

**Food, Justice, and the Church: How Local Churches Can Better Serve Black
Communities Through Food Pantries—and Why They Should**

by

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Date: 4/26/2022

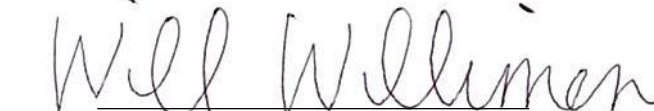
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University.

2022

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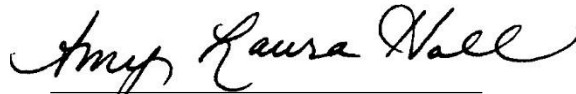
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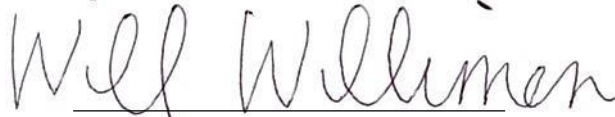
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to examine how churches might better practice Jesus's command to “love your neighbor” (Matt. 22:37) through food pantries that primarily serve Black communities. Although churches believe they exemplify Jesus’s command to love through their food pantry ministry, they are too often offering *cheap love*—love that is artificial, inauthentic, and unhealthy. Many churches, in my experience, have a transactional approach in their food pantries—they collect and distribute foods that are cheap, processed, and high in sodium and sugar. However, this practice is possibly causing long-term effects that are physically harmful to Black people who regularly receive and consume these kinds of goods.

This thesis will examine food insecurity and health disparities that significantly affect the Black community. Second, this thesis will review literature that has contributed to the food justice movement. Third, in conjunction with Matthew 22 and Daniel 1 and ministry examples, this thesis will encourage churches to adopt a relational approach that will lead them to love and empower their patrons and lean into Christianity’s surprise. Fourth, this thesis will offer curriculum to help church leaders enhance their love for God and others. By learning to love more and in new ways, churches can adopt a more relational approach in the food pantry ministry. Last, this research will offer additional creative models of how churches and organizations have been able to connect their community to agriculture.

When churches embody the expansive nature of this love through their food pantry ministry, their fight against the hunger crisis will be more holistic as they will understand the critical correlation between healthy relationships and healthy food distribution. If churches are going to commit to providing food for Black communities, they must integrate equality and justice in their food ministry mission. It is critical for churches to be more thoughtful about how their actions and the ways they give can be rooted more in love and justice. This type of food ministry will require churches to rethink the kinds of food they provide to other people and their methods to collect and distribute foods. This thesis posits that if churches want to better serve Black communities through food pantry ministries, they should consider possible health risks of Black people and how the act of food distribution can reflect the church's love for God and the hungry.

DEDICATION

For Marcus, Peyton, and MJ, whom I love and cherish with all my heart.
You have loved, supported, and cheered me on throughout this journey.

For Mom and Dad, who are able to see my full potential
and who caringly continue to nurture God's calling in my life.

For the ancestors on whose shoulders I stand.
I will never forget.

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CHAPTER ONE Food, Justice, and the Church

“What do you want to eat?” is a question many people ask throughout the day. Some people wake up wondering what foods are in the refrigerator to eat for breakfast in the morning. People pack snacks and various drinks to take to work, school, the gym, or keep in their car for convenience. Co-workers gather mid-morning at a desk or in someone’s office around 11:00 to discuss restaurant options for the day’s lunch. And in the evening, parents ask children what they want to eat for dinner, or spouses call their significant other to ask what he or she wishes to eat. Each day, millions of people make an important decision: choosing what type of foods they will eat to fuel or comfort their bodies. This decision is a major one (perhaps one we often take for granted) because what people ultimately decide to put into their bodies will affect their physical health, mood, and energy. This decision about what to eat is also a great privilege, as it involves the freedom of choice, the power of options, and access to money and food.

1.1. Food Justice

Some may argue that having privilege, freedoms, and access are rewards of living in America—it is all part of the American dream. However, not everyone in the United States can obtain all they perceive to be in this dream for many reasons, including low minimum wage, cost of living, unequal pay, inequality of education, lack of resources, and unjust systems that exist to keep people at a disadvantage. But eating, in particular, should not even be considered part of a dream that someone has to hope for and work hard to obtain; the ability to eat three square meals a day should be viewed as a

fundamental human right available to everyone. All people should have the right and access to enough healthy food that will allow them to live an active and healthy life. But, all people do not have equal access, especially the Black community.

Historically, Black people have been considered socially and economically disadvantaged. The Code of Federal Regulations defines socially disadvantaged individuals as:

those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias within American society because of their identities as members of groups and without regard to their individual qualities. The social disadvantage must stem from circumstances beyond their control.¹

Challenges associated with socially disadvantaged people include the ability to obtain employment, equal pay, quality education, and access to other resources. More specifically, these challenges can affect how Black people are affected by food insecurity and health disparities.

1.1.1 Problem #1: Food Insecurity

Discriminatory policies and practices have led Black people to be more likely to live in poverty, more likely to face unemployment, and have fewer financial resources like savings or property than

¹ "Code of Federal Regulations," *National Archives*, Eligibility Requirements for Participation in the 8(a) Business Development Program, Title 13, no. Chapter 1:Part 124: Subpart A (n.d.): 124.103.

their white counterparts. All of these factors increase someone's likelihood to experience hunger.²

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), each household within the United States is categorized into one of four classifications annually:

1. Food Secure: These households have full access to enough food for all members at all times and can strive toward an active and healthy lifestyle.
2. Low Food Security: These households can obtain just enough food to avoid significant disruption in their eating habits. These households have to supplement their food with government assistance programs or food pantries.
3. Very Low Food Security: These households have a substantial interruption to their eating habits due to the lack of money or other circumstances. These households are also unable to provide sufficient food for one or more of its members.
4. Food Insecure: These households face great uncertainty regarding their ability to eat regularly. All household members cannot eat sufficient meals, and they are unable to obtain enough food due to the lack of money or other circumstances.³

In 2010, an estimated 17 million (or 14.5 percent) households in the United States were “food insecure,” including households classified as “low” and “very low” food security. More specifically, approximately 6.4 million (or 5.4 percent) households in the United States were categorized as very low food security, meaning there was a significant

² “Hunger in America: Who Faces Hunger in the United States?,” *Feeding America*, accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/african-american>.

³ Alisha Coleman-Jensen et al., “Food & Nutrition Assistance: Food Security in the U.S.: Key Statistics & Graphics,” *U.S. Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service*, 2021, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>.

interruption in the families' eating norms. As a result, food intake was reduced for one or more family members.⁴ Further, food insecurity was more prevalent in large cities and rural areas, and the rate was higher than the national average for Black and Hispanic households.⁵ The number of households in the United States experiencing food insecurity has slightly shifted over the last ten years. For example, in 2015⁶ and 2020,⁷ approximately 15.8 and 13.8 million households, respectively, were categorized as food insecure, which included households with low and very low food security. The number of households that experienced food insecurity were also more common in Black and Hispanic households.

That millions of people still experience a form of food insecurity in a Westernized, technologically advanced country that leads the free world is an enormous tragedy. With millions daily wrestling with the question “What do you want to eat?,” what happens when they do not have the freedom, power, and accessibility to decide what to eat? What happens to the children who have no snacks to take to school and no food options when they open the refrigerator door? What happens to families that are forced to choose which member will eat for the day because options are few, or the families that are forced to decide between paying for groceries or the electricity bill? The

⁴ Alisha Coleman-Jensen et al., “Household Food Security in the United States in 2010,” *U.S. Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service*, no. ERR-125 (September 2011).

⁵ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁶ Alisha Coleman-Jensen et al., “Household Food Security in the United States in 2015,” *U.S. Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service*, no. ERR-215 (September 2016).

⁷ Alisha Coleman-Jensen et al., “Household Food Security in the United States in 2020,” *U.S. Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service*, no. ERR-298 (September 2021).

answer is that these types of families are often forced to go without eating, or they must depend on obtaining some form of assistance to eat—i.e., supplemental nutrition programs, shelters, charitable organizations, or food pantries.

1.1.2: Problem #2: Health Disparities

*The most difficult social problem in the matter of Negro health is the peculiar attitude of the nation toward the well-being of the race. There have, for instance, been few other cases in the history of civilized peoples where human suffering has been viewed with such peculiar indifference.*⁸

—W. E. B. Du Bois

The Healthy People initiative in 2020 defined health disparity as:

a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial or ethnic group; religion; socioeconomic status; gender; age; mental health; cognitive, sensory, or physical disability; sexual orientation or gender identity; geographic location; or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion.⁹

Dr. Paula Braveman draws upon this definition and offers factors that contribute to health disparities: the link between avoidable illness, pre-mature death, suffering, and disability

⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, Elijah Anderson, and Isabel Eaton, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), Kindle version 2437.

⁹ “Disparities,” *Healthy People 2020*, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/about/foundation-health-measures/Disparities>.

with being socio-economic disadvantaged; the impact of social policies based on one's socio-economic status; and a country's perspective on human rights.¹⁰

For Black Americans, specifically, health disparities and their contributing factors date back to the transatlantic slave trade that brought Africans to the this country under some of the worst and most deplorable conditions. During this time, Blacks were exposed to various diseases, maltreatment, unbelievable trauma, stress, and inhumane living and forced working conditions. Ever since this time—more than four hundred years ago—the physical health and overall well-being of Black people has been compromised and perceived as disposable, non-important, or disregarded.¹¹ This blatant disregard for Black health continued with the unjust medical experiments from the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male (conducted between 1932 and 1972), the 1996 use of poor Black mothers in South Carolina as research subjects when they were jailed, and the 1998 use of poor Black boys in New York City who were infused with fenfluramine, a cardiotoxic drug,¹² for research.

Further, Black health disparities are also evident in the reported data of various diseases such as childhood obesity and hypertension.

¹⁰ Paula Braveman, "What Are Health Disparities and Health Equity? We Need to Be Clear," *Public Health Reports (1974-)* 129 (2014): 5–8.

¹¹ Alyssa G. Robillard, Lucy Annang, and Kyrel L. Buchanan, "Talking About Race: An Important First Step in Undergraduate Pedagogy Addressing African American Health Disparities," *Pedagogy in Health Promotion* 1, no. 1 (March 2015): 18–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2373379914559218>.

¹² Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, 1st pbk. ed (New York: Harlem Moon, 2006), 15.

Childhood Obesity

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published the following statistics regarding childhood obesity for 2017–2018.

For children and adolescents aged 2–19 years in 2017–2018:

- The prevalence of obesity was 19.3% and affected about 14.4 million children and adolescents.
- Obesity prevalence was 13.4% among 2- to 5-year-olds, 20.3% among 6- to 11-year-olds, and 21.2% among 12- to 19-year-olds. Childhood obesity is also more common among certain populations.
- Obesity prevalence was 25.6% among Hispanic children, 24.2% among non-Hispanic Black children, 16.1% among non-Hispanic White children, and 8.7% among non-Hispanic Asian children [emphasis added].¹³

The CDC reported the following information for children and adolescents for 2011–2014:

- In 2011–2014, among children and adolescents aged 2–19 years, the prevalence of obesity decreased as the head of household’s level of education increased.
- Obesity prevalence was 18.9% among children and adolescents aged 2–19 years in the lowest income group, 19.9% among those in the middle income group, and 10.9% among those in the highest income group.

¹³ “Childhood Obesity Facts: Prevalence of Childhood Obesity in the United States,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, April 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>.

- Obesity prevalence was lower in the highest income group among non-Hispanic Asian boys and Hispanic boys.
- Obesity prevalence was lower in the highest income group among non-Hispanic White girls, non-Hispanic Asian girls, and Hispanic girls. *Obesity prevalence did not differ by income among non-Hispanic Black girls* [emphasis added].¹⁴

Because I was born, raised, and currently serve as a pastor in the state of Georgia, I was interested in specific data for the state. According to the State of Childhood Obesity Organization, Georgia was ranked #14 among the 50 states and Washington, D.C., for childhood obesity, with 18 percent of youth ages 10–17 from 2019–2020. The #1 state for childhood obesity was Kentucky with 23.8 percent. In 2019, Georgia was ranked #7 for obesity among high school students with 18.3 percent. Among the ethnic groups that were reported for high school students, Native American accounted for (21.3 percent), Asian (6.5 percent), **Black (21.1 percent)**, Latino (19.2 percent), white (13.1 percent), and multiple-race students (15.6 percent). It is worth noting that Georgia ranked #31 for obesity in infants ages 2–4 who were enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) from 2019–2020. For this age group, there was a significant decline in obesity for all racial and ethnic groups studied.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Georgia,” *State of Childhood Obesity*, 2020 2019, <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/states/ga/>.

Hypertension

The CDC defines blood pressure as the pressure of the blood that pushes against the walls of one's arteries. As the heart pumps and circulates blood throughout one's body, the arteries carry the blood with a certain amount of pressure. The normal blood pressure is near 120/80 mmHg.¹⁶

Several factors contribute to high blood pressure, including discrimination. An article published by Drexel University revealed that the Black community is at a greater risk of experiencing high blood pressure due to effects associated with ongoing discrimination. From 2000–2013, 1,845 Black American residents from Mississippi participated in the Jackson Heart Study. At the start of the study, these participants did not have high blood pressure, and their participation consisted of a visit followed by two additional follow-up visits. Over time, participants recalled discrimination in various settings such as schools, work, and while applying for employment or housing. After considering risk factors, the researchers determined that participants who reported medium- and high-level discrimination were 49 and 34 percent (respectively) more at risk for high blood pressure than those who reported low-level forms of discrimination. The results of this study point to the link between one's overall health and the effects of how the individual is treated.¹⁷

¹⁶ "High Blood Pressure Symptoms and Causes," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, May 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/about.htm>.

¹⁷ "Lifelong Discrimination Associated with Greater Risk of High Blood Pressure in African Americans," *States News Service*, July 17, 2020.

1.2: The Focus of this Research

While I recognize that the issue of food justice is an extensive and multilayered topic, this thesis will mainly focus on churches' response to food justice by encouraging them to reevaluate how they love and serve Black¹⁸ communities through their food pantry ministry. With Black Americans commonly facing two problems (food insecurity and health disparities), churches may have a great impact on Black health if they reevaluated ways they serve Black communities through food pantries¹⁹ as they continue in the fight toward food security and health equity.²⁰ Because millions of households in the United States face a form of food insecurity each year (households that are commonly more Black and Hispanic), they depend on different government programs or organizations for assistance, such as church-operated food pantries. If churches want to make more of a difference, they should not focus solely on distributing foods but must also consider the historical and health challenges racial groups face, as well as the nutritional value of the foods they distribute.

¹⁸ I recognize differing opinions exist regarding whether or not to capitalize the "W" when referring to White people. In this thesis, I will capitalize both the "B" for Black and the "W" for White when identifying people, in hopes that humanity will one day recognize and treat both as equal.

¹⁹ Although people at times use the terms "food bank" and "food pantry" interchangeably, Katie S. Martin makes a clear distinction. She defines food banks as charitable systems that serve a geographical region such as multiple counties or a state. Food banks also distribute foods to food programs, organizations, or pantries. Food pantries, however, are designed to directly serve individuals in a particular community. Katie Martin, *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries: New Tools to End Hunger* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2021).

²⁰ Health equity is the commitment to ultimately eliminated health disparities. Paula Braveman, "What Are Health Disparities and Health Equity? We Need to Be Clear," *Public Health Reports* (1974–) 129 (2014), 6.

Traditionally, local churches have received and distributed canned foods to their direct community. From my experience,²¹ these items have included soup, meat, beans, peaches, tomatoes, and other types of fruits and vegetables. Concerning the nutritional value of canned foods, there are strong arguments on both sides of the spectrum. Some argue that the nutritional value of canned foods is equal or better than the frozen and raw forms of the same foods.^{22 23 24} Others argue that the nutritional value of canned foods is compromised by the processing method, have high sodium, or contain a high level of bisphenol (BPA) toxins.^{25 26 27} I will not argue in support of or against the nutritional value of canned, frozen, or raw foods, but rather I present this information for churches to consider when serving groups that already lack access to certain foods and face challenges when seeking health equity.

²¹ I recognize that there are limits to my experience with food pantries. I have only served in a ministerial context in the State of Georgia and in the North Georgia region, and I have only visited a handful of churches with food pantries. I also realize that my experience of food pantries may not be the experience of others.

²² Cathy Kapica, "Do Canned Foods Fit Today's Dietary Needs?," *Nutrition Today* 48, no. 4 (August 2013): 161–64, <https://doi.org/10.1097/NT.0B013E31827D858A>.

²³ "Get More Nutrients with Your Money with Canned Foods," *The Canned Food Alliance*, n.d., https://www.mealtime.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Get_More_nutrients_for_your_money_cfa.pdf.

²⁴ Kevin B. Comerford, "Frequent Canned Food Use Is Positively Associated with Nutrient-Dense Food Group Consumption and High Nutrition Intakes in U.S. Children and Adults," *Nutrients* 7,7: 5586-5600 (July 9, 2015), <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390%2Fnu7075240>.

²⁵ "Bisphenol A (BPA)," *National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/sya-bpa/index.cfm>.

²⁶ "Canned Foods," *Center for Environmental Health*, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://ceh.org/products/canned-foods/>.

²⁷ "Safe Food," *Natural Resource Defense Council*, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/issues/safe-food>.

1.3: My Personal Journey toward Food Justice

My passion and advocacy for food justice, equity, and security is not solely based on reported data, but also on personal experiences. For much of my life, I did not give much thought to the quality of food I ate. I enjoyed all kinds of food, whether cooked at home, at a fine-dining restaurant, or at a fast-food place. When I went to the grocery store during my young adult years, I never considered brands or nutritional value. Instead, I intentionally sought to purchase the cheapest food possible—mainly because cheap food was the only kind of food I could afford at the time. I was young, considered myself to be in shape, and did not consider the impact that unhealthy, highly processed foods had on my overall physical health.

It was not until eight years ago when my daughter was born that my perspective about health and food quality changed. As a parent, I considered my primary responsibilities to be nurturing and showing love through all phases of her life—including the foods my daughter ate. Because she was unable to talk, feed herself, or drive to the store to get her food, my husband and I made all the decisions, on her behalf, regarding food. Understanding this responsibility was my “come to Jesus” moment—the moment I realized that the best start she had at living a healthy life began with me. I had to reevaluate how I showed my daughter love and compassion, and I also had to rethink my relationship with food. But was I going to do the work? Was I going to take the time to learn about nutrition, put in the effort of preparing the healthiest meals possible, and intentionally shop for quality foods? Well, I answered those questions with “yes” and committed myself and my family to being more health-conscious. This commitment

prompted me to take an inventory of my pantry and refrigerator and toss out everything I considered unhealthy—canned foods, juice boxes, and some pre-cooked meats.

Deciding to live a more health-conscious life created change at home. Also, it caused me to be more aware of human-to-food relationships and nutritional value in other contexts, especially in church and with food pantry ministries. In my experience, I observed these ministries providing bags of food to many people each week. These bags of food mainly consisted of canned goods, boxed goods, and bottled drinks that seemed loaded with sodium and sugar. While most parishioners seemingly felt good about the ministry's work, my conflicting feelings with the church and its food ministry continued to grow. Yes, I recognized there were people who needed food, and the church could fulfill that need. However, I questioned the church's role—was the church sincerely reflecting Christ's love through the food pantry ministry if it purposefully distributed possibly mediocre food to the community? Was the church possibly contributing to the existing health disparities in the Black community? Was the church doing all it could to end food insecurity, food injustice, and food inequity?

Now, let's pause for a moment. I do not intend to be critical of churches or create a negative narrative of Church ministry. I have a deep connection, love, and passion for church connection and ministry. I am thirty-nine years old and my father has been a pastor for more than thirty years. I grew up in two churches with remarkable laity who served the community and its needs well. I am also an ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church. Because of my position, I have had the honor of witnessing congregations welcome those whom society has shunned, love people when others

mistreat them, fight for the equality of rights, and pour endless labor and effort into the lives of children and youth.

However, I believe that the local church has a significant opportunity to be an example to other faith-based organizations of fully integrating its mission into all the dynamics associated with operating a food pantry ministry. Consider the following questions:

1. Is Jesus's command to love others evident in how one shops within or receives food from the food pantry?
2. What components of the food pantry are sending messages of comfort, hope, and peace?
3. How is discipleship part of the food pantry ministry?
4. Just as Jesus sought the outcast and those society shunned, how is the church seeking to love and serve socially disadvantaged persons with grace?
5. As Christians, we are called to be a holy people. How is holiness evident in the planning, logistics, and operation of the food pantry?
6. Is the food pantry ministry considering the dietary needs of patrons?
7. How are patrons feeling loved, empowered, and included in the decision making process?
8. Is the food pantry ministry operated on a transactional or relational approach?

The purpose of this thesis is to encourage local churches to reassess how they operate their food pantries. However, it is first necessary to discuss the mission of the church before any evaluation of ministry can happen.

1.4: What Is the Mission of the Church?

In the Methodist tradition, we believe that Jesus provides the mission of the Church in the command He gave to His disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.²⁸ (Matt. 28:19–20)

Further, the nature of the United Methodist Church is to be “one, holy, apostolic, catholic”²⁹ church. The elements of the Church’s nature are all connected and work together to help the Church achieve its mission. Being one with another reflects the community found in Jesus Christ.

As a result of Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience to God (“the Fall”), humans are born into sin: “Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.” (Ps. 51:5) The only solution for our broken condition is divine grace. When humans accept God’s grace and love, they acquire the ability to reflect this same grace and love in daily human interaction. To foster a healthy community and reconciliation, we must actively and intentionally extend grace to others. Accepting God’s grace is also the beginning of spiritual reconciliation, or “the Way of Salvation.” Through grace, Baptism,

²⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Harold W. Attridge and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocraphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance*, Fully rev. and updated; 1st ed. (San Francisco, Calif: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

²⁹ United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2016, ¶104.

and Holy Communion, Christ invites us to be in community with Him. As followers of Christ, we are called to put our faith into action by being one—being in community with others just as He communes with us.

When we are baptized, we are joined in connection to God and the community of faith. We become part of one great team whose mission is to win souls for Christ. Like a football team, the body of Christ has many players who possess divine gifts and talents—discernment, administration, leadership, preaching, exhortation, etc.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.
(Rom. 12:4–5)

For this body in Christ to effectively work together, all must be united in love. To achieve our mission, we must recognize and respect each individual’s spiritual gift and work together.

Second, we are a holy church, meaning we must be holy because Christ is holy. The Gospel of Luke describes when God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to foretell the birth of Jesus:

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.” (Luke 1:34–35)

We must also be committed to living a life reflective of Jesus Christ:

[W]e offer ourselves in praise and thanks-giving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us, as we

proclaim the mystery of faith [. . .] through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church.³⁰

Through sanctification, we must constantly seek all things that are of God—through prayer, Bible Study, preaching, Sunday School, small groups, worship, and the studying of God’s word. Sanctification is not something done once or twice; it is an ongoing daily process. By living a life of holiness, we are dedicating our lives to God and living our lives in a way that serves as a testimony to others about the good news of Jesus Christ and God’s grace and mercy.

Third, we are an “apostolic” church. Jesus commanded the apostles to “go” and teach the good news to others. Finally, we are a “catholic” church where all are welcome—just as all are welcome into God’s kingdom. The Church is described as “catholic” because the word means “all-embracing.” The Church is universal (for all people) and embraces the fullness of Christian reading, but its catholicity will not be fully realized until it truly is an inclusive and faithful community.³¹

In my ministerial experience, people lean on the local church for help because they hope that the Church will be different from the world—welcoming, unified, reflective of Christ, and inclusive. I have come to learn that people are tired of society objectifying them. They are tired of experiencing roadblocks at every phase as they seek assistance from the government and other organizations. They are also weary from the

³⁰ *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, Tenn: United Methodist Pub. House, 1989), 10.

³¹ Ted Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, rev. ed (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2011), 74.

burdens they experience from the stigma associated with getting assistance—all the demeaning stares, rude comments, eye-rolling, and looks of disgust.

I myself have witnessed a cousin experience the burden of stigma. Angela was sensitive, kind, quiet, and truly loved her family. She had three children she did not raise because of many challenges she faced. She was bipolar, schizophrenic, and an alcoholic. She did not have a high school diploma and, for most of her life, she was in and out of various homes. She had little money and received government assistance. Because Angela did not finish school, along with the fact that her mental conditions went untreated, she could not work and had a very long criminal history. She stayed in trouble and was arrested repeatedly—it seemed like the whole police department knew her by name. Whenever I was with her, I saw stares, judgment, and shaking heads when in stores or walking down the street. People often dismissed her—I could tell by their body language and tone of voice—when she asked for help because they considered her inferior and an irresponsible destructive citizen. With circumstantial stress coupled with the pressure of society's perception, how were she and others expected to navigate the valley with dignity and succeed?

Being in community with Christ and reflecting its oneness, holiness, apostolicism, and universalism throughout food pantry ministries would require churches to give more attention to sharing Christ's love by offering resurrections for people. Regardless of

denominational affiliation, what binds all Christians is the Resurrection³² of Jesus Christ—this is the core of the Christian faith. Without the Resurrection of Christ, the eternal fate for all humankind would stand uncertain or nonexistent. The Resurrection gives faith and hope to Christians—that they too will join Christ and have eternal life in heaven. The Bible says,

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. [. . .] If Jesus has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. (1 Cor. 15:12–14; 17–19)

Because of the Resurrection, Christians have proof that death is not final; the soul has eternal life. The Resurrection also lends further credence to the Savior’s claim to be the Messiah and the Christ and confirms that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

However, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ also gives us hope and faith in the here and now, which means that the spiritual deaths that we experience on earth are not final but temporary: through Christ we can have resurrections on earth. Thus, part of the Christian’s responsibility is to understand the significance of the Resurrection and subsequently create meaningful and loving ways that others can experience spiritual

³² I am intentionally distinguishing between *the* Resurrection and *a* resurrection. When I refer to the Resurrection, I refer to Jesus Christ’s ascension into heaven and His eternal rule and reign. A resurrection, however, is spiritual revival. It is the love, hope, joy, and peace of Christ that humankind experiences in moments here on earth.

resurrections in the here and now. When Christians intentionally keep this responsibility as a priority within local churches, ministries such as food pantries may function with more consideration, sincerity, and compassion for the people they serve.

Through this research, I hope to spark conversation, provide relevant information, discuss ideas, make theological connections, contribute to the food-justice conversation, and encourage churches to do an internal evaluation by asking themselves: Can we love our community through our food pantry in a better way? The remaining sections of this thesis will focus on the next four chapters:

Chapter Two will examine the literature of various scholars who have focused on different approaches in the food justice movement. Because this movement is multidimensional, the literature includes work from activists, social work, academia, agriculture, religious ethics, and food justice advocates.

Chapter Three will consist of a two-part methodology used in response to food justice with a church-based perspective on the food pantry. The first component of this research will include a brief exegesis of Scriptures from Matthew 22 and Daniel 1. Through an examination of some Old and New Testament Scriptures, the reader will hopefully make an awesome connection: that our love for God should be manifested in the way we show love for neighbor, empower others, and lean into Christianity's surprise. The second component of this research will include models from churches and organizations that have intentionally formed a connection between the community and agriculture. When churches embody the expansive nature of this love through their food ministry, their fight for justice against the hunger crisis will become more holistic.

Chapter Four will focus on Bible Study curriculum for churches to use as a resource when reevaluating and transforming their food pantry ministry. The focus of the two study lessons will be on ways churches can enhance their love for God and humanity.

Chapter Five will provide additional examples of ways churches can partner with other organizations in response to hunger and the food justice movement. These examples will include a farmer who is engaged in community-support agriculture, an organization that offers multiple services for individuals, and a church that has formed partnerships with a food bank and local farmer. While these approaches toward food justice are unique, I hope these examples expand local churches' knowledge of how food pantry ministry can be accomplished—especially when partnerships happen.

CHAPTER TWO A Literature Review of the Food Justice

Movement

This research seeks to inspire churches to reevaluate how they serve Black communities through their food ministry. The purpose of this research stems from two historic problems Black communities face: food insecurity and health disparities. If churches desire to reevaluate how they carry out the mission of Jesus Christ through food ministry, they should carefully consider how food insecurity and health disparities affect the whole individual and whether their response to the two problems is rooted in justice. To help churches understand the connection between food and justice, this chapter explores the literature on the food justice movement over the last twenty-five years and how faith has become an integral part of the conversation. Because food justice is multifaceted and involves food relief organizations, policy, advocacy, research, agencies, officials, community leaders, and academia, this literature review highlights diverse voices from different fields that speak to this issue.

This literature review begins with the poetic work of Wendell Berry, a poet and environmental activist who published the book *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* in 1998. Berry used his poetic gift to speak to various topics such as the relationship between humanity and the land. It is my wish that the words from his poem “Enriching the Earth” and his 2013 speech to Unitarians will help establish the subsequent conversation regarding food justice—that it involves an understanding of connection with each other and the earth, service, hospitality, advocacy, sustainability, and accountability.

To enrich the earth I have sowed clover and grass to grow and die. I have plowed in the seeds of winter grains and of various legumes, their growth to be plowed in to enrich the earth.

I have stirred into the ground the offal and the decay of the growth of past seasons and so mended the earth and made its yield increase. All this serves the dark. I am slowly falling into the fund of things. And yet to serve the earth, not knowing what I serve, gives a wideness and a delight to the air, and my days do not wholly pass. It is the mind's service, for when the will fails so do the hands and one lives at the expense of life.

After death, willing or not, the body serves, entering the earth. And so what was heaviest and most mite is at last raised up into song.¹

During his 2013 convention speech to Unitarians, Berry stated:

The long-term or permanent damage inflicted upon all life, by the extraction, transportation, and use of fossil fuels is certainly one of the most urgent public issues of our time, and of course it must be addressed politically. But responsibility for the better economy, the better life, belongs to use individually and to our communities.²

In 1993, social-work educator William H. Whitaker published an article in which he emphasized the need to form a partnership between justice and charity to combat hunger. He suggests that charity, such as support from food pantries, soup kitchens, and other forms of relief, is important—but it is not enough to defeat hunger. Instead, an element of justice must be part of the charity work. According to Whitaker,

Justice means addressing hunger's causes. Justice entails developing responses broad enough to enable hungry people to move toward self-reliance. [It] compels us to empower poor people to act as citizens on their own behalf. [. . .] Justice in action thus means advocating through public policy and using one's influence to create

¹ Wendell Berry, *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 83.

² Wendell Berry, *Our Only World: Ten Essays*, 2015, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=982252>, 70.

legislation that leads toward more food security—“access by all people at all times through normal market channels to enough food for an active, healthy life.”³

Whitaker also speaks of the impact of hunger on children and references a study conducted by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). In 1989 and 1990, FRAC surveyed participants in seven states and examined childhood hunger. According to the findings, approximately 5.5 million children under age twelve in the United States were hungry, and approximately 6 million children under twelve were at risk of being hungry. When the study was conducted, it then concluded that approximately **one out of every four children** under the age of twelve in the United States was suffering from a food shortage problem. In response to FRAC’s findings, multiple organizations have since partnered with FRAC in their campaign to end childhood hunger through charity and justice.⁴

Although Whitaker focused on justice through policy and legislation, Marion Nestle, an academic nutritionist, focused on justice by holding the food industry accountable for its role in public health. In 2002, Nestle discussed the food industry and its connection to obesity in her book *Food Politics*. Nestle challenges people to think differently about food companies, and she calls attention to the food industry’s marketing strategies and their responsibility for what foods consumers purchase and eat. Such a stance was (and perhaps still is) viewed as controversial, especially by the food industry, because Nestle questions the industry’s impact on obesity. Although the blame for

³ William H. Whitaker, “A Charity/Justice Partnership for U.S. Food Security,” *Social Work* 38, no. 4 (July 1993), 495.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 496.

obesity, especially childhood obesity, traditionally falls on the individual or parent, Nestle encourages readers to consider the role of the food industry and its influence on consumers, government officials, public health, and stockholders. She posits:

The primary goals of food companies are to sell products, increase returns to investors, and report quarterly growth to Wall Street...food companies can argue that what you eat is your responsibility, but their corporate responsibility is to induce you to buy more food, not less. Eating less—a principal strategy for managing weight—is very bad for business.⁵

Nestle continues by discussing the food industry's behind-the-scenes efforts by using its resources and monies to influence Congress, nutritional organizations, researchers, health officials, the media, and federal agencies. She also points out how the industry's marketing strategy includes targeting young children to sell an abundance of cheap *junk* foods that are very low in nutritional value. Although it can be challenging for one to eat healthily when the food industry is pushing consumers to eat more, Nestle offers solutions for improving the social and political environment so that people can make better food choices and adopt a more active lifestyle. Like Whitaker, Nestle includes changes in policy as a solution to improve food choices, as well as the following suggestions (refer to Nestle's book for additional solutions):

- Promote a national campaign to “eat less, move more.”
- End the sale in schools of soft drinks, candy bars, and other foods of minimal nutritional value.
- Require schools to be consistent with dietary guidelines.

⁵ : (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2013), Kindle 224.

- Require healthcare training programs to teach nutrition and methods for counseling patients about diet, activity, and health.
- Provide incentives for communities to develop parks and other venues for physical activity.^{6 7}

While policy and accountability for the industry are necessary approaches to food justice, Rachel Slocum brings a different perspective by focusing on racism and the role of community food organizations. In 2004, Slocum, a professor of geography, published an article that focused more on justice by dismantling racism through the work of community food organizations. Unlike Whitaker and Nestle, Slocum focuses heavily on race and how it is deeply embedded in our society, and on the result of painful inequalities that further divide. Because America was built upon racism, the resulting injustices and unfair power dynamics have been evident in systems and institutions, including the food system. Slocum argues:

The history of slavery and the years of struggle that continue in the wake of slavery should be recognized as intimately tied to white privilege and to those communities of color that experience food insecurity, do not own land, are politically disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged. The systemic oppression that communities of color experience as a consequence of racism is a factor in food

⁶ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁷ Nestle continues the theme of accountability and the food industry in her books *Unsavoury Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat* and *Why Calories Count: From Science to Politics, Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (And Winning)*.

insecurity. Organizations intent on reducing food insecurity should consider the many ways in which racism reaches into the lives of people of color.⁸

Due to racism, people of color constantly experience an array of injustices: higher incarcerations, excessive deaths, underrepresentation, and the devastation of vibrant communities. These consequences of racism have also caused more people of color to suffer from food insecurity. If community food organizations want to serve people of color properly, they must be aware of racist systems and institutions and approach working with them differently. Slocum further argues that community food organizations need to be accountable to the people they serve by rethinking programming, budgets, making informed decisions, empowering others, and bringing people being served “to the table” to help lead conversations and influence meaningful change.^{9 10}

In 2008, activist and journalist Mark Winne wrote *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of the Plenty*. In his book, Winne discussed America’s food gap, its causes, and ways to connect impoverished communities to farmer’s markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA). He states, “The food gap can be understood as a failure of our market economy to serve the basic human needs of those who are

⁸ Rachel Slocum, “Racism Food System” (Food Security: Community Food Security Coalition, October 15, 2004), <https://foodsecurity.org/pub/RacismFoodSystem.pdf>, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See also the following for further resources:

Rachel Slocum, ed., *Power, Process and Participation: Tools for Change* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995).

Rachel Slocum, ed., *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2016).

impoverished.”¹¹ However, Winne posits that the food-gap crisis does not only refer to people who experience food insufficiency but to those who overconsume and eat too many unhealthy foods. The food gap continues to widen as higher income groups have access to and are able to purchase healthy organic foods, while lower income groups lack access to such food or cannot afford it, or they live near “food deserts.”¹²

Understanding the food gap and its contributing factors led Winne to help close this gap by emphasizing the importance of community food organizations and systems. He accomplished this task through his work with the Hartford Food System, an organization in Hartford, Connecticut, designed to create a different food system that could equally and fairly serve people, especially the poor. To achieve the organization’s goal, Winne focused his efforts on organizing food projects, greenhouses, various initiatives, nutrition programs, policy, community gardens, and farmer’s markets—all approaches that would help people become self-reliant.

Although Winne’s work focused on tackling the needs of a specific community, he suggests that hunger on a national level can only end by trying new solutions. The perception of hunger is that it is a symptom of poverty. On the contrary—hunger is a *result* of poverty. Thus, to end hunger is to end poverty. Ending poverty would mean launching one national food assistance program, which Winne’s calls the “Food for All Program.” This would be a campaign “that works in tandem with an intentional and

¹¹ Mark Winne, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), Kindle 179.

¹² *Ibid.*, 194. “Food deserts” are places with few choices of healthy and affordable food, and are often oversaturated with unhealthy food outlets such as fast-food joints.

effective campaign to end poverty. The antipoverty campaign must support health insurance, quality education, child-care, and a living wage for all citizens.”¹³

In the year following Winne’s book publication, Bible and Practical Theology professor Ellen F. Davis released *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. Like Berry, Davis speaks about the love and care for the land. She describes agrarianism as “a way of thinking and ordering life in community that is based on the health of the land and of living creatures.”¹⁴ Davis also states, “Our largest and most indispensable industry, food production entails at every state judgements and practices that bear directly on the health of the earth and living creatures, on the emotional, economic, and physical well-being of families and communities, and ultimately on their survival.”¹⁵

Through the use of Hebrew Scriptures, Davis emphasizes the agricultural connection between humans and land, which the ancient texts both describe as lovely and disobedient. For example, Davis refers to the first and second chapters of Genesis when she discusses creation—the land, animals, and humans—and how it is depicted as a beautiful and intimate act of God. However, in Genesis 3, the relationship between humans and the divine shifts through Eve’s act of disobedience that involved nature (a tree) and food (an apple). In Psalm 72, the psalmist further highlights the relationship between humans and the land by desiring for the mountains to yield prosperity to the people, for the rain to shower the Earth, and for grain to be in abundance in the land.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁴ Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

Davis also highlights the connection between the Israelites and land. God establishes a covenant with the Israelites and says that if they keep God's commandments and ordinances, God promises them a fruitful, healthy, producing land (Lev. 26:3–5).

Davis argues that we have a moral, ethical, and theological responsibility to change our destructive behavior and mistreatment of the Earth and work to ensure that life may continue. If we continue allowing a highly industrialized and technology-driven culture affecting the planet—through the removal of mountains, uprooting of trees, pollution, waste, etc.—then how we live, grow foods, and eat will be negatively affected.

In 2011, Monica M. White, professor of environmental justice, continued the food justice conversation in her article “Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit.” Like Slocum, White speaks about race, but focuses on the effects of discrimination in housing, racial segregation, race relations, white flight, and racial and economic disparities in Detroit. She also discusses the significant impact that the automobile industry had on the city's growth. For example, from 2006–2008, Detroit's unemployment rate was nearly three times the national rate, crime increased, poverty grew as the middle and working class decreased, foreclosures increased, and people lacked access to quality education and healthy foods. White states:

Eighty percent of the city's residents must purchase their food at the more than one thousand fringe food retailers, such as “liquor stores, gas stations, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies, convenience stores and other venues.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Monica M. White, “Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5, no. 1 (October 2011): 13–28, <https://doi.org/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.13>, 14.

Lacking access to healthy foods while being forced to eat at fridge food retailers could lead to the overconsumption Winne discussed.

Unlike the other authors previously mentioned in the literature review, White gives specific voice to the Black female body and how her body is negatively affected by poor food options. She offers the following statistics from a 2005–2006 report provided by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey and other sources:

- Nearly 53 percent of Black women are defined as obese, a precursor for other diet-related illnesses, compared to 37.2 percent of Black men and 32.9 percent of white
- Black women are two to three times more likely than their white female counterparts to be diagnosed with hypertension, a condition that often leads to cardiovascular disease.
- Additionally, Black women are diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes at twice the rate of White women and at 1.4 times the rate of black men.¹⁷

In response to the issues plaguing Detroit, White highlights the work of the Detroit Black Community Food network, an organization formed to improve the quality of foods for the citizens. Through education, advocacy, motivation, mobilization, relationship building, and having a heart for justice, this organization affected change and worked to improve the living conditions of the Detroit residents. Their work along with other Black female farmers, as White suggests, is reflective of “ecofeminism” in action. This term, originally coined by Françoise d’Eaubonne, “is a philosophy that examines feminism in relation to the natural environment and lobbies for women’s ability to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

engage with the earth, respond to, and solve ecological crises.”¹⁸ When women join together to resist the harmful practices of food corporations and male-dominated food systems that affect food quality, they can have more control and influence in the cultivation and overall quality of foods that they will eat—which will subsequently affect their physical health.

During the same year of White’s article release, Norman Wirzba released *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. In his book, he speaks of eating as a holy act through which we experience God’s love, grace, and communion with God and one another. He states, “Food is a gift of God given to all creatures for the purposes of life’s nurture, sharing, and celebration. When it is done in the name of God, eating is the earthly realization of God’s eternal communion-building love.”¹⁹ One theme that Wirzba emphasizes is connection: Eating connects us to the animals we eat, to the laborers who planted and grew food, and to the laborers who helped prepared it. One of the ways he supports this theme is by focusing on the belly button, which represents dependence and independence. This marking is a reminder that we all, prior to becoming independent bodies, were at one point connected to someone else and depended on that person to eat and survive:

We each enter a world that is already alive with earlier generations and earlier couplings that birth us into life. Before we could do anything on our own, we were already being fed by another.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, second edition (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), xiv.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

Wirzba also explains the function of the Trinitarian as a way to understand eating from a theological perspective. God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit do not exist independently of one another and reign on their own. Rather, the three exist with one another and are united without any form of hierarchy. “Though the Persons are distinct, they always abide in each other. This mutual abiding would eventually be described as *perichoresis*, the one “making room” in itself for the other.”²¹ Therefore, Trinitarian-inspired eating is to eat and know that we do not exist a part from one another but instead we make room from one another and share in life together. Eating and communing together are acts of love, hospitality, and participation in God’s gift of life.

Further, Wirzba stresses connection and relationship with Christ and one another through his explanation of the Eucharist. With Christ’s presence in the bread and wine, the Eucharist helps to reorder, reconciliation, heal, and restore. He states:

The ritualized character of the Eucharist sometimes causes people to forget that the supper was a *meal*. It was not a nibbling session but the place where the disciples came together to obtain their inspiration, strength, and sustenance. The evidence of the early church suggests that the community of followers ate together regularly and often, and that in their eating they tried to bear witness to Christ’s way of dwelling on earth.²²

In addition to the Last Supper and participation in the Eucharist, there are other examples of how food is used to build relationships and incorporate in spiritual activity. For example, in his instructions to the Israelites, Moses states, “For the land that you are about to enter to occupy is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sow your seed and irrigate by foot like a vegetable garden.” (Deut. 11:10) Psalms

²¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²² *Ibid.*, 200.

65:9 states, “You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.” And in John 6:35, Jesus says to the disciples, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Wirzba intertwines Scripture, faith, and food to show eating as a spiritual exercise. He seeks for readers to understand that eating is more than randomly finding food to fill one’s stomach. Instead, eating is a divine gift—one that binds us to God and to one another with each bite.²³

Like Monica M. White, Wylin Dassie Wilson and Norbert L.W. Wilson continued pushing the food justice conversation in 2013 and focused on Black women’s health in connection with the Farm, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. The “Farm Bill,” as it was nicknamed before it was enacted, addressed issues regarding supplemental food assistance, nutrition, rural areas, and energy. This Act affects the health of Black women as well as all Americans.

This policy influences how and what food is grown, if and how our natural resources will be conserved, how food is processed and labeled; and it affects the affordability, availability, and accessibility of a safe and nutritious food supply for all populations. Also, the Farm Bill determines the path of agricultural and food assistance programs.²⁴

Initially, the Farm Bill was intended to support rural farmers from large and powerful producers and financially provide equal pay compared to their urban and

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Wylin Dassie Wilson and Norbert L.W. Wilson, “African American Health Activism in the 21st Century: Black Women and the Farm Bill,” *A Race, Gender, & Class Journal* 20, no. No. 1–2, Race, Gender & Class 2012 Conference (2013): 238.

suburban counterparts. Over the years, however, the focus of the Act shifted from income parity to supporting more food assistance programs, and the second largest area of support from this legislation goes toward subsidies for commodities. In 2007, one in five Americans were benefiting from the federal nutrition assistance from the Farm Bill. Although the issues of subsidies and food assistance were added to the bill to address food insecurity, obesity and diet-related illness increased; because federal food assistance and diet-related illnesses both increased, there was speculation that one was the cause of the other.²⁵

Wilson and Wilson offer the following statistics regarding health disparities with Black women, which they state are worsened by poverty:

- African Americans accounted for over forty infection diagnoses in 2010, with African American women being 23 percent more likely to die from HIV/AIDS in comparison to white women (U.S. Department of Health and Human Office of Minority Health).
- African Americans are also twice as likely to have diabetes than whites, with African American women having a higher prevalence of the disease and more likely to complications of diabetes than whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Office of Minority Health).
- African American women, in comparison to their white counterparts, also experience the leading cause of heart disease in the United States, at a higher rate. For example, African American men are 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease than whites, even though 6 percent of them have heart disease (U.S. Department of Health and Human Office of Minority Health).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

- The second leading cause of death for Americans is cancer. Although the incidence of breast cancer in black women is lower than that of whites (10 percent less frequently diagnosed), blacks are 36 percent more likely to die from the disease (U.S. Department of Health Services, Office of Minority Health).²⁶

The relationship between federal assistance, diet-related illnesses, and Black women is important due to the health disparities that affect Black people, especially Black women—which is the reason advocacy against unfair policy and legislation such as the Farm Bill is necessary.

In 2016, a group of educators and researchers brought those being served “to the table” (as Slocum discussed) to hear their thoughts and opinions and also to gain more insight into their experiences with food pantries. Anna Greer, Bronwyn Cross-Denny, Michelle McCabe, and Brianna Castrogivanni wanted to give patrons a voice or input into how their food pantry experience could be enhanced. Greer et al. conducted a study among food pantry patrons in the Greater Bridgeport area in Connecticut, and their research consisted of twenty-nine participants—mostly non-Hispanic Black men with an average age of nearly sixty years. The study sought to answer the question: “What individual, interpersonal, organizational, environment, and policy factors influence food pantry patrons’ ability to acquire sufficient food in a large, urban area?”²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 236.

²⁷ Anna E. Greer et al., “Giving Economically Disadvantaged, Minority Food Pantry Patrons’ a Voice: Implications for Equitable Access to Sufficient, Nutritious Food,” *Family & Community Health* 39, no. 3 (July 2016): 199–206, <https://doi.org/10.1097/FCH.000000000000105>, 200.

After the collection and examination of interview, Greer et al. gathered the information and developed different themes based on the findings. The main points were summarized below:

- Participants wanted recipes included with the food. They expressed that it can be challenging thinking of different ways to cook one type of food, so having recipes would be beneficial.
- Second, participants also discussed the need for more education about their foods. Sometimes they would not accept certain foods because they had never seen them before and did not know how to cook them properly. Thus, food education would be helpful.
- Third, participants emphasized the stigma and shame they felt when frequenting the food pantry. Because of that, they often felt they would rather go hungry than go to the pantry. It is possible that the stigma and shame were magnified because of the pantry staff. Although some participants had a good working relationship with the staff, some stated that some staff members were rude and condescending. The interactions negatively affected the patrons.
- Fourth, participants also expressed the need for more options for fresh and diverse foods that fulfilled their health needs.
- Fifth, having limited food quantity was also an issue. Some participants stated the food they received was not enough to feed their entire family, especially those with children.
- Last, many participants stated that it was the policy of the food pantry to wait outside in line before receiving any foods. Waiting outside for long periods of time posed problems, especially if the weather was not favorable.²⁸

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Overall, the study was conducted to enlighten food pantries and others about the multiple practices that can be conducted to enhance the experience of patrons and make their visit more pleasant. Although this study was conducted in a particular area, food pantries should be intentional about involving their patrons in the operations and decision making so that their specific needs can be met.

In 2019, Professor Rebecca de Souza published *Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege, and Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries*. Although food pantries have become an avenue through which organizations respond to food insecurity, the pantries stigmatize the patrons through the way they operate. De Souza states, “I argue that stigmatizing narratives about those who are hungry and food insecure—that is, poor people, women, and racial minorities—serve to uphold and legitimize the unjust food system.”²⁹ She further posits that there is a misconception in the United States about hunger—this country does not have a food shortage. In fact, de Souza argues that the United States has the cheapest food in the world and produces enough food to provide to everyone in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories per person per day. Therefore, our nationwide hunger problem does not exist due a food shortage. Instead, hunger in this country exists because everyone does not have equal access to food.³⁰

To support her claim, de Souza conducted a study of two food pantries in Duluth, Minnesota, over a four-year period. Her research included interviews, field work, conversation, and surveys. One problem that de Souza address is “neoliberal stigma”—

²⁹ Rebecca de Souza, *Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege, and Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2019), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the idea that there are certain people who do not want to work and will not work.³¹ Her study seeks to give voice to those who have been stigmatized and to reveal some of the challenges they face. One of the food pantry patrons, for example, was employed but expressed the hardship of not making enough money. Consequently, they did not have enough funds to pay for basic needs. Another patron stated that it is difficult paying for everything while only making the minimum income wage. Further, while the food pantry helps, it is hard to provide enough food for the entire family. Another patron stated that he receives more than \$700 from Social Security benefits, but after paying for rent and utilities, he barely has money left to purchase other items, including food. Aside from financial challenges, patrons also struggled with anxiety, depression, physical health, and trauma.³²

Another theme in de Souza's book is whiteness. She uses the story of a White female volunteer to emphasize the lack of consciousness that can occur and how White supremacy can be reinforced in settings where volunteers are White and those being served are people of color. According to de Souza, the volunteer's reason for working at the food pantry was to expose her daughter to people who are not wealthy and do not have the same lifestyle. The volunteers believed that the exposure would help remove any stigma that rich kids have about poor people.³³ However, de Souza argues that the individual's reasons for volunteering have shown that she has overlooked the history of

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 98.

White dominion and the need for more empowering. As a result, de Souza emphasizes the following:

For white middle-class women in a post-civil rights era, doing food works and self-sacrifice are central to their identities [. . .] Charity allows white middle-class women to reach out to the Other and to feel sadness for the Other, while also summoning up intense emotions linked to personal gratitude—as heard in the oft-repeated refrain: “I am just so grateful for what I have.”³⁴

In 2021, Katie Martin, Ran Xu, and Marlene Schwartz published their study on healthy food selections among food pantries. For their research, Martin et al. analyzed more than 63,000 records from a pantry and identified increases and decreases with certain foods. Traditionally, the success of food banks was measured by the pounds of foods that were distributed to communities. However, there was no division between unhealthy and healthy foods. Martin et al. refer to research indicating that patrons of food banks are more at risk for diet-related illnesses such as hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes: “A 2014 national study of food pantry clients found that over half (58 percent) reported having a household member with high blood pressure and one-third reported having a household member with diabetes.”³⁵

Martin et al. evaluated Foodshare, a New England food bank. Initially, the food bank implemented the Supporting Wellness at Pantries system, which categorized their inventory into three colors: red, yellow, and green. Each color represented the nutritional value of the food items in inventory. Although the color-coded system was used as

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁵ Katie Martin, Ran Xu, and Marlene B Schwartz, “Food Pantries Select Healthier Foods after Nutrition Information Is Available on Their Food Bank’s Ordering Platform,” *Public Health Nutrition* 24, no. 15 (October 2021): 5066–73, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980020004814>.

internal information, the food bank decided to share the information with its food pantry companies. The nutrition categories were also added to the online shopping platform. Their research showed that the patrons chose the more healthier foods once they were aware of the nutritional value. Furthermore, a large increase in fresh produce occurred as the demand for canned or frozen fruit packaged in syrup decreased. The demand for brown rice, low-fat protein, and dairy products increased.³⁶

While the nutritional system may be working and viewed as a positive change in the food banking world, Martin et al. do note that administrators of food banks report to and rely on powerful officials and corporations of the food industry for funding. Therefore, it may be challenging to hold these powers accountable in order to provide healthier food options to patrons.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE Love, Empowerment, and Surprise

In Chapter One I presented statistics showing that the Black community is one of the top ethnic/racial groups dealing with food insecurity and health disparities. Various factors contributing to the two problems include lack of access to resources, discrimination, inequalities in the workforce, and the historical perception of the Black body as disposable—all of which could significantly affect the overall well-being of Black individuals. Chapter Two offered a diverse literature review on contributing factors and approaches toward food justice to combat food insecurity and health disparities. Themes in the literature review on food justice include love for all persons, accountability, hospitality, respect, and a regard for health and quality of foods. Considering the two issues plaguing the Black community, along with the themes evident in the literature review, I believe that local church food pantries should have a more relational approach toward food justice rather than a transactional one.¹ A relational approach would require care and love for humanity, empowering others, and seeking surprise.

Churches with food pantries should consider two thoughts: 1) Eating quality foods is a basic human right. To live, people must eat, and to have the best chance at living a healthy, active life, people must have access to healthy foods. 2) Serving socio-economic disadvantaged persons through the food pantry should be a spiritual practice. When serving Black communities, churches must understand that they have a unique

¹ I use the term “transactional relationship” when describing church ministries, programs, or events that are solely focused on *doing* things for individuals, rather than *being* present with them. Being present would require a relational approach and being intentional and sincere about understanding the whole person.

opportunity to show love through collecting and distributing food to people who have experienced years of inherited stress, societal pressure, and varying degrees of disadvantages simply for being a Black person in America. Intentionally showing unconditional love through all aspects of a church's food pantry ministry—when society has historically told Black people they are not worthy of unconditional love—is an intentional spiritual practice. Thus, to reevaluate and transform a food pantry ministry into this type of discipline, I offer three relational approaches for churches to consider: love our neighbors, empower others, and seek surprise.

3.1 A Relational Approach is Showing Love for One's Neighbor:

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:34–40).

Love is a theme echoed throughout the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is an uninterrupted and structured presentation in which He provides various instructions. In part two of His sermon (Matt. 5:17–7:12), Jesus speaks of life in the eschatological² community and emphasizes love. Within this grouping of texts, Jesus offers six expressions of love: love shows no hostility (5:21–26), love is not predatory (5:27–30), love is essential in marriage (5:31–32), love is unconditionally truthful (5:33–

² Living in anticipation of the Messiah's return.

37), love does not retaliate (5:38–42), and love extends to the enemy (5:43–48).³ The theme of love continues in Chapter 11 as we are taught that Christ’s love lightens burdens (11:29–30), and in Chapter 16, Jesus teaches that denying oneself and choosing to love Him is to follow Him (16:24). As the reader then approaches the focus text (22:34–40), it is necessary to note that love is centered at the core of Christ’s teaching as He gives the fundamental command on which everything depends—that one is to love God and love neighbor.

This text comes at the tail end of the Pharisees and Sadducees questioning Jesus about taxes, the resurrection, and laws. The Pharisees were Jewish leaders who were perceived to be experts in Jewish law. They likely became influential political figures from the chaos following the Maccabean revolt.⁴ Although they emphasized certain traditions, rituals, and tithing, the gospels portray them as opposing leaders with harmful teachings throughout the gospels. In Matthew, specifically, they are often grouped with the Sadducees, who, like the Pharisees, rejected Jesus.⁵ The Pharisees and Sadducees were devout followers of Jewish law. They acknowledged 613 laws: 248 positive laws corresponding to the number of body parts, and 365 negative laws corresponding to the number of days in a year. The Jewish leaders considered all laws equal; thus, the nature of the lawyer’s test could be an attempt to manipulate Jesus into declaring one law as more important than another.⁶

³ Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8, *General Articles on the New Testament: Matthew ; Mark* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2007) 189–195.

⁴ David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, eds., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1043.

⁵ Matt 3:7 and Matt. 16:1–12.

⁶ Keck, 424.

However, Jesus responds by reinforcing the importance of love, a lesson He taught throughout His ministry. His response—that all laws “hang” on the two commandment to love God and love neighbor—is a statement of oneness. To love God is to love one’s neighbor, and to love one’s neighbor is to love God. The two commandments are not separate, nor does one come second to the other. Commitment and action, in the practical sense, toward loving our neighbor means seeing their humanity, seeing Christ in the individual, and serving that person well. Based on the exegetical text, the following three subsections provide examples for ways we can show toward love others.

Love Is Seeing an Individual’s Humanity

While there are different layers and understandings of love, love between the divine and neighbor is not merely based on a solid connection, emotion, or feeling that may subside after a certain period. Rather, this type of love that Jesus commands can be defined by how He did ministry and fulfilled His mission in the world through commitment and action. Jesus was committed to showing unfailing love, faithfulness, and hope. Because of His commitment to humankind, Jesus took action by offering His life for our sins and reconciliation to God. If churches wish to treat food pantry ministries as a spiritual practice, they must integrate commitment and action in the overall planning and operation of the ministry. Although there are several ways churches can express their

commitment to guests/patrons,⁷ I believe this commitment begins by first recognizing the humanity in all individuals.

Without intentionally seeing the humanity in all people, we run the risk of allowing biases, stigma, and prejudices to form inaccurate assumptions about others and ultimately interfere with how we treat them. De Souza refers to this burden of stigma in her book *Feeding the Other*, referenced on page 38. Chapter One begins with a personal story of a woman named Trinity who received assistance from a food pantry. In an interview for a study, Trinity stated that her experience in receiving assistance had not been a pleasant one—employees assisting with government services were mean, and people stared and judged her and the items she purchased with food stamps while shopping in the grocery store.⁸

Unfortunately, I have met others in my ministerial experience who, like Trinity, have felt this burden of stigma. Therefore, to express compassion toward others in a way that they are not re-traumatized, churches and leaders must intentionally see the whole person, which would require relationship building. Through building relationships, these leaders and churches could place aside their biases to see the soul of the individual.

Building relations and creating an intimate environment that not only serves food but also serves people's mental and emotional needs would involve leaders and volunteers recognizing the humanity in all individuals. Chimamanda Adichie speaks on intentionally seeing the whole individual in her TED Talk, "The Danger in a Single Story." Adichie emphasizes the danger in a single story because it may risk a critical misunderstanding. In a speech excerpted in this lesson,

⁷ For example, a church's commitment to guests/patrons can be shown by how they treat and welcome those guests, how they connect individuals to other ministries and people within the church and community, and the quality of love and service they give.

⁸ De Souza, 1.

Adichie recounts her experiences as the subject of the “single stories” others have created about her, her country Nigeria, and other groups to which she belongs. She says:

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story...I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar...⁹

Like Adichie, Brian Stevenson also makes a point to avoid the single-story narrative by taking the time to connect and getting to know his clients. In his book *Just Mercy* he calls attention to the problem of mass incarceration and extreme punishment in the United States. Stevenson, an attorney and advocate, chose to fight for justice because he understood how the justice system affected society and people of color. For example, Stevenson suggests that the United States has the highest incarceration rate of any other country. Also, many nonviolent offenders remain in prison, which leads to the building of more prisons. Further, incarceration affects the prisoner's voting rights, personal relationships, job opportunities, educational access, and taxpayers' costs. For far too long, incarceration and death-row consequences have been ignored, overlooked, or dismissed. Stevenson emphasizes the “collateral damage of incarceration”¹⁰ to shed light on this significant problem in America.

⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED Talks, "The Danger of a Single Story," n.d., <https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg>.

¹⁰ Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2019), 15. Citation refers to the paperback edition.

Stevenson's fight and intention to see the humanity in all people was fueled by his grandmother's lesson to "get close." Through her many hugs and affection, Stevenson's grandmother hugged him tightly to the point where he could hardly breathe. To hug tightly was Stevenson's grandmother's way of ensuring that they were close. Stevenson learned to get "up close" to each person and each situation from her affection and creative way of teaching.

Adichie and Stevenson both exemplify the importance of being intentional in seeing people as a whole human being rather than as a stereotype or single story we create in our heads. They demonstrate the importance of approaching people with a willingness to learn about all aspects of their lives so that we can recognize them as an equal part of humanity. When we accept multiple stories about others, we will be able to find commonalities, gain a better appreciation for each other, and live in harmony with each other.

Love Is Serving Others Well

When we choose to love God and love others—and respect the humanity in all people—that love and respect should be evident in all ministries and in all ways we serve others.

Through research, I learned about Heber M. Brown III, a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland, and how his church has loved and served others well. In 2010, Brown's church, Pleasant Hope Baptist Church, organized an Earth Day celebration to support better health in the community and call attention to healthy foods. The garden, later named Maxine's Garden, now sits on 1,500 square feet of church property and produces a

variety of herbs and vegetables. The produce from the garden provides healthy foods to the community.¹¹

As a result of the success of Maxine’s Garden, Brown launched “the Black Church Food Security Network” in 2015 as a way to raise awareness about health and to also help Black churches use their church property to establish gardens and create partnerships with Black farmers. Rather than depending on charities to provide food, Brown rallied pastors, farmers, and community members to unite and work to create their own asset-based food supply model. The model consisted of volunteers transporting, processing, and distributing produce to neighborhoods that were affected by social and political unrest and neglect.¹²

According to the network’s website, the network also has three primary initiatives:

1. Operation Higher Ground: This initiative includes partnering with congregations to establish or expand gardens or agricultural projects on church-owned land. Projects include rainwater collection and compost systems. Connecting the vast inventory of church-owned land with agricultural initiatives can provide myriad health-related, environmental, and economic benefits to the Black community and beyond.
2. Soil-to-Sanctuary Market: The network partners with congregations to bring miniature farmer’s markets to churches on days they worship or gather. Having Black farmers and food business owners selling their items at houses of worship provides a mutually beneficial opportunity for

¹¹ Pleasant Hope Baptist Church, “Maxine’s Garden,” accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.pleasanthope.org/maxine-s-garden>.

¹² Black Church Food Security Network, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://blackchurchfoodsecurity.net>.

growers/producers to tap into a niche market and for congregants and neighbors to have greater access to nutrient-rich food.

3. The A.R.C.(Assembling our Resources for Community Sustainability):

In response to the myriad challenges that are and have been hampering families, neighborhoods, churches, and farming partners, the network has creative innovative programming to create a food value supply chain from Jacksonville, Florida, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Like the biblical story of Noah, they the network organizers believe that God has called them help build the infrastructure needed to withstand the ramifications of climate change, food scarcity, and White supremacy by organizing Black churches to serve as food hubs, food distributors, and economic engines for more just and locally managed supply chains.¹³

The Black Church Food Security Network serves as an example of how to serve others well. If churches with food pantries desire to reevaluate and move toward a more relational approach, they must understand that all people—including the patrons they serve—want to be seen as equal human beings.

3.2 A Relational Approach Means Empowering Others

As I mentioned in the literature review in Chapter Two, Marion Nestle and Rachel Slocum speak to forms of power and how it affects disadvantaged persons. Nestle challenges the power of the food industry and its responsibility to public health. Nestle also draws the connection between the industry’s marketing strategies and obesity. Slocum focuses on racism and how it has created injustices and unfair power dynamics within various systems and institutions, including the food system. Slocum further argues

¹³ *Ibid.*

that community food organizations need to be accountable to the people they serve by rethinking programming, budgets, making informed decisions, empowering others, and bringing people being served “to the table” to help lead conversations and influence meaningful change.^{14 15}

Empowerment is a common theme in the readings by Nestle and Slocum. The two call attention to the power and control that agencies and organizations use in an attempt to either control or dismiss what others want to eat. The connection between food and power not only exists in present-day, but it also existed in Biblical times as depicted in the book of Daniel:

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his gods. Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king’s palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king’s court. Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See also the following for further resources:

Rachel Slocum (ed.), *Power, Process and Participation: Tools for Change* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995).

Rachel Slocum (ed.), *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2016).

asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. Now God allowed Daniel to receive favor and compassion from the palace master.

The palace master said to Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king.” Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: “Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe.”

So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. (Daniel 1:1–16)

Throughout the book of Daniel, Daniel is depicted as a Jewish exile of Babylon who receives visions of forthcoming events in Judea. This book of the Hebrew Bible also echoes various themes such as faithfulness, political power and unrest, deliverance, and redemption:¹⁶

It effectively communicates as well the powerful images of lowly Jewish exiles standing with faith and courage before the very throne of the occupying (and military superior) emperor, overcoming his military and political power through the power of God.¹⁷

¹⁶ Harold W. Attridge and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance*, fully rev. and updated; 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

¹⁷ Leander E. Keck, ed., *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature; Daniel; Additions to Daniel; Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi*, Nachdr., *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction. Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books; in Twelve Volumes / [Ed. Board: Leander E. Keck ...]*, Vol. 7 (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 2000).

Chapter 1 begins with a focus on political authorities with the mention of two kings, Jehoiakim and Nebuchadnezzar:

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord let King Nebuchadnezzar of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his gods. (Dan. 1:1–2)

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar seize Jerusalem, but he also captured the Jewish possessions from the temple as a way for the Babylonians to display political and religious power.¹⁸

After verse 2, the focus of the text shifts to selection Jewish exiles for training.

Verses 3–7 state:

Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court. Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

During this time, Nebuchadnezzar selected Jewish members to get acclimated to the Babylonian lifestyle and education. Four men selected to partake in the training were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Perhaps the king chose these four men for their

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

knowledge of Jewish language and culture, which would benefit the king when ruling on behalf of Babylonia. Although the four Jewish men were introduced to Nebuchadnezzar, the king gave them Babylonian names.¹⁹

Verses 8–17 highlight Daniel’s resistance to eating and drinking the king’s food and wine. Previously in the passage, the Scriptures state that the king provided the four men with “a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine” (Dan. 1:5). The themes of food and eating continue in the subsequent Scriptures beginning at verse 8: “But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself.” Forcing Daniel and the other men to eat the king’s food and wine were part of the king’s plan to get the men fully assimilated into the Babylonian way of life—but his plan failed when Daniel refused to eat the king’s foods. Daniel responded by emphasizing that he did not want to “defile him[self].” His claim speaks to the significance of purity:

The assertion of purity concerns during the exile served as an important spiritual and social bulwark against the dangers of disappearing as a people, and Daniel 1 obviously maintains this important theological motif.²⁰

Although feasting was associated with times of celebration and mourning in ancient times,²¹ the control of food represented power and privilege. Food and power is a theme not only evident in Daniel, but also in other Hebrew Scriptures.²² For example,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²¹ For example, Pharaoh celebrates his birthday with a feast as noted in Genesis 40:22, and Samson celebrates his wedding with a feast as described in Judges 14:10.

²² Keck, *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature; Daniel; Additions to Daniel; Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi.*

after Solomon had a conversation with God in a dream, he awoke and announced a feast.

1 Kings 3:9–15, states:

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?” It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.” Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.

In Job 1, Job and his sons use feasting to celebrate their wealth:

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another’s houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them (Job 1:1–4).

In the book of 1 Samuel, the theme of food and power is also evident with food taxation.

The Lord spoke to Samuel and told him to tell the Israelites:

He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain

and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves (1 Sam. 8:14–17).

The book of Nehemiah also emphasizes food taxation:

Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.” There were also those who said, “We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.”

And there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax. Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others” (Neh. 5:1–5).

What is evident in all the aforementioned Scriptures is that food is being used as a tool to display wealth, power, and control. Daniel chose to deny King Nebuchadnezzar’s intent to control through food offerings and instead decided to remain faithful to God and his eating lifestyle. Daniel showed strength through the power of choice. If churches with food pantries want to have a relational approach with their patrons, they must learn to empower those they are serving by giving them choices and allowing them to have input in the type of goods they receive.

The spiritual practice of empowering others is evident in the ministry of Envision Acres Farm. During my research, I had the privilege of interviewing Matt and Stephanie Stine, a married couple who oversee the operations of Envision Acres Farm in Stockbridge, Georgia. Matt and Stephanie were chosen to maintain the farm because of

their passion for connecting with people, sharing the gospel, and gardening. The two initially met when they moved to Georgia to complete their college education. Matt studied sustainable community development and Stephanie concentrated on cross-cultural studies.

The farm, established in 2020, is an extension of Envision Atlanta, which is part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. The vision for the church's farm originated from the site coordinator, who had a vision of serving twenty different communities in Clarkston, Georgia, where more than 20,000 refugees lived. The refugees relocated from various areas, including Afghanistan, Somalia, the Middle East, and Africa. The goal of using the farm to serve refugees living in Clarkston was intentional and rooted in providing food, building relationships, and sharing the gospel. When chosen to execute the farm plan, Matt and Stephanie researched and drafted a detailed plan in 2019 for bringing the vision of the farm to fruition. After planning and support from the Church and other donors, sixty acres of farmland were purchased with donations.

Refugees of Clarkston were chosen for this farm ministry for several reasons. First, the refugees lived in deplorable conditions. Matt and Stephanie explained that the refugees were the victims of false advertisements. The owners of the apartment communities presented the condos as being in good condition and being located in a nice area. However, once the refugees moved to Clarkston and purchased the apartment, they paid for a living space with broken balconies, caved-in floors, unpainted walls, and inconsistent heat and electricity. The refugees were taken advantage of and are now unable to resell the condo. The living conditions are poor, but many also live in high-

crime areas. Bushes on the property are often overgrown, allowing criminals to hide behind them. As a result of the crime and condo conditions, volunteers come together to do minor repairs and landscaping to cut down possible shrubbery that may be appealing to criminals.

Second, because Matt, Stephanie, and other church volunteers have created relationships with the refugees, they realized that the refugees missed eating cultural foods such as milk from goats and camels. According to Matt and Stephanie, the biggest reason for establishing the farm is to raise camels one day to provide milk to the refugees. Camels' milk is considered one of the most nutritional milks in the world—in fact, refugees perceive the rare and highly desired milk as “liquid gold.” Unfortunately, only one farm in the United States, one in Colorado, raises camels and sells their milk. When the Church realized the importance of camels' milk, they decided to organize a mission project to give the milk to the refugees. Leaders contacted a farm in south Georgia that had camels, and they were able to obtain the camels' milk from the farm. When the volunteers brought the milk to the community in Clarkston, they divided into small groups and knocked on each door to give them milk. When one resident opened the door and was handed the milk, he was utterly shocked and overjoyed with this act of kindness. When the resident asked the volunteers why they were giving him milk, they told him that their goal is to love others the way Christ loves. At that moment, he accepted Christ into his heart. Envision Acres Farm hopes to provide cultural foods such as camels' milk, goats, and fresh produce so that the refugees can experience a piece of home where they live. Currently, the farm has approximately forty goats (the most

sustainable livestock in the world), seventeen hens, ten chicks, three guard dogs, and a half-acre garden with a mixture of fruits and vegetables.

Third, Matt and Stephanie hope that through intentionality and relationship building, Envision Acres Farm can be a place of employment for the refugees. Because of their interaction with the refugees, Matt and Stephanie have learned that they, especially the Afghan women, have a strong desire to work. Many of them grew up gardening and working on a farm in their homeland. Matt and Stephanie's goal is to provide an opportunity for the refugees to have an income and allow space to use their gardening skills. Matt and Stephanie shared a story of an Afghan mother who was visiting the farm with her son. While walking the farm, the son and mother visited the shed where all the tools were kept. When Matt checked on the two, he saw the mother pointing to the gardening tools and reminiscing about the life she'd had back home. When it seemed apparent that she wanted to use the tools, Matt encouraged her to take some of them to dig holes and plant in the garden.

The Church also learned that many of the refugee men worked at chicken plants. Matt and Stephanie explained that the positions at chicken plants were some of the traditional jobs for refugees, because chicken plants are easy for refugees to obtain. However, the workers would leave before sunrise and not return home until after sunset because of the odd hours. Due to the strenuous work hours, the men were not home, could not spend time with their families, and worked long shifts. Matt and Stephanie want the farm to be a place where people can work during regular business hours and return home to spend quality time with their families.

Because the establishment of Envision Acres Farm is considered fairly new, Matt and Stephanie are focusing on caring for the livestock they currently have. Some of the goats will be used solely for dairy, while others will be used for consumption. Because the farm's location is fairly busy, they hope to have a produce stand set up. Stephanie is also very gifted in making soap, cheese, and other products from goat's milk, so they plan to make and sell various products to help generate revenue for the farm. Within the next twelve months, they hope to have enough work on the farm to employ a set amount of refugees. The couple hopes that the farm can serve as a place to empower the youth—where youth can work on the farm in the near future while learning life lessons and earning a paycheck.

After interviewing Matt and Stephanie, I left their farm feeling very inspired and appreciative of their heart to love and serve refugee communities in Clarkston, Georgia. They are two people living out their calling by intentionally building relationships and providing staples foods for people. Although this particular church ministry does not have a food pantry, I believe the mission and work of Envision Farm is an example of how traditional churches with food pantries can connect—connect to Christ, connect to people, and connect people to quality foods. Perhaps traditional churches with food pantries should invite patrons to a seat at the table to get their thoughts on how the church can best serve them through love, service, and food.

In my ministerial experience, I have often been part of meetings and casual conversations about different programming ideas that the church can do for the community. However, most of the planning has been done without listening to the particular community's needs and getting input from community groups. I have

witnessed churches give away donated items or host events that are all based on what the church *thinks* people want and need, not based on what the people have expressed. But Matt and Stephanie’s relational approach to serving refugees communities is an example of doing ministry well. Because they put in the time and energy into forming relationships, they listened to the needs of the people. As a result, they are planting produce and raising livestock that the refugees want rather than trying to provide them with foods that they are *assuming* they want or forcing them to assimilate into American culture.

3.3 A Relational Approach Requires Churches to Seek Surprise

If churches with food pantries want to be more relational with patrons by loving and serving them well, they must continually seek “surprise.” Kavin Rowe discusses this idea of surprise in his book *Christianity’s Surprise: A Sure and Certain Hope*. He emphasizes narrative and speaks to the element of surprise that the early Christians experienced when witnessing about Jesus Christ. For such Christians, their witness involved more than merely being proclaimers of the good news of Christ—their spiritual beliefs also shaped their character, intentions, and engagements. They intentionally sought Christ in all situations and in their human interactions. Furthermore, because they primarily focused on the story of Christ’s life, there was continual surprise in their daily lives through religious education, care for those in need, worship of one God, and accepting the physical consequences that could arise due to their commitment to Christ. Although surprise and storytelling were evident with the early Christians, modern Christianity in the West has struggled to experience surprise fully and, in essence, has

lost focus on the critical narrative, Christ's life. While this belief system exists, it is perhaps distant and difficult to find continuous rediscovery and newness in a modernized society. To foster discovery of and renewal in the Christian faith, Rowe describes three significant ways the early Christians brought surprise as a way to inspire today's Christians: the story of everything, the human, and institution.

First, the early Christians brought surprise through "the story of everything." Rowe states, "Narrative is the stuff within which our whole lives are lived. Which means that we live by stories. The story of everything is a story about all there is."²³ The story of everything is found in the biblical text, and when reading the Bible, one will see that it is an ongoing story that describes one's life with and without God. The early Christians chose to live life *with* God due to the hope they found in the story of the Resurrection. For them, Christ's resurrection was proof that death is not final and the soul has eternal life. They also believed that the Resurrection lent further credence to Christ's claim to be the Messiah and the Christ, and His resurrection confirmed their belief that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Their identity was in Christ. Therefore, the assuredness, hope, and salvation they received through Christ prompted them to put their faith into action by sharing the good news with others.

Second, to spread this transforming news, the early Christians brought surprise through their understanding of *the* Human, Jesus Christ. They believed that Jesus was the only one who is God incarnate and the only human who is the Word made flesh. Jesus is the Original, while all other humans are reflections and made in His image. Therefore,

²³ Christopher Kavin Rowe, *Christianity's Surprise: A Sure and Certain Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), Kindle 178.

because humans mirror Christ, the early Christians knew the importance of seeing Christ in others. As such, they moved accordingly and intentionally sought to be in community with others. Being in a community required reaching beyond boundaries and widening their understanding of their neighbor. To support this notion, Rowe offers the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 to emphasize the fact that “one needs to know who counts as ‘neighbor.’”²⁴ Through the parable, the lawyer ultimately learns to include and accept the Samaritan as his neighbor and see God’s image in that individual.

Third, once they saw people like Christ, the early Christians brought surprise through institution. Institutions, in ancient times, were not well-run businesses that required organizational charts and multi-layered management. Nor were they organizations that consisted of formal practices, official doctrine, and systematic structure. Instead, these institutions reflected creative and organized approaches the believers used to continue sharing Christ with others. Their process involved carefully considering the needs of the people, the resources needed to resolve problems, and how they would be best effective. With a focus on needs and effectiveness, the early Christians developed leaders, and they furthered their ministry through education and care. Their intent to train led to Christian education, specialized curriculum, and schools. Their desire to care was also demonstrated in how they served the poor, nursed the sick, and helped the marginalized. The faith of the early Christians was unshakable, and it was evident in the way they told the story of everything, saw Christ in everyone, and organized to ensure that the story of Christ would live.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 675.

The concept of surprise is evident in the obedience of Ben Johnston Krase and the ministry of Farm Church. I had the honor of interviewing Ben, the organizing pastor and co-chaplain of Farm Church, a church that worships at a nonprofit garden school in Durham, North Carolina. There is no physical sanctuary, but rather the church believes that their sanctuary is any time they gather together, wherever that place may be. Farm Church also maintains a community garden in a neighborhood that is a few miles from the worshipping place. The mission of the church is to follow Jesus by serving others through their farm. They intend to be the hands and feet of Jesus by leveraging the farm's resources to address food insecurity in the Durham area. People of the church gather on Sunday mornings at 10:00 a.m. to plant; worship begins at 11:00.

Ben is a pastor in the Presbyterian USA Church and previously served in Racine, Wisconsin, and Austin, Texas, before relocating to Durham. The concept of Farm Church came from a dream Ben had in 2014. In the dream, Ben was going to serve at church. When he got out of his car, there was no church building—only people worshipping on a farmland. When Ben awoke, he felt that God used the dream to relay a message for him to start a church on a farmland. Ben searched for farm churches and found very little information, so he moved forward with fulfilling the church on a farm vision and began by purchasing the domain www.farmchurch.org. After planning and research, Ben resigned from his position with the church later that year and launched a fundraising campaign with two friends to raise money to purchase farmland. Ben traveled to different states while trying to identify the perfect area.

Eventually, Ben and colleagues decided that Durham would be the place to plant Farm Church. Ben expressed that God was definitely in the details throughout the

process. For example, the current land upon which they planted the garden sits on a corner in a neighborhood and was offered by a friend of a friend of a friend. Ben did not have to purchase the land—he was given permission to use it by someone who believed in his vision. Because there was no physical building, the residents living in the house next to the farm property decided to install an outside bathroom onto their garage for congregants and volunteers to use during worship and throughout the week.

In 2015, Ben and his colleagues moved to Durham; in 2016, Farm Church officially started with worship and began fulfilling their mission of serving Jesus while serving others. Because of the mission, a diverse group of individuals have either supported the church with donations or have chosen to be part of the church. Because of the overwhelming response, the church found a bigger garden with a pavilion that is operated by a nonprofit to worship on Sundays. Even though the worship location changed, volunteers still maintain the garden at the original location to continue providing food to the community. Ben also stated that they like to keep serving the community creative and fun. For example, once a year, they rename the church and incorporate the new name into a ministry project. For one year, they renamed the church “Dumpster Church.” On Dumpster Church Sunday, they gathered in the morning and went dumpster-diving throughout the city to find much-needed cardboard. The cardboard they collected would be used to put under the soil to prevent the weeds from growing. Another year, they renamed the church “Pickle Church.” On that day, the people gathered to make jars of pickles that they would give away to the community. Without the pressures of repairing a physical building or going through formal protocols of getting a mission project approved (as in the traditional church), Farm Church is able to focus their

time, energy, and funding solely on the community—being among the people, meeting people where there are, and doing creative and meaningful ministry as God continues to lead them.

Ben and the establishment of Farm Church serve as an example of bold, obedient faith and the spiritual fruit that comes when people lean into Christianity's surprise. Because Ben was obedient to God's vision, he moved forward with bold faith to execute and bring the vision to fruition. And because of his obedience, people of all backgrounds have supported the mission of Farm Church. Although the church is not a physical building with a food pantry, it exemplifies intentional connection to people and what it means to think outside of the box to serve. Because of their heart to connect directly to the community, church members have been able to provide healthy homegrown foods to disadvantaged groups that may not otherwise have access to these types of foods. Perhaps the traditional churches with food pantries could consider renaming their church once a year and focusing on making food with love to share with others. Alternatively, traditional churches with undisturbed land could consider maintaining a community garden for others to come and experience the love of Christ through healthy foods.

Although this chapter has three primary points to achieve a relational approach, "providing healthy food options" could have been a fourth, as my research is based upon the connection between food, justice, the Church, and Black community. However, I believe providing healthy food options is the natural result of what will happen when one intentionally loves others, helps to empower them, and allows Christianity's surprise to positively affect the food ministry and help it evolve.

CHAPTER FOUR Learning to Love

The focus of this research was on encouraging local church with food pantries to reevaluate how they serve the Black community. As previously mentioned, Black people experience more food insecurity and health disparities than White counterparts. These issues are a result of the historical and ongoing lack of access to resources such as quality foods, discrimination, perception of the Black body as disposable, and the deeply embedded racism in established systems and institutions. If churches with pantries want to serve the Black community better, consideration must be given to historical challenges and tending to all aspects of the whole individual. Once churches realize the interconnection between Scripture, humanity, the well-being of one's body, and healthy foods, then the reevaluation of food pantries can be more productive and fruitful.

What follows in this chapter is a curriculum, rooted in Scripture, to serve as a teaching tool for churches to move toward transformation and restructuring of their food pantry. The first part of the chapter includes questions and information to consider while the leader plans the study. The second part of the chapter includes one in-depth lesson plan and three abbreviated plans with teaching points centered on love for God, holiness, and sacrifice. Scriptures used for part two come from Malachi, a book that teaches love for God, holiness, and sacrifice. Before we can show love and respect for our neighbor, our bodies, and healthy foods, we must begin with understanding how to love God and live in holiness. The third part of this chapter includes one in-depth lesson plan on teaching love for humanity, using Scriptures from 1 John. The lesson plan in part three

was created with contributions from The Rev. Beth Brown Shugart, Deacon, North Georgia United Methodist Conference.

I want to emphasize that I recognize that all congregations and leaders are different. I also recognize that there are multiple ways to teach love. Thus, please note that the teaching tools provided in this chapter are only a resource and by no means the *only* way to teach about love. Also, I encourage each leader to take a spiritual inventory of your congregation and teach themes that are relevant and effective to your ministerial context.

4.1 Pre-Planning Information to Consider (sample answers have been listed with each question):

1. Describe the group for which the study is prepared.

Sample:

The group for which this Bible Study is prepared is the lay leadership and those who serve in the food pantry ministry. Of course, anyone else who is not serving in these positions are more than welcome to attend.

2. Questions the leader might anticipate during the study.

Sample:

The Book of Malachi contains important themes such as the God of love, sacrifice, holiness, and relationships. I anticipate the group asking the following questions:

1. What are significant themes in Malachi?
2. How does this book relate to me personally?

3. How can we, as a church (and food pantry ministry), better relate to the lessons and themes learned from this book?
4. How do we understand Malachi in modern times?
5. What does sacrifice mean?
6. What does holiness mean?
7. How can this book improve how we love each other and our relationship with food, land, and laborers?
8. How can we improve the ways in which we show God's love to others?

In my experiences with teaching groups, I recognize that the method of learning can vary from person to person. Some people learn best through reading, discussion, hearing, lecture, visual aids, or writing, or through combining different methods together. Thus, it is the leader's discretion to incorporate a variety of teaching methods such as lectures, reading, question and answer, visual aids, handouts, small-group breakouts, and general discussion in order to ensure that the study time encourages optimal learning.

3. List your expectations and goals in leading the study. What do you expect participants (including yourself) to learn? What might you learn from the group? How do you expect participants to grow or change? How will their faith be transformed? What might happen to you?

Sample:

I have two goals for this study. First, I want to be in community with a different group of people. I look forward to being in a safe learning environment where the participants and I can become more acquainted, share different life experiences, and connect to one another more through engaging Scriptures. To achieve this goal, I will

provide certain expectations at the beginning of our first class. Those expectations will include confidentiality, a nonjudgmental setting, and sharing our own experiences and insights.

My second goal is to provide a deeper understanding of the book of Malachi. To achieve this goal, participants should expect to learn significant themes found throughout the book, engage Scripture during personal time and during the study, be involved in open dialogue, and ask questions.

I expect participants (including myself) to learn different aspects of love, how to recognize God's love throughout this book, the importance of effective leadership, proper worship, and the importance of sacrificial giving.

As Christians, we are called to a life of holy living, which means that our words and actions should always reflect the love of Christ that dwells within us. I expect participants to grow or change by being purposeful in showing others "agape love." If we are all intent on showing this kind of love that goes beyond emotions, love will always prevail over our differences.

The faith of the participants as well as my own will be transformed because we will have a greater understanding of God's love and of the book of Malachi, and we will be encouraged to share the love that God continues to give to us each day. Teaching this Bible Study will not only give me the opportunity to be spiritually transformed and strengthen my faith, but will also allow me to be in community with and learn from a group of women who are willing to share their incredible faith, extraordinary wisdom, and insightful experiences.

4. What will be the physical setting of the class? How will the meeting space be arranged? Why?

Sample:

The Bible Study will be held in the conference room on the bottom floor of the church. The room will be set up in a classroom-style setting, with three rows of rectangular tables on the left and three rows of rectangular tables on the right. There will be five chairs at each table and a podium in the front of the room. The arrangement is optimal for small-group study and discussion.

5. What teaching methods will you use?

Sample:

I plan to use the following teaching methods: lecture, visual aids, handouts, question-and-answer discussions, supplemental reading, small-group discussion, and video conferencing via Zoom.

6. What theological themes will be addressed? What place will critical study of the Bible have in the group session?

Sample:

The following themes will be addressed during the study: God of love, God of justice, the integrity of worship, sacrifice, and the coming of the Lord. Critical study of the Bible will allow for a deeper understanding of the text and the ability to apply lessons from the text to one's current situation.

7. What opportunities will be provided for participants to connect the insights of the study to their lives?

Sample:

The participants will have many opportunities to connect the insights of the study to their personal lives. For example, the book of Malachi teaches that love is an action, although many people tie love to their current mood. The participants will be encouraged to think of different creative ways they can continue to share the love of God—one that goes beyond our emotions—with others.

8. What is your role as teacher, facilitator, participant, or other?**Sample:**

My role as the teacher is to pray, study, organize study lessons, and provide Biblical teachings to the class participants. My role as the facilitator is to generate effective conversation that will not only cause participants to reflect on Scripture but will also encourage them to connect and apply Biblical teachings to their present lives. My role as a participant is to be in community with others by walking alongside them on the spiritual journey and learning from the wisdom they share.

4.2. Lesson 1: The God of Love

Scripture Assignment: Malachi 1:1–5

(Instructions for the leader will be in parentheses and italicized. Prior to the start of class, the leader will prepare at least 30 folders that will include the class schedule, a copy of the lesson, and two sheets of notebook paper. The leader will set up the room in a lecture style with three tables to the left of the center aisle and three tables to the right of the center aisle. Each table will face the lecture podium and will seat approximately five people. The leader will also bring the necessary materials to conduct the illustration during class, and will refer to the attachments section for further details. The leader will arrive to class at approximately 6:45 p.m. in order to do final preparations and place a folder at each seat. The class will be dismissed at 8:30 p.m.)

*(The leader reads the following greeting and spends approximately **five minutes** on the prayer and introduction to the book of Malachi.)*

Good evening, everyone and welcome to this short study. I hope all is well with you, and I pray that you all had a wonderful weekend. During this short study, we will study and discuss various themes throughout the book of Malachi. The objective for this study is to deepen our love for God—by the ways we sacrifice, are obedient, and strive to be holy in all aspects of our lives. If you are interested in the reading materials used for

the study, I can provide a list of resources for you.^{1 2 3 4 5} The recommended readings for this class are the Bible (study version of your choice) and *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Each of you has a folder that includes a copy of the class schedule and two sheets of notebook paper. You will also need your Bible. Our Scriptural lesson for today's session comes from Malachi 1:1–5:

An oracle. The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals. If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the Lord of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel!"

Before we begin the class, let us begin with prayer.

(Leader says the following prayer.)

Lord, fill our hearts and minds with the comfort of your Holy Spirit. Enable us to receive new insight and revelation of your Word so that we may gain a deeper understanding of you. Bless our time together and may it be fruitful. I say this prayer in the name of your precious son, Jesus Christ, amen.

(Leader chooses a volunteer to read the following focus text for today's lesson.)

"I have loved you, says the Lord ..." Malachi 1:2

¹ Attridge and Meeks, *The HarperCollins Study Bible*.

² Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis*. (Place of publication not identified: LEXHAM PR, 2018).

³ John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2004).

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2019).

⁵ Keck, *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature; Daniel; Additions to Daniel; Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi*.

(Leader reads the following introduction to the Book of Malachi.)

The book of Malachi is about one of the twelve minor prophets and, unfortunately, there is very little personal information about the writer. As we begin the journey into this lesson, please consider the context. The book opens with God speaking to the Israelites through Malachi after the Babylonian exile. The Israelites have returned to Judah and are experiencing much skepticism regarding God's love for them, corrupt leadership, and lessons of repentance, faithfulness, and restoration. There is much confusion and chaos and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Israelites to find God in the situation.

The theme for today's lesson is "the God of love," which is drawn from Malachi 1:1–5. The focus text within this particular passage is the beginning of verse 2, which reads, "I have loved you, says the Lord ..." Interestingly, this passage begins with God's response to the Israelites in which God not only tells them, "I have loved you," but also references the story of Jacob and Esau to serve as proof of that love.

Let's reflect on the relationship between Jacob and Esau, which will help our understanding of God's response in our passage of study. Esau and Jacob were born to Isaac and Rebekah, with Esau being the firstborn. Isaac loved Esau the most, but Rebekah loved Jacob the most. Since conception, the relationship between Esau and Jacob was described as an ongoing conflict. In Genesis 25, we read:

The children struggled together within her;
and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?"
So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her,
"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:22–23)

The conflict continued as Jacob sought to obtain his brother's birthright. During a time when Jacob was cooking lentil stew, Esau asked Jacob for food because he was famished. Jacob provided Esau with food only after Esau granted Jacob's request to sell him his birthright.

The conflict between Esau and Jacob continued when their father was near death. Although Isaac wanted to bless Esau before he died, Rebekah intervened and instructed Jacob on how to receive Isaac's blessing. Rebekah prepared and provided Jacob with a savory meal to take to Isaac, and Jacob wore Esau's garments and hairy lamb skins on his arms so that Isaac, almost blind, would think he was Esau. Once Jacob disguised himself as Esau and provided Isaac with the food, Isaac blessed him. Jacob's name was subsequently changed to Israel and he became known as the patriarch of Israel.

(The leader re-reads Malachi 1:1–5)

An oracle. The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals. If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the Lord of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel!"

*(The leader spends approximately **ten minutes** discussing the answers to the following questions.)*

1. Understanding the background story of Esau and Jacob, how is God's reference to Esau and Jacob in Malachi 1:1–5 proof of God's love?
2. How do you define love?
3. When God shows us love, how should we respond to that love?

(The leader asks for a volunteer to read the section below about love. Provide an opportunity for participants to briefly answer the question asked in this section.)

The definition of love sounds simple and has so many meanings, yet at times it can be difficult to explain and even show toward others. In our society, because we have a tendency to categorize love, it can affect our understanding of God’s love for us. Knowing and feeling God’s unconditional and constant love for us is vital, especially during times of crisis. How can we deepen our understanding of God’s love for us so that we can share and show that same love to others?

(The leader encourages the class to reflect on the following words.)

I’m going to give you an illustration. While I do, please reflect on God’s love toward us and how we do or do not share that love with others.)

*(The leader proceeds to do the following **15-minute** illustration. Refer to the “Air Pressure Science Experiment: Balloon and Jar Instruction Page” in the attachments section of this study for needed materials and instructions. The leader pulls on the balloon to show the class that it will not come out of the jar.)*

(After the illustration is complete, the leader reads the following section.)

God’s love toward us is amazing, and all Christians should be more than willing to share that same love with others. Just as God loves us, we too should love others—in fact, we’re commanded to. In the Gospel of Mark, we read,

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered,

The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The

second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:28–31).

Even though Jesus commands us to love, we do not always do a good job of keeping this commandment and sharing God’s love with others. Just like it was difficult to pull the balloon out of the jar, it is difficult for some of us to pull love out from within and share with others.

(The leader asks the following question. Allow for three to five people to respond.)

1. Why is it sometimes difficult to show others love?

(The leader reads the following section.)

So often we think of love as only being an emotion or feeling. The problem with relating love to an emotion is that our emotions constantly change. We become sad or happy based on how we feel at the moment. We become angry or excited based on our present situation. Our emotions can go up and down within one minute. Because of that, it is important to think of love as an action. The “agape love” that we often hear of is the divine love that is sacrificial and extends beyond emotions. This means that despite our present feelings, we can still show love toward our neighbor without expecting anything in return. As we continue to reflect on God’s love toward us, we will now work in small groups and explore the scriptures.

Exploring Scripture (45 minutes total: 30 minutes working with groups and 15 minutes for each group to share their findings with the class)

(The leader asks each group to read the following scriptures and discuss the following with their table.)

1. Review Malachi 1:2–5 and read Deuteronomy 7:1–11 and Hosea 11:1–2 with the following questions in mind: What is the connection between Jacob and Israel? What is

the connection between Esau and Edom? What is your understanding of love and hate in the Malachi text? Why would God choose Israel as the chosen people if they were consistently ungrateful, disobedient, and the group with the fewest people? How does it make you feel to know that God chooses certain people to fulfill certain responsibilities? How does the choosing or election of certain people correlate to the Body of Christ? How is the decision to choose persons or a group of people a display of God's love?

Quick Scriptural references for the leader to use during discussions:

- Malachi 1:2–5

I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?” Is not Esau Jacob’s brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals. If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the Lord of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel!

- Deuteronomy 7:1–11

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to

be his people, his treasured possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him. Therefore, observe diligently the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that I am commanding you today.

- Hosea 11:1-2

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

2. Read Psalms 135 and Romans 9:1–18 with the following questions in mind: What are examples of God’s love in the text? How can we understand agape love from these texts?

Try to think of three other texts that describe God’s love for us.

Quick Scriptural references for the leader to use during discussions:

- Psalm 135

Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord; give praise, O servants of the Lord, you that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing to his name, for he is gracious. For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession. For I know that the Lord is great; our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth; he makes lightnings for the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both human beings and animals; he sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants. He struck down many nations and killed mighty

kings—Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan—and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel. Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages. For the Lord will vindicate his people, and have compassion on his servants. The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, and there is no breath in their mouths. Those who make them and all who trust them shall become like them. O house of Israel, bless the Lord! O house of Aaron, bless the Lord! O house of Levi, bless the Lord! You that fear the Lord, bless the Lord! Blessed be the Lord from Zion, he who resides in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

- Romans 9:1–18

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants; but “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. For this is what the promise said, “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God’s purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call) she was told, “The elder shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.” What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. For the

scripture says to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.

3. Read Genesis 33:1–17 with the following questions in mind: How was God’s love evident in this passage? Have you learned anything new about love from this passage? How can this story serve as hope in our lives?

Quick Scriptural reference for the leader to use during discussions:

- Genesis 33:1–17

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.” But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.” So he urged him, and he took it. Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.” But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to

my lord in Seir.” So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “Why should my lord be so kind to me?” So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

(The leader asks each group to share a summary of their discussion and new revelations.

The leader spends approximately ten minutes total for all groups to share.)

(The leader reads the following lesson summary.)

Our lesson for today invites us to love beyond ourselves, boundaries, and our differences. We also learn the importance of recognizing God’s love in unaccustomed or unexpected ways. As followers of Christ, we are called to share the love of Christ with others. How will you choose to show love to others this week?

(The leader gives the following assignment for the next class.)

Read Genesis 33:1–17 to be reminded of the ending to the story of Esau and Jacob. How was God’s love evident in this passage? Read Malachi 1:6–2:16.

(The leader spends approximately five minutes asking for prayer requests and then says the closing prayer.)

Prayer: Lord, help us to love as you continue to love us. Help us to recognize your unconditional love and mercy throughout each day. Help us to love beyond barriers that we have created so that we can be more like you. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.

ILLUSTRATION INSTRUCTIONS

Air Pressure Science Experiment: “Balloon and a Jar”⁶

Grade Level: Kindergarten to second grade (with adult supervision!); **type:** physics

Objective: Use heat to change the air pressure inside a bottle, causing a balloon set on top of the bottle to squeeze into it.

Research Questions: When you first set the water balloon on top of the jar, the air pressure outside the jar and the air pressure inside the jar are the same. As the fire burns, air, heated by the fire, rises and pushes its way out of the jar. This hot air pushing out past the balloon causes the balloon to wiggle. However, while hot air is going out, no new air is coming in (the balloon works like a one-way valve, letting air out but not in). So now there is less air, less stuff, in the jar. With less stuff taking up space in the jar, the pressure inside the jar is less than it used to be, that is, less than the air pressure outside the jar. Since the pressure outside the jar is now greater than the pressure inside the jar, what will happen to the balloon?

Materials:

- One large glass jar (a big maraschino cherry jar from a bar works well)
- One balloon
- Water
- A bit of paper
- Matches

⁶ Shelly Smith, “Air Pressure Science Experiment: Balloon and Jar,” 2019, <https://www.education.com/science-fair/article/balloon-bottle-air-pressure/>.

Experimental Procedure:

1. Fill the balloon with water until it's a little too big to fit through the mouth of the jar.
2. Light a bit of paper on fire and drop it into the jar.
3. Quickly place the balloon on top of the jar.
4. Observe carefully.



Terms & Concepts: Air pressure

Author: Shelly Smith

<https://www.education.com/science-fair/article/balloon-bottle-air-pressure/>

Lesson 2 Outline: Sacrifice and Faithfulness

Scripture Assignment: Malachi 1:6–2:16

- I. Opening prayer led by a participant.
- II. Give brief review of Lesson 1.
- III. Ask for thoughts about the assigned reading:
 - a. What were the main themes?
 - b. Were there any new revelations?
- IV. Ask for two participants to read the scripture assignment.
 - a. Priests dishonored the Lord
 - b. The punishment of the priests
 - c. Details of the priests' disobedience
 - d. Reflection of Judah's sin
 - e. *Question:* What were some reasons God was displeased?
 - f. *Question:* How do you define "sacrifice"?
 - g. *Question:* Can you recall times when you failed to sacrifice?
 - h. Offer reflections from the book *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. (pages 37–42).
- V. Read Malachi 1:7.
 - a. *Question:* In what ways do we spiritually pollute things or ourselves?
 - b. Reference page 22 in Kaiser's book: "The pollution was twofold. First, polluted men and women cannot offer pure sacrifices to God while simultaneously reject

his lordship and fail to glorify and enjoy him. It has always been a matter of priorities when we worship the living God. **Our God inspects the offerer first and then his or her offering.”**

- c. Discuss the importance and meaning of God inspecting the “offerer.”
- d. *Question:* How can you surrender yourself to God for transformation?
- e. *Question:* When you sacrifice, what does it cost you?

VI. Malachi 2:10–16

- a. Ask a participant to read the text.
- b. What main points did you gather from the text?
 - i. Infidelity
 - ii. Marriage
 - iii. Emphasis on human relationships
 - iv. Adultery and abandonment
- c. *Question:* How have the Israelites been behaving?
- d. *Question:* How is their human interaction reflective in their relationship and interaction with God?
- e. *Question:* In what ways can our relationship with God be evident in our relationships with other people?

VII. A call to action

- a. Make God a priority.
 - i. Name different distractions that prevent us from making God a priority.

VIII. Questions for reflection

- a. What things have you made a priority in your life?

- b. What steps can you take to always ensure that God is and remains #1?
- c. In the midst of our social distancing, what are new ways you can show others the love of God?

IX. Assignment

- a. Reflect on today's lesson. Write down any thoughts and questions.
- b. Read Malachi 2:17–3:18.

X. Closing prayer

Lesson 3 Outline: The God of Justice

Scripture Assignment: Malachi Chapter 3

- I. Opening prayer led by participant.
- II. Give brief review of Lesson 2.
- III. Ask for thoughts about the assigned reading:
 - a. What were main themes?
 - b. Were there any new revelations?
- IV. Ask two participants to read the scripture assignment.
 - a. *Question:* How do you understand verse 17?
 - b. *Question:* Why was the judgment of God important?
- V. God responds to the question in verse 17 with the following words: “Behold, I will send my messenger.”
 - a. *Question:* Who do you think is the messenger?
 - b. There are different perspectives on the identity of the messenger
 - i. Some commentaries suggest that the messenger is Malachi. The writer is not only speaking of the coming of the Lord in the passage, but he has also mentioned the love of God, the integrity of worship, and faithfulness. Further, the writer also emphasizes the importance of showing respect for God through human interaction.
 - ii. Angel of the Lord: Exodus 23:20–23
 - iii. John the Baptist: Matthew 3:1–6
- VI. Read Malachi 3:6–7

- a. *Question:* What are your thoughts about this verse?
- b. Share thoughts on your understanding of the unchanging nature of God:
 - i. The essence of God does not change.
 - ii. God is consistent.

VII. Read Malachi 3:8–12; 3:13–18

- a. Read Psalms 95:8–11
 - i. Share thoughts on this text.
- b. *Question:* What is the difference between Psalms 95:8–11 and Mal. 3:10?
 - i. There is a direct connection between obedience and showers of blessings.
 - ii. *Question:* Have you noticed manifestations of this in your life?

VIII. Questions for reflection

- a. How do you understand Mal. 3:18?
- b. What steps can you take to always ensure that God is and remains #1?
- c. In the midst of our social distancing, what are new ways you can show others the love of God?

IX. Assignment

- a. Reflect on today's lesson. Write down any thoughts and questions.
- b. Read Malachi 2:17–3:18.

X. Closing prayer

Lesson 4 Outline: The God of Justice (continued)

Scripture Assignment: Malachi Chapter 4

- I. Opening prayer led by participant.
- II. Give brief review of Lesson 3.
- III. Ask for thoughts about the assigned reading:
 - a. *Question:* What were the main themes?
 - b. *Question:* Were there any new revelations?
- IV. Ask two participants to read the scripture assignment.
 - a. *Question:* How do you understand verse 1?
 - i. In my experience, some people struggle with this depiction of God—a God who punishes and shows signs of frustration and anger. They have their own definition of “love” and how God fits with that expectation. As a result, they experience an inner conflict when a more judgmental, emotional God is portrayed.
 - ii. *Question:* In chapter 4, what are your thoughts on how God is portrayed? Does this portrayal positively or negatively affect your current understanding of God?
 - b. Throughout the Bible, God is associated with fire.
 - i. *Question:* Can you name other scriptures that reference God and fire?
 - ii. Reference Hebrews 12:29 and 2 Peter 3:7 for scripture comparison.
Facilitate class discussion.

- c. *Question:* What is the difference between verses 1 and 2? Who is God referencing in both verses? How is God portrayed in verse 2?
- V. Verse 2 mentions “healing.”
 - a. *Question:* From what are people being healed?
 - b. *Question:* Why is this healing significant and critical for humanity?
 - c. In our faith, Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace are vital in our lives.
 - i. *Question:* Since Jesus does the healing, how do these types of grace function within our lives?
- VI. Verses 3–4: A call to obedience and remembrance
 - a. After the destruction, a new generation will rise.
 - i. *Question:* Can you think of other instances of the destruction of something old and the rise of something new? Name scriptural references.
 - ii. *Question:* What is the connection between Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai?
 - b. *Question:* How can we remain obedient to God’s commands?
- VII. Questions for reflection and discussion
 - a. The book of Malachi has taught us a lot about our relationship with God and our relationship with others. We are also able to see God portrayed in different ways.
 - i. *Question:* During this pandemic, how have you been able to remain faithful to God?
 - b. Some consider the Book of Malachi a “transitional” book, since it brings closure to stories involving the Israelites, the old covenant, and a long line of rulers, thus leading into the new covenant with Jesus Christ.

- i. *Question:* During this time of transition, how have you been able to meet Christ in the moment?
- ii. *Question:* What are creative ways you can continue carrying out the mission of Christ and the Church during this time of social distancing?

VIII. Verbal evaluations, feedback, and revelations

IX. Closing prayer

4.3 Lesson 1: The Love for Humanity

Scriptures from 1 John

First Session

(approximately 60 minutes)

Welcome (3–5 minutes)

(The leader will read the following greeting. The leader may add additional comments, announcements, and housekeeping.)

Hello everyone and welcome to this study. During our time together, we will study the work of Saint Tupac Shakur. Thank you for joining us, and I am looking forward to our time together. For this class, you have been provided with a folder that includes a copy of the class schedule and two sheets of notebook paper. All materials for the class will be provided.

Please have an open mind and open heart so that you can grow during this class. I also ask that you help foster an atmosphere of free and open dialogue. When we share, certain conversations may need to remain in this space. Please share your enthusiasm about what you are learning and use discretion about the personal matters.

During this study we will be pairing different books with the Bible: *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People*,⁷ *The Rose that Grew from the Concrete*,⁸ and *Changes*:

⁷ Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016).

⁸ Tupac Shakur, *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* (MTV Books/Gallery Books, 2013).

*An Oral History of Tupac Shakur.*⁹ Do you read through a Biblical lens? When reading secular things do you think Biblically? Reading with a Biblical lens is one of our goals.

During this class, you will also hopefully learn ways Shakur called attention to social justice issues through his use of art. Although Shakur spoke to racism, oppression, and police brutality decades ago, these issues are still deeply embedded in our country's DNA. Therefore, the goal of this class is to use some of Shakur's poems as a tool to discuss social justice in hopes of learning and teaching others the importance of seeing the humanity and equality in every one. Before we begin the class, let us begin with prayer.

Opening prayer (1 minute)

(The leader will say the following prayer.)

Lord, fill our hearts and minds with the comfort of your Holy Spirit. Enable us to receive new insight and revelation of your Word so that we may gain a deeper understanding of you. Bless our time together and may it be fruitful. I say this prayer in the name of your precious son, Jesus Christ, amen.

Introductions (5 minutes)

(The leader will take a few minutes to allow time for introductions.)

Memory verse (1 minute)

(The leader will read the Scripture and instruction.)

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to

⁹ Sheldon Pearce, *Changes: An Oral History of Tupac Shakur* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. (Romans 12:9–13)

Introduction of Tupac Shakur (1–3 minutes)

(The leader will read the following introduction of the Saint. The leader may add information or paraphrase.)

Tupac Shakur was an iconic rapper known for his poetry, activism, and acting career. During his short life, Shakur influenced millions of people while also calling attention to social justice issues. He was born in New York in 1971, where he stayed until he moved with his mother, Afeni Shakur, to Baltimore, Maryland, as a teenager. Shakur was named and raised to be great from birth, mostly due to his mother’s childrearing. Afeni was an activist in the Black Panther Party and a powerful presence in the community. After reading a book about Túpac Amaru II, a leader in the 1700’s who led a revolt against the Spanish in Peru and whose leadership and influence she valued, Afeni chose to name her son “Tupac Amaru Shakur.” In Sheldon Pearce’s book, *Changes: An Oral History of Tupac Shakur*, he states, “Afeni said later that she named her son that because she wanted him to be worldly.”¹⁰

Many people who knew Shakur recognized his contagious personality and extraordinary musical talent. As his rap career gained momentum in Baltimore and then California, fans witnessed how he embodied his name through his sophisticated lyrics and maturity as a musical artist. Shakur eventually became a global artist with top hits such as “Dear Mama,” “Keep Ya Head Up,” and “I Get Around.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Tupac Shakur,” accessed April 18, 2022, <https://www.biography.com/musician/tupac-shakur>.

Yes, Shakur was a musical genius, but he also had a troubled past that included sexual assault charges, gun violence, and multiple arrests. The media often described him as controversial, a thug, and a “gangsta.” Although Shakur seemed to be involved in questionable behavior, he believed in the divine power, inspired others through his work, called attention to a more significant cause, and built a legacy that continues to be recognized postmortem.¹²

Reading of the text (5 minutes)

(Leader will read or will invite a participant to read the following text.)

Tupac felt that through art we could incite a new revolution that incorporated the heart, mind, body, spirit, and soul. He wanted his art to instill honesty, integrity, and respect.

“How Can We Be Free”

by Tupac Shakur

Sometimes I wonder about this race
Because we must be blind as hell
2 think we live in equality
while Nelson Mandela rots in a jail cell
Where the shores of Howard Beach
are full of Afrikan corpses
And those that do live 2 be 18
Bumrush 2 join the Armed Forces
This so called “Home of the Brave”
why isn’t anybody Backing us up!
When they c these crooked ass Redneck cops
constantly Jacking us up
Now I bet some punk will say I’m racist
I can tell by the way you smile at me
then I remember George Jackson, Huey Newton
and Geronimo 2 hell with Lady Liberty¹³

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Tupac Amaru Shakur, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* (New York: Publisher, 1999), 137.

Discussion (10–15 minutes)

(The leader will lead the group in discussion. The leader may use the following questions as a guide.)

1. What thoughts come to mind after hearing Shakur’s poem, “How Can We Be Free”?
2. Shakur states in his poem, “This so called ‘Home of the Brave’; why isn’t anybody Backing us up!” What does “backing up” someone else mean? Why would Shakur and others like him need to be backed up?
3. Keeping our memory verse in mind, what is the definition of a Christian?
4. Does Jesus’ life and the lessons from Scripture teach us how to back up others? If so, how?

Reading of text (1–2 minutes)

1 John 3:11–18

(The leader or volunteer will read.)

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s deeds were righteous. Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. We know love by this, that He laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

Introduction of blind spot (5 minutes)

(The leader reads the following text and will then invite the group to complete two exercises.)

To help in the fight against social justice, one must be able to recognize the humanity in all people. This task sounds simple but can at times be difficult because we are all full of hidden biases or blind spots that are capable of guiding our thoughts, actions, behaviors. In the book *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, authors Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald state:

What are the hidden biases of this book's title? They are—for lack of a better term—bits of knowledge about social groups. These bits of knowledge are stored in our brains because we encounter them so frequently in our cultural environments. Once lodged in our minds, hidden biases can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence. In talking with others about hidden biases, we have discovered that most people find it unbelievable that their behavior can be guided by mental content of which they are unaware.¹⁴

In the book, the authors provide different Implicit Association Tests (IAT). After I pass around copies of the test, I will read the instructions at the top of each page. After I finish, please take two to three minutes to complete both exercises.

¹⁴ Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016).

A

For **INSECTS** and for **words pleasant in meaning**, mark in the circle to the left. For everything else (**FLOWERS** and **unpleasant-meaning words**) mark in the circle to the right. Start at top left, go from top to bottom doing all items in order, then do the second column. At bottom right, record the elapsed time in seconds.

INSECTS or pleasant words	FLOWERS or unpleasant words	INSECTS or pleasant words	FLOWERS or unpleasant words
<input type="radio"/> ORCHID	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> TULIP	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> gentle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> enjoy	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> ROSE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> WASP	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> heaven	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> poison	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> FLEA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ROACH	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> damage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> evil	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> DAFFODIL	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> DAISY	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> cheer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> gloom	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> CENTIPEDE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> MOTH	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> vomit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ugly	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> GNAT	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> WEEVIL	<input type="radio"/>
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<input type="radio"/> LILAC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> LILY	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> love	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> friend	<input type="radio"/>

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Number of seconds: _____
 Number of errors: _____

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

B

For **FLOWERS** and for words pleasant in meaning, mark in the circle to the left. For everything else (**INSECTS** and unpleasant-meaning words) mark in the circle to the right. Start at top left, go from top to bottom doing all items in order, then do the second column. At bottom right, record the elapsed time in seconds.

FLOWERS or pleasant words	INSECTS or unpleasant words	FLOWERS or pleasant words	INSECTS or unpleasant words
<input type="radio"/> FLEA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> GNAT	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> gentle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> enjoy	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> ORCHID	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> WASP	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> evil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> poison	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> ROSE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ROACH	<input type="radio"/>
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<input type="radio"/> CENTIPEDE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> LILY	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> vomit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ugly	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> LILAC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> MOTH	<input type="radio"/>
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<input type="radio"/> love	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> friend	<input type="radio"/>

Number of seconds: _____

Number of errors: _____

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Discussion (10 minutes)

(The leader leads the group in discussion and may use the following questions as a guide.)

1. What were your feelings about the IAT?
2. Did the tests provide new insight into how you think about certain things?
3. On Sheet A, was it natural to group flower names with unpleasant words and insects with pleasant words?
4. Grouping flower names with unpleasant words is perhaps difficult for people to do because there is no shared connection (most people would agree with this). How does this lack of perceived connection also show up in society when thinking about people?
5. What lessons did you learn from the exercises?
6. How do the lessons relate to the 1 John 3:11-18 text?
7. The Scriptural text reminds us to love in truth and action. How do our thoughts about others affect the way we love in truth and action?

Reading of the text (3–5 minutes)

(The leader reads the following text.)

What is implicit bias? According to the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Diversity section, implicit bias is a form of bias that occurs automatically and unintentionally, that nevertheless affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors. Research has shown implicit bias can pose a barrier to recruiting and retaining a diverse scientific workforce. Additionally, the NIH states:

The good news is that implicit bias can be mitigated with awareness and effective bias-reduction strategies. We provide a few examples of these strategies that you can use to reduce implicit bias.

Think of counter-stereotypic examples: Identify scientists of diverse backgrounds in your fields.

Perspective-taking: Imagine what it is like to be a person who experiences people questioning your ability or skills because of their social identity.

Interrupt automatic biased thoughts: Identify when you may be most influenced by implicit bias (e.g., evaluating performance) and create an action plan (e.g., review evaluation criteria before assessing each person's performance in the form of "if" and "then" statements) to increase mindfulness of, or mitigate the influence of, implicit bias.

Education: Join or set up an implicit-bias workshop in your community to raise awareness. While raising awareness of and reducing implicit bias is an important way to promote scientific workforce diversity, implicit bias is only one among many factors. A concerted, integrated approach to increase participation and engagement of underrepresented groups is essential to achieve true diversity and inclusion within an organization.¹⁷

Homework and questions (5–7 minutes):

(The leader provides assignments and instructions for participants to do before the next class meeting.)

1. Before the next meeting, write three ways you will choose to get close to others.
2. Also write three ways you can be brave and back up others.
3. Be prepared to discuss 1 John 2:9-11 and 1 John 4:7-8. Also be prepared to discuss Shakur's poem "And 2morrow":

¹⁷ National Institutes of Health, "Implicit Bias," accessed April 18, 2022, <https://diversity.nih.gov/sociocultural-factors/implicit-bias>.

*Today is filled with anger
Fueled with hidden hate
Scared of being outcast
Afraid of common fate
Today is built on tragedies
which no one wants 2 face
Nightmares 2 humanities
and morally disgraced
Tonight is filled with rage
Violence in the air
Children bred with ruthlessness
Because no one at home cares
Tonight I lay my head down
But the pressure never stops
gnawing at my sanity
content when I am dropped
But 2morrow I c change
A chance 2 build anew
Built on spirit, intent of heart
and ideals based on truth
And 2morrow I wake with second wind
And strong because of pride
2 know I fought with all my heart 2 keep my dream alive¹⁸*

Closing prayer (1–2 minutes)

(The leader says following prayer or invites a participant to pray.)

Lord, continue to open our minds, hearts, and soul to your wisdom. We pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work within us. Hear our prayer, O Lord. Amen.

¹⁸ Tupac Shakur, *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* (MTV Books/Gallery Books, 2013), 141.

CHAPTER FIVE Connection and Community

As the data and literature suggest in chapters one and two, the Black community experiences two significant issues: food insecurity and health disparities. Various contributing factors to the two issues include the lack of access to resources and quality foods, discrimination, diet-related illnesses, and systems and institutions that are deeply rooted in racism. If churches with food pantries want to continue being part of the food justice movement, they need to understand that they should not operate their food pantry with a transactional approach or one that simply collects and donates food. Instead, churches could have more of an impact if they adopted a relational approach to food pantry operations. A relational approach would require churches to focus on loving others well, empowering others, and leaning into Christianity's surprise.

For churches that seek to reevaluate their food pantry ministry, I have provided relevant Scriptural text, church models, and a curriculum to help churches expand their knowledge and move toward a better food justice approach. This chapter will provide additional creative models of churches or organizations that intentionally put their love for humanity and food justice into action.

5.1 Gralan Farms

A third contributor to my research was Greg Earle. I had the honor of interviewing Greg, a farmer located in Madison, Georgia. Greg is the owner of Gralan Farms, which consists of nearly 150 acres. Greg's farm was initially used to grow trees that landscapers would use for landscaping projects. However, the housing market crash

in 2008 greatly affected Greg's business. As a result, Greg shifted to planting produce in 2010 and sold it at a local farmer's market every Saturday during the summer months.

The produce included tomatoes, okra, potatoes, various beans, kale, and lettuce. About five acres were dedicated to growing these items, and Greg also formed relationships with two other farmers who allowed him to grow foods on their farmland. Because their farmlands were located in different parts of Georgia, Greg was able to grow different kinds of foods that do better in certain climates. Because of the amount of produce that he took to the market, Greg had leftovers by the end of the day and decided to donate the excess to a cooperative ministry near the market.

Greg sold produce at the market for a couple of years before transitioning to start a community support agriculture (CSA) program in the area. This twelve-week program offers consumers the chance to buy a share of Greg's farm during the harvest season for a one-time fee. Once the season began, Greg would pack boxes with produce and would deliver the boxes once a week to a central location where customers could pick them up. I met Greg when he worked at the farmer's market and was in his first CSA group, so I can attest to the delicious homegrown foods he works hard to provide to the customers. I can definitely taste the quality and love that he pours into his farm.

During our conversation, we also talked about the state of agriculture and church involvement. Greg stated that he was concerned with the future of farming and agriculture. Because major corporations continue to purchase farmland for the purpose of development, farmlands are decreasing, especially near urban areas. He also told me that the company recently purchased two thousand acres near his farm in order to build an electric car facility. The construction company will remove all the trees and soil, and the

land will be ravaged for industrialization. A stark reality is that the days of farmers providing an array of foods are coming to an end, and if we don't change the trajectory, corporations will continue buying up land and using harmful chemicals to mass-produce.

I asked Greg about church partnerships, and he stated that no church had ever contacted him to partner in all his years of farming—not one. Although Greg's farm is not a physical church building with a pantry, perhaps traditional churches with food pantries could consider partnering with a farmer to use the homegrown produce. This partnership could include “adopting” a certain number of families and paying to be part of the CSA program so the families could have consistent, healthy foods each week. Alternatively, the partnership could include giving the excess produce (that might otherwise rot) to those who do not have access to quality foods.

5.2 Chosen 300

Through research, I learned about Chosen 300, an organization made of local churches and organizations that work together to serve the homeless in the Philadelphia region and beyond. In 1995, Executive Director Brian Jenkins envisioned different ways multiple churches and denominations could come together. This vision began with organizing a one-night prayer service using the Book of Judges as a Scriptural theme. In chapters six and seven, God chose three hundred men for Gideon to fight against the Midianites. On the night of the prayer service, more than three hundred Christians from diverse backgrounds united in prayer with a desire to help others.¹

¹ Chosen 300 website, accessed April 13, 2022, www.chosen300.org.

The following year, Brian met a homeless man (“Mr. Jones”) who was standing outside a theater building. Although many people walked by him, only Brian stopped and offered what he had—forty cents and an apology for not being able to offer the man anything more. Mr. Jones replied to Brian, “But you considered me.”² These words would eventually serve as the mission statement for Chosen 300. The week after Brian’s encounter with Mr. Jones, Brian organized a bagged lunch initiative that he operated out of his home. Over time, the initiative grew to having multiple locations with more than 115 religious organizations, companies, and community groups that distribute over 150,000 full-course meals throughout the Philadelphia region. Chosen 300 also expanded to donating more than 500,000 pounds of food and aid to nine regions, including Guyana, Jamaica, and South Africa. At the main location, volunteers feed homeless persons four times during each week.³

Not only does Chosen 300 provide food to patrons, but they also offer other services that include:

- First Tuesday Learning Lunch

“Learning Lunch” is a program provided the first Tuesday of each month from noon to 1:00 p.m. During the session, they provide workshops to assist individuals in resolving various issues that are preventing them from becoming self-sufficient.

- Center City Bible Enrichment Class

Every second through fifth Tuesday from noon to 1:30 p.m. This class is for those

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

seeking a journey of pleasing God. This class teaches individuals who seek inspirational nourishment about hope in God while seeking a better way of living.

- West Philadelphia Bible Enrichment Class

Every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.. This class is for those seeking a journey of pleasing God and teaches individuals who seek inspirational nourishment about hope in God while seeking a better way of living.

- Barber Day

One of the things that makes a man lift his head up high and gives him the boost he needs is a fresh haircut. Every fourth Monday of the month, barbers from surrounding cities donate their time to give many of the homeless men in the community new haircuts. The goal is to give them a new look on life and the chance to look decent when searching for work. Their computer lab was also full with men searching for a new job.

- Computer Lab

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from noon to 3:00 p.m. Volunteers are on site to help men and women in transition receive assistance with resume writing, online job search, and e-mail setup.

- Expungement Clinic

Free legal consultation from a local law is offered once a week to help those seeking expungement services.

- Computer Training

A five-week computer course for homeless men and women who are interested in moving forward with information technology. These courses provide individuals with the

basic computer concepts needed to enhance their resume and prepares men and women in transition to stay on top of the competitive market.

- G.E.D. Prep Courses

These one-on-one classes are offered to those who are looking to get back on track by seeking the knowledge and skills needed to prepare for their G.E.D.

- Shoes for Success

This program offers a reward to men and women who seek to find, gain, and successfully land a career. When the individual provides a pay stub or letter as proof of employment, they receive brand-new work shoes or boots.⁴

Chosen 300 proves the fruitfulness that can happen when churches join together for a greater cause. A plan that evolved from a prayer meeting to serving bagged lunches out of a person's home has grown to an international operation with the help of volunteers and supporters. Chosen 300 is not only an organization that provides food, but they are also working toward food justice by providing various services that tend to the whole individual. Although Chosen 300 is not a traditional church with a food pantry, food pantries can use their work as a template by creating partnerships with others in the area and providing aid for different aspects of the patron's life.

⁴ *Ibid.*

5.3 Olive Cart Ministry

I also had the privilege of speaking with Kimberly Taylor, an associate pastor at Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Arlington, Virginia. Kimberly oversees the hospitality, outreach, prayer, and evangelism ministries. As part of her responsibilities, Kimberly also supervises the Olive Cart Ministry, which provides food to the Arlington community. The Olive Cart Ministry originally began in April 2020 due to the food insecurity challenges stemming from the COVID-19 crisis. The church received a \$10,000 grant from the Arlington Community Foundation to purchase food. At the time, the church decided to use the funds to purchase food gift cards for senior citizens, differently abled persons, and others who expressed challenges with food insecurity. Kimberly stated that the funds were used to support eighty-eight households.

Not only did the church provide gift cards, but through their service, they were also able to strengthen the relationship between young adults and senior citizens. If any senior citizens were unable to pick up their gift card from the church and go grocery shopping, young adults from the church volunteered to get their gift card, do their grocery shopping, and deliver the groceries to the senior citizen's doorstep. This act of kindness was a display of love for neighbor and showed the wonderful connection that we all have as siblings in the Body of Christ.

Kimberly also explained that they only had a month's worth of food gift cards before the grant funds were depleted. However, many church members decided to donate more money to keep the ministry flourishing. Over time, Kimberly and volunteers realized that receiving a food gift card for either \$75 or \$100 once a month was not enough to fully sustain a family. In April 2021, the church decided to partner with the

Capital Area Food Bank and became a mobile market. Partnering with the food bank allowed the Olive Cart Ministry to provide much more food to families once a month. The food is delivered to the church on Fridays, and the ministry volunteers prepare the bags to be distributed the next morning. While preparing the bags, any food excess is donated to the Arlington Food Assistance Center, a free grocery store for designated patrons.

The Olive Cart Ministry currently supports 150 households. Because of the work the ministry has done in the community, a software company chose to sponsor the church for 2022 so they can continue providing food to households. Since its establishment, the ministry's community partnerships have expanded and also includes a partnership with Milton Bunting, a local pastor and farmer in Eastern Shore, Maryland, who owns a farm and grows vegetables and fruits. Because of his partnership with the church, Milton provides boxes of fresh homegrown produce to give to families three times a year. With each box, the ministry provides a turkey or chicken.

After speaking with Kimberly, I thought of three themes that are evident in the Olive Cart Ministry: Holy Spirit, flexibility, and obedience. Because the church ministry saw a pressing need in the community, the people allowed the Holy Spirit to guide them in finding the best way to provide a solution to food insecurity. Because of their obedience, they were able to form partnerships with a company and local farmer; because of their flexibility and desire to work together, the volunteers continue moving forward to ensure that their community eats. From their ministry, church leaders get a glimpse into ways that God continually provides and how forming partnerships provides significant benefits.

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to urge local churches to reevaluate the way they serve Black communities through their food pantries. Because Black people experience more food insecurity and health disparities than their White counterparts, food pantries should then consider the challenges that Blacks face, as well as revamping their food pantries ministries to be more relational. A relational approach would require churches to love well, empower others, and lean into Christianity's surprise. Further, as this research concludes, it is important to note that all church-based food pantries should be intentional about being in community with its patrons. Community is a concept that Jesus Christ taught all believers through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, which are outward signs of inward grace that allow the opportunity for people to be in community with Christ and each other. Baptism and Holy Communion are both powerful signs of divine grace given to all people:

Wesley viewed the sacraments as crucial means of grace and affirmed the Anglican teaching that "a sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same." Combining words, actions, and physical elements, sacraments are sign-acts which both express and convey God's grace and love.⁵

⁵ The United Methodist Church Discipleship Ministries, "By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism," n.d., <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/by-water-and-the-spirit-full-text>.

Baptism is essential because it provides a connection and creates a covenant between the one being baptized, the community of faith, and God. With this covenant, the sinful life dies and a new life in Jesus Christ is born.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor. 5:17–19)

Holy Communion is profoundly significant because it represents the past, present, and future. Because of what Christ did in the past, today we welcome the presence of God and remember the unconditional love and gift of life that Christ gives, as we also look forward to the heavenly banquet we will experience in eternal life. Christ offered His body and died so that we may be saved from sin and have eternal life in heaven. We must never forget the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus paid for each of us. Sin no longer has victory over our lives because of Christ.

In Scripture, we also find that Jesus wanted to be remembered. When He met with His disciples for their last supper, “Then [Jesus] took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19)

Just as Christ intentionally invites us all to commune with Him through Baptism and Holy Communion, we too must intentionally commune with all people and in all contexts. Therefore, the fight against food justice through the mission of food pantries requires intentionality. Churches leaders should be intentional about advocacy, education, respecting all humanity, holding powerful agencies accountable, and tending to the whole

individual. This type of work never stops and the work of Christians to bring about justice should never end.

If you are a serious Christian, then you never completely “dry off” from you baptism, to use a wonderful phrase of Gerard Baumbach. The sacrament is a living reality, not merely an unrepeatable event in the past.⁶

⁶ Paul J. Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful: Key to a Living Church* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2005), 22.

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BIOGRAPHY

Cynthia was born to The Reverend Isaac Whitehead, Jr. and Mrs. Hattie Whitehead of Athens, Georgia. She is a 2005 graduate of the University of Georgia, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and a minor in sociology. Cynthia is also a 2011 graduate of Candler School of Theology at Emory University, where she earned a Master of Divinity degree with a concentration in church and community leadership.

In 2020, Cynthia was ordained as an Elder in Full Connection in the North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church. Currently, Cynthia serves as an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church of Lawrenceville. Cynthia has also served at Ben Hill United Methodist Church (Atlanta, Georgia), Conyers First United Methodist Church (Conyers, Georgia), Kelley Chapel United Methodist Church (Decatur, Georgia), The Greater Piney Grove Baptist Church (Atlanta, Georgia), and First Baptist Church (Gainesville, Georgia).

Cynthia is married to Marcus Jackson, who holds a master's degree in education. They are the proud parents of their daughter, Peyton, and their son, Marcus Jr. Her hobbies include traveling, cooking, and writing children's books.