and success are defined in terms of the community's mission and success, impact will not be limited by traditional church resources. Leadership must hold the congregation accountable to the church's mission, at times nurturing, teaching or prodding, but always leading by example. It is vital to listen to and continually assess the community for hopes and dreams, hidden needs and untapped assets. As leaders and laity spend time developing relationships within the larger community, churches will see Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human capital growing both inside and outside of their church.

The case study highlights the power of bridges connecting organizations and individuals across the ideological, denominational, political and economic spectrum, foreshadowing Dr. King's "beloved community" with relationship and belonging where previously there was isolation and rugged individualism.

INTRODUCTION

"Small but mighty," "the little engine that could," "punching well above its weight": these are apt descriptions of Bethel Church of Morristown, New Jersey, and its community outreach arm, Spring Street Community Development Corporation (CDC). In the fellowship hall of the church, you'll see a commercial kitchen with supplies for food distribution and daily meals for thousands of families across Morris County. In the neighboring CDC headquarters, you'll find a walk-in freezer, more food and rooms with computers and local university student-tutors helping fifth graders work toward their college goals. Take a walk down Bishop Nazery Way to the nearby public parking lot on any Thursday morning and you will see a hive of activity during rain, shine or bitter cold. Volunteers from across the county will be busy setting up tables and tents with tons of food — actual tons — and hundreds of people lined up on foot and in cars for the CDC's weekly Table of Hope food distribution. If you are lucky enough to be there on the Friday before Thanksgiving, the expansive parking lot at the County College of Morris will be transformed before your eyes as hundreds of volunteers, law enforcement officers, politicians and media personnel participate in a special food distribution, with more than 600 families receiving turkeys and food for a complete Thanksgiving meal.

Getting to this place of tremendous community impact, especially for a small church with limited resources, has literally meant going through the flood and the storm. It has required partnering with people and organizations across the ideological, denominational, political and economic spectrum, rallying them around the substantial community needs that were hidden in plain sight. It has meant walking a 180-year-old church through changes that were not embraced by all.

Are we witnessing a modern "loaves and fish" event in Morristown, New Jersey? Recall that in the well-known biblical story, the disciples wanted to send the crowds away, but Jesus said, "***You*** feed them" (Luke 9:13 MSG, emphasis added). As a result, with nowhere near enough resources, thousands were fed. The example of Bethel Church illustrates how multiplying resources and creating outsized impact starts by taking seriously the responsibility that God has given us for the well-being of our communities. It requires trusting the Creator, organizing the resources that may already be present and asking unabashedly for all to participate in providing and enjoying the meal.

Below we'll trace the story of Bethel Church and its impact in Morris County, looking at the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly.[1] Churches of all sizes, but particularly those that are small and under-resourced,[2] will find the challenges encountered familiar — and will hopefully be inspired to serve their communities in ways that are currently beyond them. After providing historical and situational context, we will discuss the FISHing Differently[3] framework that undergirds this work as well as challenges and opportunities. We'll conclude with a summary of lessons and considerations for pastors as we follow God, together, toward thriving and flourishing communities.

[1] Findings are based on the author's 36 interviews with past and present church members, Spring Street CDC board members and volunteers, Oikos Institute and Crossing Capital Group staff, community stakeholders and partners and several Bethel guest speakers. The researcher/author also spent a total of eight days during two site visits doing field research in Morristown and the surrounding communities.

[2] According to the latest National Congregations Study (2018-2019), the median congregation has 70 regular participants and an annual budget of $100,000 (pre-COVID). Congregational size and budget have declined consistently since the first study in 1998, a trend which is expected to continue.

[3] FISHing Differently™ is a trademark of Crossing Capital Group.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

George Washington famously headquartered the Continental Army in Morristown during the winter of 1776-1777. The historical significance of this place includes the paradox that slavery existed in New Jersey, with both pro-slavery and anti-slavery movements present. Bethel's first pastor, Bishop Willis Nazery, was born into slavery in 1803. After serving as a pastor for several congregations from 1845 to 1852, he was ordained a bishop and sent to Canada. He, along with many other Bethel pastors, was active in the Underground Railroad. Walking through the local cemetery, Pastor Sidney Williams explains that those considered to be "white" got the high ground even in death, with those labeled as "Black" buried out of sight in a depression, often in unmarked graves. In fact, Bethel's founder, Frances Freeman Ray, was buried there without a tombstone until 2018. The placement of Bethel's building within a flood zone in 1874, where it still resides, was therefore no historical accident, with the white churches comfortably ensconced on hills looking over the village.

Pastor Sidney, his wife Teresa and their four children moved to Morristown in December 2010 after an 18-month stint as missionaries in Cape Town, South Africa, where they focused on bridging cultural divides. Bethel congregants were in collective shock when the family arrived, having experienced losses of several pastors, including the sudden death of their previous pastor Alphonso Sherald. Many members had already moved away due to corporate downsizing and the eventual closing of a nearby AT&T facility. The demographics of the area were changing rapidly, as well. For example, in the year 2000, Morristown was 17% African American, but today sits around 7%. The shocks continued, as Sidney approached the pastorate in an unconventional manner. Some members complained, "You spend more time getting to know the community than getting to know us" — a fair critique, according to Sidney.

The defining shock in the recent history of Bethel hit during Hurricane Irene in late August of 2011, eight months after the Williamses' arrival. The lower level of the church flooded, causing a complete and utter loss of what had been the kitchen and fellowship hall. Because of overlooked administrative tasks and limited financial resources during the previous years, the church had no flood insurance. It was clear that the congregation had nowhere near enough resources to cover the $1.5 million bill.

Rather than spending time in the comfortable pastor's study during his first eight months, Sidney had been building relationships within the community, realizing even before the flood that the church's resources were not sufficient to sustain itself, let alone expand its impact. When a local businessman heard about the flood at the church, he immediately offered to cover the costs of remediation and rebuild, with some important stipulations. He agreed to fund the work because of Sidney's desire to serve the community, revamping the space to include a commercial kitchen and other community-serving purposes. Bethel's trajectory as a community-serving church was thus reinforced and accelerated. About two years after the devastating flood, the Table of Hope was born, as Bethel used their new commercial kitchen and rebuilt space to start a community meal service five days a week. The Spring Street Community Development Corporation, led by First Lady Teresa, was incorporated in September of 2011. The CDC's initial program, SOAR, was an academic enrichment program, entirely funded by local business owners, foundations and partnerships with mission-aligned nonprofit organizations.

At first, some Bethel members were skeptical of the local businessman's offer to cover the post-flood costs, fearing the loss of control of "their" fellowship hall (a topic we'll explore in greater depth below). There was skepticism in the community, as well: many liked to think of Morris County as an affluent, conservative area with few people in need. However, contrary to this popular opinion, poverty was hidden in plain sight. Even today, 2021 citywide statistics that show a 10% poverty rate and a $112,000 median household income hide the fact that census tracts right around Bethel have poverty rates of 30% and median incomes of only $30,000. People came to the Table of Hope not only for food, but to connect, to be seen and to be listened to. Volunteers from the church — and, increasingly, from the community — came for the same reasons, forming community and belonging where previously there was isolation and rugged individualism. Food was distributed at various sites, with the number of families in attendance growing from hundreds to thousands when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Barriers to volunteer and to be served were purposefully kept low, creating a welcoming environment that connected individuals and organizations that would otherwise have remained separate.

CURRENT STATUS & IMPACT

42,000

FAMILIES RECEIVED GROCERIES

18,000

MEALS SERVED

1,000

BACKPACKS FOR STUDENTS

1%

ABOUT 20 OF THE 2,000 VOLUNTEERS ARE CHURCH MEMBERS

Edwin David Aponte, dean of the Theological School at Drew University, sees the Bethel experience as "helping to recast the narrative of the declining church." He continues, "The opportunity is to redefine thriving in terms of community impact, not more traditional church metrics."

While Bethel Church remains a small, sparsely resourced community of believers, it is nevertheless recognized as an anchor institution in the community. Likewise, Spring Street CDC has grown into a highly respected community organization that is vital to the livelihood of thousands of people in Morris County. For example, in 2022 the CDC provided groceries to more than 42,000 families, served more than 18,000 meals and provided more than 1,000 backpacks and other school supplies to students. Interestingly, of the nearly 2,000 people in the CDC's volunteer database, only 1% (about 20 people) are church members. While Bethel Church, under the leadership of Pastor Sidney and First Lady Teresa, was instrumental in the creation of the CDC, this statistic raises questions about the nature of the ongoing relationship between the church and the community. Reviewing the "FISHing Differently" theory that underpins the work at Bethel will start us on the path to answering these questions — and identify principles for application in other communities.

FISHING DIFFERENTLY

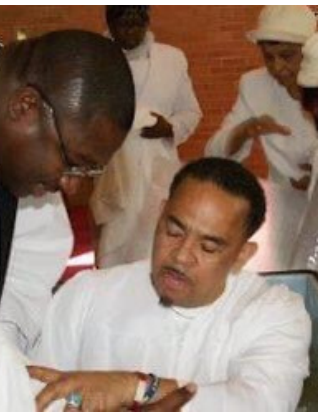
Refusing to be limited by church resources, Pastor Williams elevated the work of the church to building multiple forms of capital — Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human — for the common good.

PRINCIPLES & APPLICATION

While a student at Wesley Theological Seminary in 2005, Sidney developed the "FISHing Differently"[4] planning and evaluation framework, incorporating Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human capital. While the notion of multiple forms of capital is not unique, the application to church mission has proven useful in helping congregations move from simply surviving to fulfilling their Jeremiah 29:7 mandate to seek the peace and prosperity of their city. Sidney writes, "The FISH principle teaches congregations how to build a network of relationships focused on making capital investments in their community" (Williams, pg. 9). As a seminarian who was transitioning out of a career in finance, Sidney was troubled that most churches had a narrow view of flourishing focused exclusively on the "spiritual." He longed for better integration of human and spiritual flourishing, nurturing all the forms of capital God has made available to his global church. Sidney observed that the churches with the greatest impact refused to be limited by declining tithes and offerings, with members and community members fully engaged and embraced in the mission of the local church. Sidney further developed this framework in partnership with the Wharton Business School, when he convened 30 pastors in January 2008 for a five-day Community Revitalization Leadership Development Program. In 2013, Sidney designed and taught a course based largely upon FISHing Differently principles at Payne Seminary. This work in academic and practitioner settings refined the framework and set the stage for the current work of Crossing Capital Group and the Oikos Institute for Social Impact to deliver training in partnership with numerous seminaries throughout the country. Elizabeth Lynn, Ph.D., of the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving — which has provided funding for FISHing Differently curriculum development — remarks that "this framework helps congregations think differently about the resources they have at their disposal to serve their communities. It provides a tangible, accessible vocabulary."

FISHing Differently establishes connections with historic narratives and events that surround a church. For pastors in their first year at a church, the goal should not be to set a new narrative but rather to "join the members in translating the historical narrative in a more compelling, relevant one" (Williams, pg. 26). Indeed, Bethel's engagement with the community and involvement in pressing social issues predates the Williams' arrival. The church had been active in race relations, civil rights, HIV/Aids and recovery ministries, among other efforts, during its storied history.

[4] Sidney cofounded the Crossing Capital Group and the Oikos Institute for Social Impact to teach and help churches implement FISHing Differently principles. His book "Fishing Differently" was published in 2018.



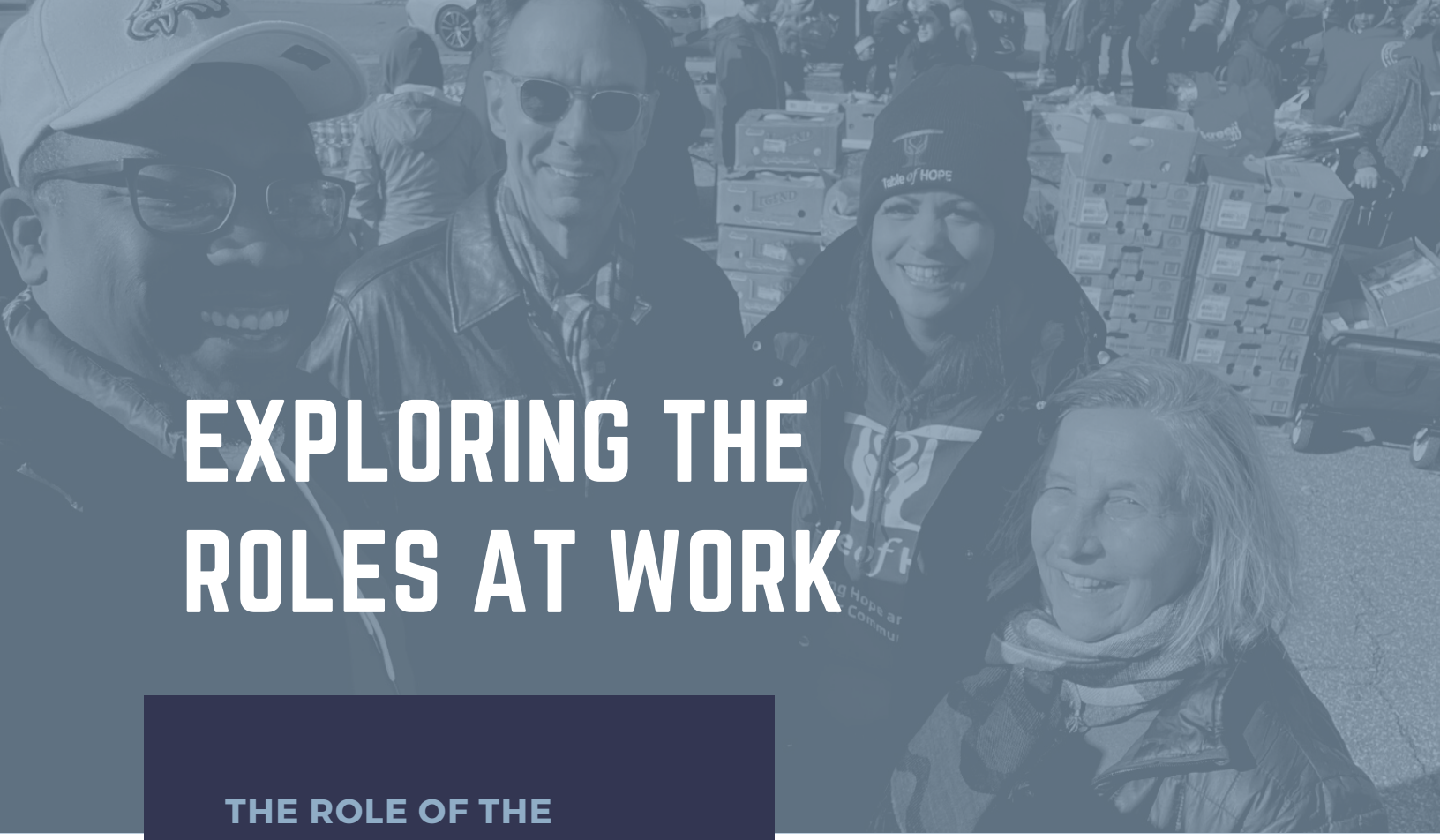
Below we will discuss additional work Bethel pursued to establish historical connections between the church and the surrounding community. We will also see the hard leadership decisions that may be required to call the congregation to be true to its historic and current mission in the community.

The first form of capital in the framework, ***faith***, refers to tithes and offerings raised by a church. While not minimizing the importance of this capital, Sidney stresses that churches must not limit the size and scope of their desired impact based on this often-limited, dwindling capital source. Bethel, like many churches, has an aging congregation with many lower-income individuals. In fact, during COVID-19, Sidney agreed to forgo his salary so they could keep paying the church musicians. Thus, when Sidney encourages pastors to "set goals that require more resources than your congregation can offer" (Williams, pg. 28), he speaks from experience.

Intellectual capital, second in the framework, includes the skills and knowledge that clergy and lay members contribute in support of a given mission. For example, Sidney asked a Bethel member who was a professional dietician and experienced with food service certification processes to help launch the Table of Hope. While churches routinely look for ways to leverage their members' gifts, these are often limited to the business of "doing church." At Bethel, the size of the desired impact required digging deep into the intellectual capital of the church. In many instances, this requires helping congregants heal from past trauma and acknowledging that church attendance does not always mean commitment. The "80/20 rule," where only 20% of the congregants contribute to the mission, must be broken.

The intellectual capital within the congregation must be multiplied by the third form of capital: ***social capital*** refers to networks of relationship and trust with individuals and organizations outside of the church. Sidney spent (and continues to spend) considerable time developing relationships with government, business, nonprofit, educational and faith sectors, bringing them into a shared vision of community impact. We have already learned how this resulted in a $1.5 million gift to restore the church basement. Several church members also leveraged their social capital to help launch SOAR, the CDC's after-school tutoring/mentoring program. For example, one member worked at St. Elizabeth University, providing Sidney access to university leadership; another was a teacher who provided access to the local school district's superintendent office.

The fourth and final form of capital, ***human capital***, is defined in the FISHing Differently framework as "projects and programs having relevant and demonstrable impact on human lives" (Williams, pg. 51). The impact of providing food to the community is not limited to meeting immediate nutritional needs; it can also free individuals to pay for other necessities, reducing overall stress levels in families. The CDC's SOAR program invests in community youth, developing pathways for them to pursue higher education, a significant determiner of total lifetime income. Focusing on human capital outcomes, both spiritual and material, helps churches move beyond simply asking for donations to building support for the cause of human flourishing. The result is the development of a compelling vision for the entire community to rally around.



EXPLORING THE ROLES AT WORK

ANALYSIS

For churches sharing God's dream for human flourishing in their communities, closely examining the work at Bethel Church highlights both opportunities and challenges from which to learn. Next we explore the role of the local church, church "membership culture," building bridges within the community and the role of leadership.

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Churches have often been at the forefront of efforts to fight poverty and oppression. For example, Black churches were instrumental in advancing civil rights and launching the first community development corporations (CDCs) in the 1960s. Although there are no definitive statistics, many existing CDCs were started by churches, even if they no longer are formally considered faith-based organizations. While maintaining legal separation between a CDC and its sponsoring church is wise and has many legal and financial benefits, what is the ideal level of integration between a church and its community organization? Should Bethel Church and Spring Street CDC be more integrated? What are the benefits, challenges and opportunities of such integration?

When Sidney came to Morristown, he started knocking on doors and building relationships using the calling card of "Pastor of Bethel Church." The long presence of the church in the community automatically gave him legitimacy. However, his "pitch" to community stakeholders wasn't about Bethel Church; rather, it was to engage in a discussion about where the community was headed, listening for the hopes and fears that people harbored. The church's role as an anchor institution in the community was solidified not by beating its own drum, but through work such as that of the Sankofa Heritage Collective of Morris County (where Sidney sits as board chair and co-founder). The Collective seeks to connect the historic African American experience in Morris County with today, revealing that Bethel's history overlaps considerably with community history. The historic record highlights that Bethel Church has contributed to community well-being for centuries, with those contributions continuing into the 21st century with efforts such as Table of Hope. The ways in which the Sankofa Heritage Collective uncovered Bethel's historical rootedness helped people outside the church start viewing Bethel not only as a church, but as an anchor institution — which, in the words of a CDC board member, "demolishes the perceived separation between church and community."

In addition to providing institutional legitimacy, Bethel Church has positively impacted Spring Street CDC by establishing an ethos of a caring family rather than a transactional service organization. Using shared facilities such as the church kitchen and fellowship hall, both volunteers and those receiving aid enjoyed (pre-pandemic) meals together around tables in a non-threatening, come-as-you-are environment. No long application forms were required to receive help or to volunteer. This ethos continues today even as the CDC has scaled up and appropriately professionalized, with a family atmosphere maintained among those serving and receiving. For example, a volunteer named Nancy recently noticed that many Hispanic mothers were not taking the processed, packaged food in the food line. She asked them what kind of food they wanted, and the CDC responded to their requests with fresher, less processed foods that the mothers were already familiar with. Kevin Jones, co-founder of the SOCAP impact investing organization, notes that Spring Street CDC is a "learning organization, willing to adapt." Importantly, the relational ethos has not degenerated into a closed and controlling system. Kevin goes on to observe that "it isn't a controlling nonprofit, so this attracts similarly minded partners and plenty of 'super-volunteers' who thrive serving in this environment."

Bethel Church has undoubtedly been a positive and necessary force in the creation of Spring Street CDC. But what about the ongoing relationship between the two? We've already noted that the volunteer base of the CDC comprises 99% non-church members. Clearly, Bethel's membership base is not sufficient to meet the needs of the CDC, and few would argue that the CDC should restrict its impact by limiting itself to available church resources. Also, by not overtly identifying with and relying on Bethel, the CDC is able to leverage the welcoming ethos described above into attracting volunteers and partners from across the community. For example, one super-volunteer named Kenny serves at Table of Hope five days a week. He came to the CDC not because of its connection to a church, but via his volunteer work for the county food bank. Several CDC board members are members of nearby churches, which in some communities would be considered "competition" for Bethel. Not so here, as both Bethel and the CDC have emphasized relationships with many area churches, including the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer for semi-annual pulpit swaps and the non-denominational Liquid Church for an expanded Table of Hope site in nearby Parsippany, New Jersey.

Spring Street CDC has grown well beyond Bethel and would likely continue to expand its impact even with a complete break from the church. What about the converse? Does a church that is focused on blessing the community result in more church growth and increased budgets? This doesn't appear to be the case with Bethel, nor is it the experience of many other churches that have adopted missional models. Although Bethel's membership and budget may not have swelled because of the work of the CDC, the stature of the church in the surrounding community has certainly grown. The result is an opportunity for Bethel to provide more explicit spiritual nurturing, for those who want it, amongst the thousands of CDC volunteers and stakeholders. This expansive role of "community pastor" is what many church leaders actually long for, allowing them to move from "church business" to the business of community thriving for all.

CHURCH "MEMBERSHIP CULTURE"

To some, the purpose of the local church is to support and equip members in their walk with God, with an inward focus on church programs and activities. In more missionally minded circles, the role of the church is to engage in God's mission in the world, with a more outward focus. All congregations, however, exhibit group dynamics, including what sociologists call "in-group" formation, where those in the "out-group" are to be competed with and defended against. We use "membership culture" to describe this in-group mentality within congregations. This mentality can develop in all types of churches, but particularly those with a more inward-focused orientation.

We've encountered membership culture in the "Historic background" section of this case study, with some Bethel members (the in-group) feeling short-changed by the amount of time Pastor Sidney spent outside of the church (the out-group). Today, this feeling of competition for the pastor's time seems to have dissipated, as most members interviewed describe Sidney as very responsive and generous with his time. However, when Bethel renovated the fellowship hall after the flood, there was a group of members who feared the loss of "their" kitchen and fellowship hall, a sentiment that exists to this day. While acknowledging the good that Table of Hope does, some members continue to mourn the loss of space for church activities as the fellowship hall has slowly but surely been taken completely over by the CDC. Another example of membership culture was observed at a recent church discussion on the possibility of removing the pews from the sanctuary to increase flexibility for church and community use. Several members expressed significant pushback, centered on maintaining control for their perceived "right use" of the sanctuary.

While this membership culture may only be exhibited by a vocal minority that remains at Bethel, its presence cannot be ignored. Sidney anticipated this when he wrote about "The Paradox of Restoration" (Williams, pg. 22), which entails honoring and valuing the past while addressing the present and advancing the church's mission. This takes time, in the form of listening, teaching, spiritual formation, discipleship training and leading the congregation to decide on the future "corporately for the change to have lasting improvement" (Williams, pg. 26). This is where theory ran into reality, however, as the flood of 2011 forced Sidney's hand to pivot the church to a new path faster than prudence would have dictated.

Spring Street CDC grew more rapidly than expected, reflecting the great needs in the community, but also causing some church members to feel like they were always trying to catch up and adjust.

It is impossible to predict what would have happened without the flood and a slower, more deliberate journey. Would membership culture have disappeared completely? Those of us who have been around churches for any period of time know that this is unlikely, no matter how slow and inclusive the process. At times, pastors will need to stake a leadership position and say, "You feed them," calling attention to community needs that cannot wait for church committees. But they must also be willing to say, "Come off by yourselves; let's take a break" (Mark 6:31 MSG) — to process, consider and be refreshed together for the next push into mission.

BUILDING BRIDGES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The FISHing Differently framework emphasizes the importance of social capital, encouraging churches to reach out to individuals and organizations within the broader community to develop what researchers call *bridging* social capital.[5] Richard Babcock, COO of Crossing Capital Group and a FISHing Differently co-collaborator, explains that "the key to success in creating cooperative partnerships is finding those who share a common vision and mission who will unwaveringly walk with you to achieve an outcome of mutual priority. It is imperative to divorce yourself from the limitations of ideological, political, racial, financial or denominational hurdles to find those who will enthusiastically commit themselves to the mutually desired outcome."

The list of cooperative partnerships that both Sidney and Teresa have developed is indeed impressive, spanning churches, corporations, local businesses, sororities and fraternities, local and state government, schools, higher education and nonprofits. While this bridging has fueled a vibrant, low-barrier volunteer system and generated broad support for operation and

[5] Sociologist Robert Putman popularized the term "social capital," distinguishing between *bridging* social capital (linkages between groups) and *bonding* social capital (linkages within groups).

and expansion, its effect is made more powerful by expanding the activity of social capital generation into the community. Contrary to most bridging social capital efforts, where the emphasis is on connecting the organization to others (an organization-centric view), this study found Bethel Church to be a catalyst for the development of bridging between organizations within the broader community (a community-centric view).

For example, Sidney has developed a strong relationship with the County College of Morris (CCM), multiplying this social capital by brokering a relationship between CCM and the Morristown school district. By helping create a bridge between these two important community organizations, the CDC's SOAR program was able to expand with after-school programs at CCM, and all three organizations benefited. The previously mentioned Table of Hope food distribution brings together diverse groups of volunteers, creating bridges within the community that would otherwise not exist. These community bridges include crossing racial barriers with a Black-led organization employing primarily white volunteers to serve a heavily Hispanic population. The bridging also extends to the board of the CDC, including two political rivals as well as members from several area churches who nonetheless find agreement in the common cause of serving the community.

When interviewees for this study were asked what words came to mind describing Bethel Church and Spring Street CDC, the most popular word was "community."

"community"

A long-time Morristown business owner observed that there has traditionally been very little feeling of community in the area, with self-sufficiency and rugged individualism prevalent as core values. While there have always been people struggling in Morristown, it was easy to ignore if those struggles were treated as something for individuals to deal with on their own. Bethel's work drew attention to the magnitude of the challenges in the community, with people voicing shock at the foot traffic and lines of cars that were visible every Thursday. Particularly during the isolation of COVID-19, the community welcomed the opportunity to rally together around a common cause — helping others in *their* community. Drawing attention to the true state of the community and providing a mechanism for collective action has created bridges as well as bonds to tie the community together.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

Pastor Sidney and First Lady Teresa are both high-caliber leaders. While Sidney's leadership is described by interviewees as "visionary" and "magnetic," Teresa's is "gracious" and "enabling." However, given that this study is not focused exclusively on leadership, we will forgo detailed analyses of the Williamses' leadership characteristics, focusing instead on several novel elements of leadership discerned in this study at the intersection of church and community.

We have already highlighted the importance of bridging and connecting, but why were Sidney's efforts in this area so successful? Sidney has a background as a Wharton MBA and investment banker, enabling him to speak "non-church" with business owners, politicians and community members at large.[6] Of course, Sidney also has his "church credentials," with a Doctor of Ministry degree from Payne Theological Seminary. Sidney's background enabled him to dialogue with the community in a way that de-centered the church and centered the community. While not every pastor who dreams of serving and impacting their community needs an MBA, it is vital for pastors to bridge the church/community boundary with at least some training in business, finance, community development and related fields. This is also an invitation for pastors to draw on the intellectual capital within their congregations to help fill their knowledge and experience gaps. In addition, more visionary seminaries are needed to equip pastors to bridge the often-separate worlds of church and community.[7] We must also consider those we select as senior pastors, looking for clergy with sufficient theological training as well as experience outside of church and theological settings.

As several observers of the Bethel work noted, tending a church congregation, establishing deep community connections, being a "community pastor" and running an organization such as a CDC requires rethinking the traditional view of a pastor. However, rather than place unrealistic expectations on pastors, we can see a way forward even as we acknowledge the challenges. This case study highlights the need for leaders to navigate these waters by

[6] This is not meant to minimize in any way Teresa's impressive background (an M.Div. and a BBA in finance). The focus of this particular discussion is on developing community connections, something that Sidney has focused on while Teresa has focused on running the CDC.

[7] Fortunately, there is movement on this front. See, for example, Princeton Theological Seminary's Spiritual Entrepreneurship initiative, Multnomah Seminary's Community Flourishing M.Div. track and Drew Theological School's Social Impact D.Min. program (led by Sidney). See also numerous institutions that are supporting FISHing Differently cohorts in partnership with the Oikos Institute, such as Wesley Theological Seminary, Perkins Theological Seminary, Chicago Theological Seminary, American Baptist College and Wake Forest University. (Full disclosure: the author is currently employed as an adjunct and consultant at Multnomah Seminary to develop their Community Flourishing M.Div. track.)

bringing as much integration as possible between the work of the church and the work of the community.

The FISHing Differently framework can aid in this integration, by focusing leadership on identifying and catalyzing multiple sources of capital within the community and the congregation, seamlessly moving between the two as required. For example, the traditional work of developing gifts within the Body can be strengthened by expanding it to "catalyzing multiple sources of capital" inside and outside of the congregation. Leaders must also guide the church's mission to be subservient to God's mission in the community, removing any perceived or real conflicts between the two. The traditional view of a church's mission should be recast to flow from common cause with the community, a shift that requires missional-theological teaching, preaching and discipleship. A former member of Bethel (who has now gone on to start his own church in another state) commented on the importance of taking time to guide a congregation through these steps before making dramatic moves. While this aligns with FISHing Differently framework guidance, we've noted that this process may have been short-circuited at Bethel due to the flood of 2011. Such missional-theological work in a church will help to break down the challenges of membership culture discussed above and minimize the distinction between "the work of community" and "the work of the church."

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

An in-depth case study such as this will necessarily expose strengths as well as challenges. We have already discussed the challenge of the widening gap between the church and the CDC. Below we highlight two additional opportunities that are particularly salient for future growth: leadership development and expansion of services.

Regarding leadership, several interviewees expressed concern that the success of the work in Morris County relies too heavily on Sidney and Teresa's leadership. As an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, Bethel is at the mercy of the denomination regarding pastoral changes, and the next pastor will certainly impress his or her own values onto the church. At the previously mentioned church discussion on removing the pews, one parishioner objected by noting that "the next pastor may want to put them back!" While having Pastor Sidney move on from Bethel would unavoidably impact the church, how would it impact the community? Will the community bridging and bonding that has accelerated since 2010 slowly dissipate without a Sidney present? Will the community be able to use its recently developed ability for collective action to respond to new challenges without Sidney's energy and vision? Positive answers to these questions may be found in the nature of the Spring Street CDC board, comprised of a diverse set of community stakeholders, each with strong leadership capabilities. We've already noted the bridging that occurs on the CDC's board; growing the board and tasking them with developing more bridges within the community will help distribute this important function beyond Sidney. Also, Teresa's leadership of the CDC has resulted in a very efficient learning organization. Developing a strong management team and grooming her successor will be critical to ensure continuity and growth of impact in the community when she is no longer at the helm.

Secondly, as an observer noted, "The Table of Hope is extraordinary but unexceptional." In other words: without minimizing the importance of addressing food insecurity, the current services are impactful but not transformational or unique. However, we found that these highly visible services were exactly what was needed at the time they were created in Morris County, serving to create a sense of community and meeting acute needs. Bethel and Spring Street CDC must continue to learn from their community, leveraging their well-earned status as community anchors to ask, "What are the barriers to holistic community thriving? How can we get to that place of thriving?"

Of course, Sidney, Teresa and other leaders are already asking these questions. One route under consideration is to elevate the work of the CDC to that of an intermediary, enabling other organizations to serve their communities through grants, technical support and networking. Another consideration is to delve into community economic development: for example, helping entrepreneurs start or grow locally owned businesses, providing workforce development services and encouraging similar efforts to grow local wealth-building opportunities. Digging deeper into the root causes that inhibit flourishing will require ongoing community engagement and the courage to re-invent even in the midst of successful programs.

CONCLUSION

Although Bethel's congregation is smaller than the median church size of 70 (see footnote two on page seven), it has created community impact orders of magnitude larger than bigger and better-funded churches. While each church and community are unique, what can churches, particularly those that are small and underfunded, learn from the Bethel experience? Churches can play a role in holistic community flourishing that includes, but is not limited to, the "spiritual." Leaders should develop as much integration as possible between the work of the church and the work of the community, strengthening bonds and bridges through collective action for the common good. In a church where mission and success are defined in terms of the community's mission and success, impact will not be limited by traditional church resources. Leadership must hold the congregation accountable to the church's mission, at times nurturing, teaching or prodding, but always leading by example. It is vital to listen to and continually assess the community for hopes and dreams, hidden needs and untapped assets. As leaders and laity spend time developing relationships within the larger community, churches will see Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human capital growing both inside and outside of their church. It is our sincere hope that pastors and other leaders will be encouraged by this case study to fully pursue God's vision of thriving in their community, regardless of the size of their church.

LESSONS & DISCUSSION

WHILE THIS CASE STUDY AND THE CONCLUSIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE, HERE ARE KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR OWN CONTEXT:

- **Spend time listening, lamenting and connecting the past to the present.** Don't seek to set a new narrative but rather, as Pastor Sidney writes, "join the members in translating the historical narrative in a more compelling, relevant one" (Williams, pg. 26).
- **Document and celebrate the shared history of the church and the community.** Develop the church as a community institution. As a CDC board member put it, "Demolish the perceived separation between church and community."
- **Bring as much integration as possible to the work of the church and the work of the community** by incorporating missional-theological thinking into teaching, preaching and discipleship. Define the church's mission and success in terms of the community's mission and success (Jeremiah 29:7).
- **Take time to teach your congregation before making drastic changes.**
- **Leadership must be prepared to counter "membership culture"** and hold the congregation accountable to the mission in the community in which God has placed you. There is a time for teaching, nurturing and prodding, as well as a time for decision-making. In all cases, leaders must lead by example toward the mission.

- **Listen to the larger community** for hopes and dreams, hidden needs and untapped assets. Research your community to find the obvious as well as hidden pockets of poverty and brokenness.
- **Draw attention to the true state of the community and provide ways for the community to work together through collective action.** This creates bridges as well as bonds to tie the community together.
- **Don't be content with limiting ministry to what your church can do directly.** Build Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human capital both inside and outside of your church.
- **Spend considerable time developing relationships with government, business, nonprofit, educational and faith sectors.** Build bridges within the community, not just between your church and the community; equip and encourage others in this work, as well.
- **Don't ask people to support an organization. Focus on developing support for a cause** that has demonstrable human and community impact. Churches have a role in holistic flourishing that includes, but is not limited to, the "spiritual."
- **Create a low-barrier environment in which volunteers love to serve.** Translate a caring, family-like ethos from your church into your community work. Emphasize relationships rather than transactions and application forms, but also honor your volunteers and funders with efficient, well-run processes.
- **Equip pastors with training** in business, finance, community development and related fields. Look for pastors with sufficient theological training along with experience outside of church and theological settings.
- **Carefully consider the role of community pastor** and how it can bring focus to community outcomes rather than more traditional church metrics. Look for integration between the spiritual nurturing inside the church with spiritual nurturing outside of the church.
- **Plan for the church and community without you.** Nurture new leaders.
- **Continue to look for barriers** to community flourishing. Be willing to reinvent yourself and the organization(s) in which you serve.

RELIGIOUS PROPERTIES TO SOUP KITCHENS

BY REV. DR. SIDNEY S. WILLIAMS, JR.

Each religious property is unique, and the adaptation process may vary depending on the specific building and local regulations. It's important to consult with architects, engineers, and relevant professionals to ensure the conversion adheres to safety standards and local requirements. Here are some key considerations for adapting religious properties into soup kitchens:

SPACE ASSESSMENT

Evaluate the layout and available space within the religious property to determine how it can be converted into a functional soup kitchen. Consider the seating capacity, kitchen facilities, storage areas and accessibility for both volunteers and visitors.

KITCHEN FACILITIES

The existing kitchen may need to be renovated or upgraded to meet the requirements of a soup kitchen. Ensure that the kitchen has sufficient space for food preparation, cooking appliances, sinks, refrigeration and storage for perishable and non-perishable items.

RESTROOMS

Make sure the religious property has adequate restroom facilities for visitors and volunteers. Renovations may be needed to meet health and safety regulations.

ACCESSIBILITY

Ensure that the soup kitchen is accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. Install ramps, handrails and other necessary modifications to comply with accessibility guidelines.

PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

Check with local authorities to understand any permits or regulations required for operating a soup kitchen. Health department inspections, food safety guidelines and zoning regulations may apply.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Engage with the local community, including religious organizations, volunteers and other stakeholders, to gather support and assistance in converting the religious property into a soup kitchen. Collaborate with local food banks, nonprofits and government agencies to establish partnerships and access resources.

SUSTAINABILITY

Consider incorporating sustainable practices into the soup kitchen's design and operations. This could include energy-efficient appliances, waste reduction strategies and sourcing local, seasonal and nutritious food options.

ABOUT

The Crossing Capital Group (CCG), a New Jersey Benefit Corporation, established the Oikos Institute for Social Impact ("Oikos") in 2020 to serve as an accelerator for congregations and other BIPOC anchor institutions to harness the power of their assets in order to be a catalyst for communal transformation and economic renewal.

The Oikos Institute develops strategic collaborative partnerships with mission-aligned developers, seminaries, universities, foundations, government agencies and denominational judicatories to strengthen the Faith, Intellectual, Social and Human Capital of faith communities and other BIPOC anchor institutions as they actively engage in social impact and transformational work in the under-resourced communities they serve.

The Oikos Catalytic Loan Fund is managed by the Oikos Institute, a 501(c)(3) Illinois nonprofit corporation, seeking certification as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) by the U.S. Treasury Department. Oikos will be a national lender, funding the adaptive re-use development of religious properties and campus assets for social impact.

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MORE INFO

The Crossing Capital Group: https://crossingcapitalgroup.com/

Fishing Differently: https://www.fishingdifferently.net/

The Oikos Institute: https://oikosinstitute.org/

NJ PBS mini-documentary: https://www.njpbs.org/programs/21/morris-county-a4yxex/

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