

Ministry Manual: Community Ministry as a Bridge to Multiracial Churches

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Synopsis

I grew up in what I would call a neighborhood church. Some families (including mine) drove several miles to get there, although a good number of people from the neighborhood were members. We also had a food pantry and clothing ministry during the week. Our church was (and still is) multiracial, although I don't know how much of that was connected to these ministries. I am presently a member of another neighborhood church – or at least it used to be. We are definitely a church that acts committed to our neighborhood. After all we house a significant food pantry in the ACCESS system (see annotated website list), serve a weekly free meal to the community and support/run a used clothing store down the street. This church is not multiracial although the guests in our church throughout the week are. On several occasions my pastor and I discussed this dilemma and brainstormed both why this is and how to change it. These experiences inspired me to want to pursue the following topic that I think many churches are (or should be) asking: *Our outreach ministry population is diverse (and reflective of our neighborhood demographics), but our Sunday morning worship is not. How can we connect the two? How do we encourage people who come during the week to join our community on Sunday?*

While I still believe this is an important question, I discovered in my research just how little is written on what is really the integration of two separate topics: racial reconciliation (and/or multiracial ministry) and community ministry. There are increasing numbers of resources geared towards helping churches unpack racism and its historical and present impact, pushing them more towards embracing a commitment to a multiracial identity. There are also countless resources on community ministry – from the basics on how to start it to more in depth sociological and urban ministry oriented studies.

While much of community ministry is faith-based and often flows out of the church, very rarely do these materials address the relationship between Sunday morning worship and what happens during the week. John Perkins, a giant in the Christian community development world (see the annotated website list), is one of the strongest voices towards the integration. He has championed what are affectionately known as the three R's: reconciliation, relocation and redistribution. As far as he is concerned, if you are not willing to reconcile, re-locate yourself to the place of ministry, and redistribute resources, you have little business engaging in community development. A second significant resource is a book on urban ministry by Dr. David Claerbaut

– a book in which race is named up front as a significant obstacle and issue as the church engages in urban ministry. Beyond these resources there are lots of interesting studies and anecdotal accounts of churches engaged in being a kingdom presence to and with the community in which they find themselves. Some of these provide great encouragement, while others seem to magnify the challenges facing the church.

The resources describing multiracial churches and the process of developing into one rarely (if ever) address the relationship between Sunday morning worship with community outreach. This may be in part due to the disappearance of the parish model in the Protestant tradition. There is also a sense in which many multiracial churches are new starts, rather than transformed congregations – affording them the opportunity to begin with a more integrated model. In general, the recommendations for multiracial churches can easily be applied to the way a church engages in community ministry.

The first step is for congregations to name the divisions in our midst – both within and without the church – particularly highlighting the presence of individual and institutional racism. This takes intentionality, a key component to ministry. Dialogues must happen in order for understanding to develop and also to work at eliminating the power dynamics at play in our racialized contexts. This means that members of the congregation need to not only be committed to the mission statement of the outreach programs, they need to be involved. Relationships cannot be built when people fail to show up. Reciprocity cannot develop without relationship. A community meal is not for all, if members of the church fail to show up (not to mention the message it sends that we're too good to eat that food).

Leadership is another key issue at stake. Members of the community who participate in outreach programs need to be encouraged to step forward in leadership of their own ministry. If all the volunteers are from the dominant group, it perpetuates the hierarchies rampant in our society. This is true of church and ministry program staffing as well. Hiring practices must reflect the commitments of a church to becoming multiracial lest the church be hypocritical. The leaders of the church must be committed to the vision and bringing in front of the congregation as often as possible.

A final point to highlight is the kinds of connections that ought to be made between community ministry and Sunday morning worship. A number of resources point out that failure to change the “style” of what happens on Sunday morning is a failure to welcome someone from

a different background. This is as much about the words that are written and spoken as it is about the music we hear and sing. A wonderful bridge can be found in the church's practice of the Eucharist. It is not uncommon for food to be a part of community ministry and the table is certainly a key part of worship in the Christian church (especially the Reformed and Catholic churches). "Eating is a social activity that links persons together in webs of mutuality and reciprocity. ... The answer to the question 'Who eats with whom?' reveals, for good or ill, the culture of the church" (Bacote, 204). As a community gathers around the communion table, divisions seem to melt away – we're all in need of food; we're all in need of grace.

I think there is hope that uniracial churches who are actively engaging their neighborhoods will become multiracial. It will not be an easy journey and it likely requires radical changes. Yet as the church lives more into the radical life Jesus calls us to live, our vision will grow to encompass God's kingdom vision for relationships that transcend divisions. Dr. Claerbaut summarizes our task well: "...holistic ministry derives from balancing the nurture of the church members with outreach, developing a commitment to and love for the community, having a holistic theology and vision integrated into the church, and equipping leaders and members to action from a base of loving, healthy relationships" (Claerbaut, 271).

Annotated Bibliography

Anderson, David A., *Multicultural Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

Using imagery from music and dance, Anderson writes a down-to-earth book based on his experience of establishing a multicultural ministry. Although this book does not specifically address outreach ministries of a church, the model he presents seems applicable to the transitions a church must make any time there is a desire to become more diverse. While at times the chapters feel over simplified, the basic message of the book is rooted in biblical and theological foundations which make it unavoidable for churches to see God's desire for the church to reflect the multicultural kingdom of God. Anderson does not ignore the reality that moving towards multicultural ministry takes hard work and intentionality. Instead he offers real life examples of churches that have done and continue to do the hard work.

The journey towards multicultural ministry requires "a rhythm of cooperation, power sharing, and idea generation" (42). None of these happen without intentional work on the part of leaders and members of the community. All of these stem from the hard work of building relationships where there are conscious decisions to dialogue and conscious acts towards others. Interracial service opportunities may be a great way to build relationships both within a congregation and in the neighborhood. Anderson also recommends racial reconciliation groups that help individuals to develop deeper understanding, greater respect, and practical approaches. One appendix of the book is a 6-week session specifically on racial reconciliation. From the Sunday morning worship standpoint, Anderson also encourages leaders to make conscious and informed decisions on preaching and teaching (different cultural groups are attracted to different styles of hearing the Word of God) as well as music choices. Anderson does not encourage a color blind approach at all, but acknowledges and celebrates diversity, infusing his approach with grace.

Bacote, Vincent, "Church as a Lifestyle: Distinctive or Typical?" in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, eds. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 195-209.

The way we define church impacts the identity of church goers, whether we like it or not. While the church often gets defined as a voluntary group of individuals, Scripture and history point to a much more distinctive identity. To be the church is to be a set apart people, with the emphasis on the identity of the whole. "The recognition of the church as being central to our identity and behavior in the world should yield a perspective and social practice that opposes and critiques a racialized society" (195). Understanding ecclesiology in this way requires transformation in the life of the church, both in the way identity is passed on and in how the church is seen from the outside. The practices of the church (from hospitality to baptism and the Eucharist) reveal the priorities and identity of the people. Ultimately "the church's public performance, broadly considered, tells and retells the narrative that constitutes the church's self-understanding" (199). Internally a church must embrace a catechetical (teaching and formation) model so that people can be brought into this distinctive identity. "The church as a culture should proclaim and practice the social life of the coming kingdom, contradicting the social forces that reinforce a racialized society" (207). Bacote concludes that reconceiving identity and practice may impact that racial status quo of evangelical churches.

Black, Kathy, “Promises and Problems of a Multiethnic Church” in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Todd E. Johnson. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002, 141-152.

This short chapter packs in helpful information around the formation of multiethnic churches and the “promises and problem” in the midst of it all. Black gives a brief overview of different models of multiethnic churches (two congregations sharing a building, multiple language/ethnic ministries in one congregation, fully integrated). The third model often takes form in assimilation and assimilationism – both of which encourage or force participants to conform to a dominant culture. However, Black suggests the approach of reciprocal assimilation for forming “a culturally conscious congregation—one that takes seriously the various ethnicities and cultures represented in the congregation” (143).

Reflecting on the growing diversity in our communities, Black asks: “If a multicultural community cannot be created in small, congregational microcosms, how can we expect people to get along in diverse contexts in the secular world?” (144). The multiethnic church is an important formative place for all Christians, helping everyone to grow in their ability to respect differences and develop reciprocal relationships as faith is shared. This requires an awareness of the power dynamics at play as different cultures come together.

One of things I appreciate about this chapter is the specific naming of the challenges that multiethnic ministries face and the intentionality required in both seeing them and responding appropriately to them. While Black does not offer significant resources on the response side, other books and resources do. The challenges she names are: lack of shared liturgical story (from Biblical interpretations to worship practices), authority issues (specifically in the way the Word is preached), different understandings of time (linear versus cyclical), and personal interaction behaviors (greetings, naming, eye contact, personal space and indirect speech). All of these challenges are potential barriers in transcending differences. Yet Black concludes, “I truly believe that the promises of the culturally conscious multiethnic church provide a vision of God’s kingdom on earth—a community not based on hierarchical kingship, but a community of God based on treating one another as kin, as children of God” (152).

Claerbaut, David. *Urban Ministry in a New Millenium*. Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005.

This book is by far the best resource I encountered in addressing the question of bridging outreach ministry with Sunday morning worship. Claerbaut takes all the important principles of urban ministry, good community development, and strong biblical and theological foundations to provide instruction and insight to urban ministry workers, particularly white ones. He names the value of neighborhood empowerment, reminding the reader that “As important as relief ministries are, the church must go beyond being an ecclesiastical version of the welfare system” (80).

Most significant to this research was the clarity with which he names the significance of race. “Any white urban workers who underestimate the virulence and all-pervasiveness of prejudice and racism in the US society are setting themselves up for a tremendous amount of frustration and failure” (161). Later he reiterates that the first step in ministry has to be awareness of both individual and institutional racism.

Concrete suggestions abound in these chapters – from placing minorities in leadership to the kinds of commitments white urban workers must make (committed to credibility (building trust), servanthood (a “no strings attached” approach), desire and willingness to learn, and support of worthy minority causes). The bridge is built best when ministry moves from the inside out. “[Ministry] needs to grow out of the needs of the people with whom the church deals, rather than becoming the center of the church’s identity in the expectation that it will draw people to the church” (258). The church also needs to learn from sociology about the three organizing principles in society: gender, race and class. Often urban ministry does not understand or address these – especially race and class. One sociologist suggests that the church needs to become the fourth organizing principle.

The final conclusion is that “holistic ministry derives from balancing the nurture of the church members with outreach, developing a commitment to and love for the community, having a holistic theology and vision integrated into the church, and equipping leaders and members to action from a base of loving, healthy relationships” (271).

DeYoung, Curtiss Paul, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim. *United By Faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

A response to the 2000 publication, *Divided By Faith*, the authors present a compelling case for multiracial congregations. There are chapters on the biblical basis for such congregations, the historical context out of which these congregations emerge, and rationales and responses to both uniraical and multiracial congregations. While this book does not specifically address outreach ministries, several points stand out. Once again a model of assimilation is broken down in order to make room for a more integrated approach in order “to be united in our equally respected differences” (139). This is not something to be taken lightly or done superficially. Token songs from other cultures and prayers in another language are not sufficient. The shift to multiracial requires “a fundamental shift in understanding and practice” (140). It is this fundamental shift which includes the way community ministry is practiced. In fact the authors state that “multiracial congregations certainly should be centers for community development that address the needs of their neighborhoods and places of refuge for people of color who are experiencing the daily assault of racism. . . . Membership in multiracial congregations can facilitate the establishment of interracial social networks and help people increase access to important information or job opportunities” (141). In the end the authors call for congregations committed to modeling and living out a multiracial identity – through “redesigning their mission statements, worship styles, and social practices in ways that reflect the New Testament call to be multiracial” (185).

Howell, Brian M., “Power and Reconciliation in an Urban Church: The Case of New City Fellowship” in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, eds. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 293-307.

This chapter tells the story of New City Fellowship, a PCA congregation in St. Louis. This urban church successfully embraces and lives out a multiracial identity, in spite of the larger forces of white-majority tradition in terms of denomination, doctrine and social context. In large part this is due to their commitment to redefining practices and language. One helpful example is around language used in prayer where “social problems of the so-called inner city [are put] on a

par with the problems of suburban life” (295) (i.e. temptations of drug use next to issues of materialism). The church also holds regular reconciliation meetings – a place where members share joys and struggles specifically around their experience of race. The honest dialogue helps to diffuse power. “If no one group can claim privilege in the life of the congregation—no single group can claim to have all the resources necessary to live a full Christian life—individual members experience themselves as being equally powerful and equally powerless to form a complete community” (299-300). Their theological commitments are the foundation for the ways they consistently seek to engage these difficult issues (in word and deed). They are also willing to accept that not all social justice issues (including racism) affect every person of color in the same way. Living with that tension is crucial to acknowledging the different forces at play in congregational life and that all of them must be addressed “practical, symbolic, and political means” (305).

Laudarji, Isaac B. and Larry G. Murphy, “The Urban Ministry of the West Side Churches” in *Religious Organizations and Structural Change in Metropolitan Chicago: The Research Report of the Religion in Urban America Program*, ed. Lowell W. Livezey. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1996, 107-137.

This research comes directly out of the work of the Religion in Urban America Program directed by Lowell W. Livezey out of the University of Illinois, Chicago. This chapter tells the story of five churches from Chicago’s west side: St. Stephen African Methodist Episcopal, First Baptist Congregational Church, Presentation Catholic Parish, People’s Church of God in Christ and Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church. At the time of the research the area was 98% African American, the result of significant white flight due to the move of jobs from the area. Middle-class blacks were also beginning to move out of the area. Of these five churches, around 40-80% of congregants lived outside the neighborhood although many had lived in the area at one point. All of these congregations were also aware of the issues of race and ethnicity. All of these churches were committed to ministry in the community. Some of the churches had congregations that were reflective of neighborhood populations, where others did not. Two of the churches (Catholic and Baptist-Congregational) specifically and intentionally changed their worship services to be more reflective of the community. Another interesting commitment on the part of the Baptist-Congregational church was the special education hour and worship time they brought to the public housing project on Sundays. Their commitment of staff time and willingness to go to the community is significant.

Porrata, Mary Lou, “San Lucas: Presente!” in *Envisioning the New City*, ed. Eleanor Scott Meyers. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, 295-307.

This chapter tells the story of a Hispanic UCC in the Chicago area. This small church was founded with the intent of being a presence in the community. It is described as “not only a house of spiritual worship and prayer on Sundays but a place where the rhythm of worship goes on all week long. People come and go daily, bringing and defining needs, searching for and finding resources” (295). This small church is committed to relationships and the integration of faith and action. Although it is a predominantly Puerto Rican congregation, its commitment to the community means embracing all present and all their issues. They attribute their “success” at being present in the community to leadership, networking and advocacy. Leaders are cultivated

from within. Area networks are utilized for furthering efforts in serving the community. The church lives out its role as advocate by being available and making connections where necessary.

This example of this congregation shows the possible links between neighborhood and worshiping life in living out a parish model of ministry. And the church is focused on the needs of the community and the seamless relationship between weekday activity and Sunday morning worship.

Price, Matthew J., "Place, Race, and History: The Social Mission of Downtown Churches" in *Public Religion and Urban Transformation: Faith in the City*, ed. Lowell W. Livezey. New York: New York University Press, 2000, 57-81.

The Religion in Urban America Project (RUAP) did extensive study of Chicago churches. This book examines many different facets of urban ministry. This particular chapter focuses on the complex racial dynamic in the downtown Chicago churches. As the neighborhoods changed, these churches have continued to be majority white and extremely powerful. However these churches have not disconnected themselves from the community. In fact they started and grew multiple projects to serve these communities. But there is more to it than that as these churches were also committed to the racial and economic transformation of their congregations. Each of the churches studied had racial integration at the forefront. Yet as the community outreach programs grew, so did the need for volunteers and staff. Soon these programs included more people from outside the congregation than within. This created a barrier for these churches as the commitment to and leadership in these ministries shifted. Some congregations were able to identify this as well as the larger issues surrounding race that were making connections difficult.

The important learning for these churches is around the need to form a single community and for the volunteers involved in the varying projects to be connected to the congregation. As the neighborhoods continue to change, so do congregations. Attention to the new needs of congregants can be a helpful bridge so that service is simultaneous. Drawing people in to common need lowers the barrier to authentically forming one community. Another key learning is around honest dialogue in assessing outreach ministries and their relationship to a church's philosophy and vision.

Walton, Janet and Eleanor Scott Meyers, "Ritual Expression in the Urban Church" in *Envisioning the New City*, ed. Eleanor Scott Meyers. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, 156-167.

This chapter tells "the story of one urban church that has experienced class-, age-, and race-based transitions in its neighborhood" (156). The authors describe the experience of working with a planning group over a month-long period in which they planned a worship service that focused on the relationship between ritual and symbol, the reality of "strangeness" (urban environments regularly face changing populations), and the significance of storytelling. The planning process included discovering the differences of those involved through acknowledgement of divisions and categories from society. They were able to both grieve and celebrate in this process. The service they planned and experienced grew out of their increased knowledge of one another. While the event went well, the congregation's worshipping practices did not change permanently. The authors make several key observations around the ways this

congregation fails to address the realities of their context. Male language and images in worship do not speak to the predominant presence of single women. A service-oriented mission statement fails to include community members in the main church event – Sunday worship. Symbols in worship along with the space arrangement, emphasize hierarchy and upper-class priorities, which are not in line with the congregation. The lesson learned? “Changes must be implemented on a consistent basis to break down the race-, gender-, age-, and ethnicity-based barriers to community. ... Constant vigilance and unrelenting education would be required to enable such an ongoing conversation.” (166).

Other practical resources to consider specifically for community ministry:
Dudley, Carl S. *Community Ministry*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2002.

This is a much revised version of a “manual” for community ministry from an earlier publication. Based on significant research and experience, this book addresses the various aspects of establishing and sustaining community ministry.

Van Groningen, Jay. *Communities First*. Grand Rapids, MI: CRWRC, 2005.

Just over 100 pages in length, this book presents solid biblical and theological foundations for community ministry in addition to practical questions and steps. Each chapter has an accompanying workbook for intensive study and action steps for the congregation embarking on this largely asset based community development model.

Interview Summaries

For this particular topic, I found it difficult to figure out how to nuance these interviews so that they might inform my project. Instead I decided to keep the conversations more generic about race in the church. In thinking about whom to interview, I decided it would be interesting to hear both from the perspective of someone who grew up in a different racial context from my own and from someone within my racial context who had a significant experience as a minority. I had the privilege of conversing with two women, both of whom are good friends of mine. Over the course of our friendships, we have spent many hours talking about the issue of race. While some of those conversations have involved the church, none have been directly focused on their experience of race in the church. It was a gift to sit down and have these conversations – to struggle to form helpful questions and to listen intently for the depth of their experience.

Kim is in her mid-20s. She grew up in Detroit, Michigan, the daughter of a black pastor of a small black Baptist church (about 100 people). In her early years, most of her world was contained within predominantly black settings and race was often a topic of conversation. “You’re black and you live in America; race is something you talk about, period. The color of your skin is such a huge issue. From middle passage to here – color of skin has always been an issue.” Even though her family taught her to believe that her skin color doesn’t matter, she was also taught that to some people it does.

Race was also talked about in church. There were important messages for black families and black communities to hear. Kim also described a transformation in her father after he pursued further theological study. He began to make connections between the black experience and the slave narratives in the Old Testament. He also took interest in the geographical settings of scripture and its potential to connect his black congregation to its African roots. Kim attributed these approaches to her father’s theological study and not to the typical black church experience.

After college Kim came on staff at an all-white RCA church in Muskegon while worshiping at an all-black Apostolic church in the same town. She was the first black person ever to serve on staff at this church – a decision that even caused one member of the church to leave. The experience of working in an all-white church and worshiping in an all-black church was challenging, and further emphasized the deep lines of segregation in Muskegon.

She now worships at an RCA in Holland that is really striving to be multicultural or multiracial. For Kim, being in a multiracial church has been the experience in which she most understands her own identity as an African American woman. She feels strongly that this vision of the church – a Revelation 7:9 vision – is what God created the world to be. “There shouldn’t be a denial or downplay of who you are – your racial or ethnic identity. But within this huge tradition each ethnicity or culture – ways of life, music, etc. – should all be valued and appreciated and affirmed within the church.” She reflected that our racialized society makes it incredibly difficult for the church to live out this vision. Yet she expressed hope in the church’s awakening to this vision and the ability to open up the conversation.

Allison is originally from Zeeland, Michigan. She is not Dutch, nor did she grow up Reformed – yet the West Michigan culture is the place in which her identity was first formed. She became a Christian in her teenage years and became a member of a small CRC. After graduating from college (during which Allison’s eyes were first opened to racial reconciliation), she moved to Chester, PA to work in a church and do campus ministry. The church that hired her was small, non-denominational and predominantly African American, led by an African American pastor (the second pastor to serve the church). Interestingly when it first started it had

been an all-white Mennonite congregation led by a white pastor. During Allison's time the congregation worshiped between 50 and 75 (mostly African American families with some single white folks).

Part of Allison's job was working in the after school program, run by a nonprofit, loosely connected to the church (supported by federal money of course). The 50 or so children that attended the program were predominantly African American. At least 10 or so of these children would also come to Sunday morning worship. The nonprofit site director was also the wife of the pastor. Allison did not describe their relationship positively. She felt that the woman did not trust her and that there were unspoken issues related to her (Allison's) race and some of the history of the church.

Initially as Allison reflected on her experience, she spoke primarily to the cultural shock that it was for her to be a part of this congregation. Worship style was different – from music to language to order. The influences on people were different – books they read, people they respected, circles they were connected to. Yet these were things that Allison eventually embraced and appreciated and even grew to love. When I pressed her to speak directly to race, she spoke of a language dance in which people avoided the conversation. They wanted to be multicultural and so that was the language they tried to hold to. She also described it as a “color blind perspective” – that people acted cautious and inauthentic. Their mantra fell along the lines of, “we just need to love each other, no matter what color. If we read our Bibles and pray and everything will be okay.” However she did describe some occasions where race was unavoidable – a woman gets pulled over and treated horribly because she is African American so the congregation prays specifically for her and the individuals and systems involved.

The experience brought up a lot of questions for Allison. What does racial reconciliation really look like? What do you do in a church where the conversation isn't happening and where your leadership isn't respected or acknowledged – a woman, white, not from community...all strikes against her? At times she found herself thinking: “I just wish I wasn't white. I would be so much more effective.” Her race inhibited her ability to be effective in working with people in that community. Ultimately it was also an internal struggle in learning to value herself and her gifts that she does have to offer the community – that she is not limited by her race.

She left the church in Chester after one year and spent the next 1.5 years trying to find another church. This experience had awakened in her a desire to be in a multicultural setting and to not necessarily be in the majority. Despite living in Philadelphia, she never found a church that seemed to fit all that she had learned about herself. So now she worships at a mostly white Presbyterian church and works in a setting dominated by other races and cultures. Her experience of race in the church drastically impacted her ability to do the ministry she is involved in with college students in Philadelphia. It is definitely an experience she continues to process.

Site Visit

Broad Street Ministries in Philadelphia, PA

QUESTIONS ENCOURAGED, CREATIVITY CHERISHED, DIVERSITY EMBRACED

While I was unable to attend a worship service or participate in one of their typical programs, a visit to this church to hear Dr. Michael Eric Dyson speak on his recently published book on MLK Jr. gave me an interesting window into this unusual church/ministry. Most of the church staff were at the event that night and the “convening pastor” gave a quick synopsis of the church before Dr. Dyson spoke about his book.

Broad Street Ministries is located right in the heart of the bustling city of Philadelphia along the Avenue of the Arts. Just across the street is the major arts center. A glance up the street reveals the impressive city hall building. There is definitely a lot of life around this place – from students to average city dwellers to the homeless population. The wide doors of the church advertise its numerous programs and offerings – from an all-night café for the homeless to weekly Bible studies and worship services. As we had arrived early for the event the doors were still locked, although the folks sitting on the steps knew when they would open and were friendly enough to tell us.

Everything about this place screams hospitality – and not just to an educated middle class who might value things like the arts and diversity. In just a few months BSM will celebrate its 3rd anniversary of ministry in this former Presbyterian church building. The staff seem creative and energetic, despite the tireless nature of their ministry to the increasing homeless population and their commitment to advocacy on countless justice issues. Although white dominated, there are several African American staff members. According to my friend the worshipping congregation is also diverse (although he did share a story of a conversation he had with a visiting African American couple who wondered about the church’s commitment to diversity). The folks’ gathered for the evening lecture were pretty evenly split between white and black (there was a noticeable lack of other diversity, although I do not think that is the case for the city of Philadelphia).

The “traditional” church building is being used in ways reflective of their mission. The downstairs fellowship hall serves as the café. The narthex of the grand upstairs sanctuary serves as the usual worship space on Sundays and during the week, orienting the worshipers to face one another rather than straight forward in pews. An art installation of steel windmills suspends somewhat eerily in the vaulted ceiling, hinting at the powerful winds of change made possible by the work of the Spirit in the people and programs that gather. Cascading in and around these mills are hundreds of origami birds carrying the written prayers of the homeless who seek shelter and sustenance and comfort in these walls. The evening lecture was held in the front part of the sanctuary using the traditional pews and pulpit, although a message such as the one we heard hasn’t resounded from any pulpit I’ve ever seen before! In the back of the pews were small cards advertising the weekly worship service and offering the words of a blessing and challenge, stated each week in worship. Partnered with these small cards was a bright sheet of paper describing the programs of BSM and inviting one’s participation through further information or

volunteering. I felt informed and welcomed as I sat in that unfamiliar place and I had a sense of intrigue and hope in the bold mission of this ministry.

The lecture (could be read “sermon”) we heard that night could be a separate paper altogether. Dyson is energetic and prophetic – committed to challenging the church to be a different kind of place that lives out the kind of love MLK Jr. preached. My mind was swimming with reflections from this course and my class on the Prophets – wondering how in the world to digest the information. And I kept coming back to the place I found myself in – the pews of a church building, once a place of worship of staunch white Presbyterians, likely intentionally segregated. As the listeners offered encouragement through an occasional “amen” and more prevalent applause, you couldn’t help but feel your heart carried away with hope. And the hope didn’t just come from the persuasive and crafted words of Dyson, you could feel it in the gall of this ministry – seeking to really be the church in ways the church has not been for too long.

Since the visit I have spent some time perusing the church website. If they really are practicing what they say they are, this seems to be the kind of place that “gets it.” Or at least they’re working hard to live it out. They have a broad support base and utilize both a larger church staff as well as many volunteers. And the connections are happening between the outreach ministries and the worshiping life of the church – it was pretty hard to miss the direct connections.

A few snippets from the church’s website, www.broadstreetministry.org, are included here to give further context to this fascinating ministry model:

History: In 2005, Broad Street Ministry formed as an alternative church community. BSM seeks to be dynamic in its expression of worship, embracing of those both on the margins of faith and those who have enjoyed the embrace of the church.

BSM also welcomes into its body not just those who are on the margins of faith but those who are on the margins of society. The member of prestigious private clubs worships alongside the homeless person. The gay and lesbian activist passes the peace with the Pentecostal lay preacher. The possessor of a PhD. in theology prays alongside the summa cum laude graduate of the School of Hard Knocks. Churches should regularly feature this kind of diversity but in our experience—they seldom do. We believe that diversity of belief, skin tone and life circumstance strengthens our witness as a Christian community—and we work hard to extend it. We began by offering monthly gatherings, then bi-weekly and then by the fall of 2006, we worship weekly at 6pm.

Additionally we host, sponsor and produce innumerable works of public art and culture, community based meals, events and conversations and work alongside many in Philadelphia who can envision a more just and fair society.

Is it a church or what? What is Broad Street Ministry exactly?

Broad Street Ministry is an emerging community of faith that:

- honors CREATIVITY in all it pursues
- strives to extend hospitality intentionally to each and all
- works tirelessly for a more just and compassionate city

Annotated Website Resource List

ACCESS (All County Churches Emergency Support System)

www.accessofwestmichigan.org

ACCESS is a network of congregations, individuals, and the community at large working together to meet needs in Kent County, specifically hoping to eliminate poverty and hunger. They coordinate a food pantry network, assist congregations in identifying needs and offering aid, offer poverty simulation workshops, aid in disaster response and more. Their website provides information on the various programs, including the necessary forms for a church interested in joining the ACCESS network. Being connected to this kind of network may be key for churches engaging in community ministry. I think the poverty simulation is a great way to get members of a congregation in an experience that will help them to bridge the gap with neighbors who live in poverty. While ACCESS does not specifically speak to issues of racial reconciliation, there are certainly ways to bridge the conversation to the stated ministry manual topic.

Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)

www.cdda.org

Since its inception in 1989, CCDA has offered an annual conference for those committed to community development at a grassroots level. In 2004 the association added an institute which offers courses and training for leaders. These courses are offered throughout the United States in various cities all during the year (the website includes the current offerings). While there are some helpful lists of resources and a great article on their philosophy, I sense that the bulk of their resources are available through the significant members-only section and by attending their conference and/or institutes. However, I think this is a key resource for churches willing to engage honest and in-depth conversation around their community ministry and its relationship to their worshipping life. Here's a great quote right out of their philosophy:

“Lastly, probably the greatest sustaining power of community development is the community building of a local church. Because Christian community is based on relocation and people living in the community, having a local church to worship together is essential. It is the church where people gather to be rejuvenated and have their personal needs met. This is true of staff members and non-staff members. How exciting it is to see doctors at a local health center worshipping and sitting next to their patients on a Sunday morning. This is community building at its best. The church helps people to understand that each person has gifts and talents and all must utilize those for the greater good of the community. A worshipping church breaks down many of the barriers including racial, educational and cultural barriers that often separate people in communities.” (taken from “The Eight Components of Christian Community Development” by Dr. Wayne L. Gordon)

LaSalle Street Church

www.lasallestreetchurch.org

LaSalle Street Church, located in the heart of Chicago, is a church that has been actively engaged in community ministry since the 1970s (Bill Leslie, the late urban ministry guru, was their pastor for many years). Their website describes the kind of church that is integrating their community outreach with their Sunday morning worshiping congregation. Whether or not the congregation truly reflects this requires a visit to the actual church. However I think this site is a good resource in its model of the kind of language required for a congregation to make the connections and the ways in which commitments to racial reconciliation and integration require intentionality and direct ties to one's mission statement. A quick glance at the staff page suggests to me that this congregation has yet to embrace the need for the leadership to reflect the diversity of the congregation.

Reformed Church in America

www.rca.org

I consistently find this website to be one of the most difficult to navigate. Both the Multiracial Ministries and Social Justice links on the left hand side led me to sections of the website with some related information, although no part of the website addresses my question directly. The multiracial section continues to grow monthly as the newly hired Earl James settles into his role. The resources span seven areas: Managing Change; Transformational Resources; Workshops and Events; Networks; Bibliographies; Worship; Resources; Assessment Tools; Multiracial Stories. There are helpful links to articles and information regarding events and other trainings available for congregations. The social justice section offers resources connected to typical community outreach areas. The articles available around the immigration issue in particular offer information that will be fruitful for congregations continuing to seek reconciliation and integration.

Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education

www.scupe.org

SCUPE, an organization based in Chicago, offers experiences and courses designed for folks involved in urban ministry. Their website not only gives information about how to sign up for their classes and attend their events (various gatherings of practitioners), they also have a section for church and community leaders. One of the most helpful tools on their website is their archives of their CityVoices newsletter. There are lots of helpful articles and stories of actual churches engaged in urban ministry focused around reconciliation and deeper connections.