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CONTEXTUALIZATION

Moral Failure and Christian Evangelicalism

This summer, I had the privilege of researching the relationship between the Christian evangelical church and moral failure. The findings from my research led me develop a project applicable to Christian American churches. My knowledge of moral failure and productive development work unearthed the importance of looking at the United States' context concerning Christianity. Americans in the United States credit themselves as a nation found on Christian values. Yet, from the birth of the country, many Christian American's have participated in moral failure through their actions. Through the examples of Manifest Destiny and extreme patriotism, I will explain the moral failure that exists in the US on a macro-level. I will then continue to provide detail regarding the context of the seminar. Since cultures are constantly reinventing and changing, I plan to use context as the groundwork for more research in the church regarding moral failure and my future as a community developer.

Why Context? In the realm of community development, context provides critical information to the community's circumstances. Over the past few years as a graduate student of Northwest University's International Community Development, I have learned that my academic knowledge in an organization will be useless and even harmful in communities, if it is not implemented correctly. As a result of the courses that I have been able to complete within my graduate study, I now recognize that my understanding of a community may be limited. In order to combat this limitation, it is important to remember that effective community development work is first about listening and learning and then taking steps to promote the actual work being made.

So, when practitioners in community development ask why contextualization is so essential, their answer is found in the reality that it takes time to understand how the programs, processes, and interventions created will be useful and promote positive change. Just because specific communities have the same need does not mean that those communities should be approached the same way or have the same solution. It is only when a practitioner understands this distinction that they can use it to their advantage and find real solutions to the problem, in this case, towards a more sustainable development model.

Moral Failure in the United States of America

Manifest Destiny. The subject of inquiry for my project is moral failure in the context of the American evangelical Church. Before even being able to address the American evangelical Church's current context as it concerns moral failure, it is important to analyze part of the US's history with moral failure. A clear example of this is at the history that the church has had with the moral failure of colonization. Specifically, there is the example of Mexico and how the United States perpetuated the country's colonization. On February 2nd, 1848, Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo after losing the Mexican American war. The demise of Mexico in the war resulted in the United States taking over half a million square miles that were possessed because of ambition and greed. Yet, the defeat of the war became only the beginning because it “set in motions a pattern of structural injustice against Mexican and other Latino/a groups that continues to the present day” (Chao Romero 99). The relevance of this war is found in the aggression of greed fueled by the ideology of manifest destiny.

Early colonizers of the United States believed it was their God-given right to claim the land but was only a “romanticism of a pastoral ideal defined by the punitive ideology of exclusion” (Vandivinit 166). In retrospect, the nation's rhetoric that the United States was

founded on Christian ideology was misconstrued for tactical dominance and land ownership. In this example, the American evangelical Church is guilty of moral failure as it relates to the approach it took towards the Mexican American war and beyond that to America's current moral failure.

Nationalism. In current times, it is easy to dismiss claims of moral failure during the Mexican American war because the war happened more than a century ago. Yet, this issue persists because facets of this ideology have continued to infiltrate the American evangelical church through nationalism. In the United States, nationalism has led Christians to idolize and follow in "blind obedience diametrically opposed to critical reflection" regarding foreign relationships, decision-making that negatively affects other countries, and political stances globally (Fornieri 108). The Christian American Church is accountable for not advocating for the inequitable treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that took large portions of Mexican land. This is an example of how the Christian American Church as a whole is complicit of senselessly following the decisions that result in harmful repercussions for other nations.

The moral failure of nationalism is partly a result of the United States' cultural predisposition of being a masculine country. Masculine countries have a clear distinction between gender roles and "men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede et al. 140). Masculinity in individuals shapes the perspectives and behaviors of the society. According to Hofstede, a pioneer research of different dimensions of cultures, the United States scores a 62 out of 100 on masculinity (Hofstede Insights). A 62 out of 100 on the scale shows that the United States is a competitive nation. Across the country, nationalism influences the "need for ego-boosting behavior . . . as well as the tendency to resolve conflicts by

a show of force.” (Hofstede et al. 400). High masculinity in the United States is evident in how the nation of the United States proudly flaunts being the country with the strongest military in the world. Christian Americans are guilty of promoting nationalism and an us vs. them mentality concerning other countries. This is a pattern of isolation that leads to moral failure because the country’s ideology prevents Christian Americans from reconciling with other countries when their community has had a history of thinking that they are superior to those countries. Christian Americans need to begin questioning cultural norms within their society and begin to advocate for reconciliation practices to live into their Christian ideology as opposed to their national ideology.

The Importance of Context to Find, Restore, Equip, and Send

Finding the Community. Not only is moral failure on display on the macro-level in America, but it can also be observed on a smaller scale of the local context. In Restore City Church’s Growth Track Seminar, the church-growth discipleship model begins with identifying people that the churches should focus on bringing towards community and restoration. Churches must understand the context of their community. Context shapes the approach that churches need to take in order to reach the people they are trying to guide through a discipleship model. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is the Messiah that addresses with the individual and systemic relationships between people. Christ understood that humanity is problematic and addressed the reality that “God’s redeeming work does not separate individuals from the families, communities, and larger social systems of which they are a part of” (Myers 99). The importance of community is seen in the “find” stage of Restore City Church’s Growth Track. It is complicated, challenging at times, and requires extensive efforts but it means allows individuals to grasp the community's context and people that Christians want to reach. Lead Pastor of

Rainier Avenue Church, Peter Chin, is a clear example of how context helps churches reach the people they are trying to find. Chin believes that at Rainier Avenue Church, they “want to be a church that celebrates the global church and celebrates the unique stories, heritages, and narratives from which people come” (Chin 0.37). Rainier Avenue Church and its leadership are a prime example of being rooted in the community and understanding the group of people they want to reach and reach those individuals best. Churches need to understand their local community, so that they can reach the community while acknowledging their social realities that they live in.

The Christian Definition of Restoration. In the same context of Christianity, the meaning of Biblical restoration is vital for the project to be addressed accurately. The idea of restoration varies across different Christian communities. However, within Christianity, there is an emphasis on reconciliation between people and God, people and nature, and between people and people because they must reconcile if restoration will happen. In Christianity, “sin is the foundational reason that relationships do not work for the well-being of all, and thus dealing with sin through redemption in Christ is the beginning of development” (Myers 69). Addressing moral failure in people's lives paves the way for the Church to become united and reconciled as a whole.

I was able to see how restoration has been possible through individual experiences. As Ajelet Bergman, a congregant at Restore City Church said, churches “need to make sure to take the time and see that people are growing. People need to know that they matter” (Bergman). This mentality not only applies to church congregants, but it applies to leaders as well. Ministry Professor at Northwest University, Nick Steinloski echoed this ideology in how he saw the need for healing and accountability while still remaining rooted in the community. He explained that “you might have to step away from your staff position but not from community and not from an

opportunity of being restored” (Steinloski). Regardless of the consequences, if healing practices are being reinforced, restoration from moral failure will inevitably happen through discipleship.

The way that accountability can be reinforced by the community is through a discipleship model. The discipleship model then becomes a dynamic tool for the community that leads to transformational change. Christianity is a religion that is not meant to be passive, but rather is intended to tackle difficulties in a constructive manner. The conflict that arises from addressing moral failure is transformational because it is a conductor of change that “envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity to engage a broader context, to explore and understands the system of relationships and pattern that gave birth to the crisis” (Lederach 30). By not being intimidated by crisis, churches can address the messiness of people that have gone through moral failure and guide them towards a life filled with reconciliation and restoration. Christian Americans need to follow the Biblical commandment to foster healthy relationships by paving redemptive steps for individuals who have morally failed themselves, God, and the community. *Equipping the Individual for the Collective Body*. Part of the drive for restoration is founded in restoring the broader community so that those individuals can then walk alongside other congregants and leaders and therefore, lead the community collectively. Leading collectively gives room for people “to shift from a self-centered consciousness to awareness of the larger whole” (Kuenkel 30). It is unrealistic for church congregants to begin leading when they do not understand the community's context and how to best work together. Still, part of the restoration process lets people acknowledge the brokenness in their relationships and begin the merit of support and mutual respect. There is also value in the innovation that each community member can bring. In Christianity, everyone has different roles and different strengths. Similarly, since

having a strength also implies having a weakness, working together to improve and help others is essential.

Christians believe that God is composed of three distinct beings who work together to compose the Holy Trinity, operating as one spiritual force. Like the model of the Trinity, Christians believe that humans are all different but are meant to work together. Christian church understands that "there are different kinds of gifts but one spirit...different kinds of service but the same role . . . different kinds of working but the same God works them all of them in all men" (1 Cor 12.4-6). Each person fills a gap with their skills and talents. Since each member of the church can contribute to the development of the community, leaders are not only ones burdened with this responsibility. Robert Daniels, Family Life Pastor at Rainier Avenue Church emphasized the importance of supportive habits within Christian churches. His example showed how reinforcing systems where the community partners with leadership "begin to build a muscle within the community. . . that starts with leadership that is not the center of attention . . . [and] where leaders let go and redirect" (Daniels). Even though everyone has the same value, Christianity's teachings show different people in different facets of the work towards restoration in the community. The individuals in the organization must use the strengths and skills because Christian principles teach that an individual's choices affect the community. Many times, individuals can only improve weaknesses by accountability within the confines of a healthy community, and "living for just [oneself] isn't an option, because everything [one does] impacts other people" (Clawson 186). Gifts that people have are both a blessing and a responsibility. In Christianity, the stewardship of the skills people have is essential because it is the means by which the church is supported.

The Creativity of Sending. The final step of discipleship entails sending people out into their communities and everyday spaces. Once individuals are equipped within the community, they can begin to use their strengths in people allows them to improve the community outside of the church. There is a stepping out that takes place because “people first come to believe that change is possible and then they learn how to advance change themselves” (Bornstein and Davis 43). During the transmitting phase, the church community can use creativity to send people out according to the context and best practices aimed for that church community. For the project, I engaged with the Restore Groups aspect of discipleship to learn how small groups of teaching engagement methods are useful to upbuilding people. Restore Groups are a valuable asset because they are versatile depending on the context of their specific church. The format that Restore City Church has developed is simply a model that other churches can adapt to best fit their community's needs. The Restore Groups are also a creative asset to the community because they provide structure for leaders in the church to facilitate groups where other leaders can emerge.

The leaders at Restore City Church are another asset that I can engage with for this project. Restore City Church is unique in the various leaders who have had personal stories of moral failure and restoration. Having the ability to use storytelling and giving testimonies for people to hear will create a sense of transparency and hope for churches struggling with how to approach moral failure. The perception that evangelical Christians have fortified on leaders in the church is important to acknowledge because “humans beings are defined through perception of others [and it] determines the action of other people towards the individual” (Holmes 136). Having leaders be transparent through storytelling about the moral failure that they have had is a creative way of addressing a problem in the context. By reinforcing transparency through the

asset of storytelling, leaders are creative in how they connect with church congregations. By using storytelling, leaders in churches are also setting an example for community members to do the same while keeping in mind the presentation of storytelling that best fits the church's local context.

Being a Community Developer that Promotes Partnerships and Advocacy

There is Hope for Partnerships. I recognize that moral failure in the Christian context is a deeply rooted problem that needs advocacy, and I hope that I can use the tools I have learned to take positive steps in the Christian community. From the history of the United States of America, there is evidence that moral failure is consistently debilitating the evangelical Church, preventing the United States from thriving on a macrolevel. Moral failure may not ever go away. However, the way that Christians approach moral failure can lead to transformational change. Currently, the discipleship model that Restore City Church will teach at the seminar is limited to each individual church. I hope that once churches have successfully implemented the discipleship model to their local church contexts, they can develop partnerships with other local churches with tools learned from the seminar to address the needs of the city better. By churches partnering with each other, they will address more needs and work alongside each other in church coalitions.

Christian Advocacy. The seminar may be the first time church congregants learn about the correlation between moral failure and discipleship. Therefore, the seminar will set the stage for a catalytic event that educates communities on accountability and restorative practices among leadership. The catalytic event of Restore City Church's Growth Track will be an event that moves churches "from the isolation and stagnation of life in homogenous groups and break through into a new reality" (Salter McNeil 45). The new reality that churches will be

experiencing is an awareness of the church community which consequently leads to transformational change through advocacy. Since Christianity is a religion based on the belief of support and love, Christian communities will see there is a need for advocacy of individuals in their communities that are metaphorically falling through the cracks.

Testimonies Across Community Development. Another lesson that I will be carrying into my future as a practitioner outside of the evangelical Church is the power of storytelling.

Testimonies are commonly used in Christianity and were one of the methods of presenting through the seminar to best address seminar participants' context. They are tools of engagement that are both relational and educational. Testimonials are also valuable means of storytelling because they do not need formal education or a set of skills. They offer something that education alone cannot teach, context. In community development testimonials are powerful because one person's testimony "requires a different way of relating to the local community, for they must become partners in the ministry, helping to educate the 'ministers' to the realities from their perspectives" (Myers 213). Practitioners in community development have a lot to learn through the means of these stories, but they must first begin the work of listening with humility and awareness. By practicing listening, practitioners can show the community both sides can learn from each other. Storytelling is a great way for practitioners to learn from the community and their context because the stories are interlaced with values, rituals, and cultural information that lead practitioners to become better more informed community developers.

Conclusion

Community development work is complex, which is why context is paramount to grasp. My time doing extensive qualitative research and learning how to best learn the context of a community has enabled me to learn more about the link between moral failure and Christianity on both

macro and local levels. The American Church has a history of moral failure that extends to the personal level. Through Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar, the four stages of discipleship are all centered around the context. As a result, the community directly benefits from the church's work. It is also important to remember that the project does not fully address all the complexities that more research and advocacy work can do. Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar is meant to lay the foundational work upon which future practitioners and projects can continue to develop.

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QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Defining Qualitative Inquiry

Within my search aiming to answer the question of how churches can do a better job at addressing the moral failure crisis within the Christian American Church, I found that the way in which I conducted my research affected the insights that I was able to access. My primary focus of conducting research was through qualitative research. The reason I adhered to qualitative research methods was because its purpose is to explore in-depth questions. It does not neglect quantitative analysis but refuses to be constrained by quantifiable numbers and statistics. The complexities of qualitative inquiry are “a means of answering questions . . . [and] why things are the way they are” (Merriam and Tisdell 18). Qualitative research sees through the lens of senses, perceptions, and insights on how society shapes social norms, standards, and customs. By being descriptive, qualitative research seeks to be comprehensive.

Qualitative research is also life changing. It allows the researcher to be versatile and embrace uncertainty. Although it can be confusing and nuanced, it allows the researcher to discover new experiences and gain a greater understanding of cultures. It includes empathy and a willingness to let go of biases, to learn through the experiences and observations. For community developers, qualitative inquiry is a powerful tool because it focuses on relationship building. The result “is both a process and a product” (Merriam and Tisdell 29). That process and product shape the community developer's life to better understand the target community they are interacting and working with.

Interviews as a Method

As someone born and raised going to a church my whole life, I thought I had a comprehensive concept on how Christian Americans define moral failure in their communities. I could not have

been more surprised than when I began the process of interviewing. I interviewed both church leaders and congregants on their personal experience of Christianity and moral failure. The interviews I conducted were a means to recognize that there are differences that exist in individuals that live within a community.

Through interviews, I encountered stories that forced me to confront my biases and reevaluate my research trajectory. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were a method I used to immerse myself into the context and gather crucial information from the people to create a project proposal that was relevant to the need. The information that I gathered from interviewees informed me of the context that consists of “the practice of designing programs and processes with attention to the particular cultural characteristics and inherent resources of a given people, place, and time” (Inslee). In my case, I was able to use the method of interviews to design a discipleship seminar (Restore City Church’s Growth Track Seminar) to help churches deal with moral failures in healthy ways.

Defining Moral Failure within its Context. My approach to semi-structured interviews was what led me to discover the flaw in my questions. How could I even begin exploring the topic of moral failure when my definition of moral failure was limited to sins identified in the Bible? My interview with Neah Lee, Interim Worship Pastor at Rainier Avenue Church, indicated that I needed to reframe my idea of what moral failure was in the first place. Moral failure is a phrase that “can unlock a flood of insider knowledge” and me placing constraints on its definition, limited me to what I could research (Sunstein and Chiseri 282). Everyone’s interpretation of moral failure differed. Lee’s example of the mental health stigma in Christian Americans was a prime example that moral failure needed to be viewed through the lens within a community. To her, the American Church’s lack of addressing mental health was a type of moral failure: “It’s

laundering out your issues . . . dishonoring your family, it's this whole saving face thing and especially if you're a leader. If you're a leader then you should have your act together, why do you need to see a counselor, don't you have God and faith? I mean you're supposed to lead the sheep . . . I had to process all this stuff about being a pastor's daughter and the way people in the church hurt my parents" (Lee). By using semi-structured interviews, Lee was not limited to an agenda in our interview and she had the liberty to define moral failure through her experiences. Had it not been for open ended questions and the method of a semi-structured interview, I would not have been aware of how American Churches' reactions to mental health is an act of moral failure.

The Exposing of Moral Failure. The reason I even decided to address moral failure is because, moral failure is a deep-rooted problem across Christianity, yet, many churches struggle with even talking about it. Moral failure is chaotic, and churches are scared of what it may result in. On the other hand, the disruption that moral failure brings makes churches acknowledge that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Through an interview with lead pastor of Rainier Avenue Church, Peter Chin, I was again challenged in my thinking about the role that moral failure plays in churches when it comes to light. In my interview with Chin, he expressed the importance of the church's response to the disruption and changes through an analogy:

In tech fields they use an expression called disrupt your model. It's when a company makes you obsolete. It's a positive expression of innovation, not sitting back, always recognizing to be ahead of the curve. When they talk about disruption, they actually mean a positive thing and as a church these past four years have exposed something that has to be exposed and addressed. Surgery is cutting someone open; it's exposing nerves and

tissue and blood but it's for a good reason. . . it is when we are comfortable that we hate disruption, but Christians and comfort aren't supposed to go hand-in-hand. (Chin)

Chin's acknowledgement to how Christian churches should perceive moral failure as an opportunity to bring solutions challenged my understanding of the context of Christian American Churches as they relate to the Biblical Church. The Bible calls Christians to walk in light ". . . as he [Christ] is in the light, we [Christians] have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us all from sin" (*New International Version Bible*, 1 Jn. 1.7). Through this interview, I shifted my negative outlook on moral failure coming to light. I realized that although churches struggle with moral failure, having it in the churches is inevitable and should be embraced with a good discipleship model that allows for people to grow. Again, interviews served as a method to reframe my thinking on the Biblical context that Christians take to addressing moral failure.

The Permanence of Resilience. Throughout my interviews, I found that the context of the community is important when considering the perceptions of moral failure. Lee is an example of how the definition of moral failure varies from person-to-person, and Chin shows how moral failure needs to be exposed regardless. Yet, I found in my research interviewing people that the disruption that comes from moral failure is complicated when the definition of moral failure is not clearly stated because some individuals may find certain acts disruptive that other individuals do not.

Through an interview with David Gushee, a Christian theologian, and author of *Changing our Mind*. I realized why creating an effective model of moral failure that is used Church-wide can be difficult. Despite being a part of the Christian community in the US, Gushee's definition of moral failure received negative backlash when he shifted his theological

stance on the LGBTQIA+ community and became affirming. Daryll Stephens, a researcher on affirming churches defined the term affirming as a ministry that is fully inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community and their experience in the context of faith (193). Despite Gushee's stance as an affirming theologian being controversial, the story of the LGBTQIA+ community shaped his theological understanding and how he saw the need to advocate for them and change how he saw moral failure in the Christian American community's response:

The more experiences and more stories that we hear, the more our ability to be a friend and love grows . . . the problem with the church is that they drive away people from the Church. Once you're committed about an issue, and you're really committed about an issue your life gets reshaped and that's what happened to me. Old friends are lost and new ones are gained. Old understandings are lost, and new ones are gained . . . if the suffering of LGBTQ+ is more important than our own disruption, then we will do it.

(Gushee)

Gushee's love for people guided the way he reshaped his theological framework. Despite not being included in some theological circles, Gushee is a clear example of the contrasting definitions to moral failure in the Christian American Church. He saw moral failure in the way the church has addressed the LGBTQIA+ community and understood that despite the pain that the backlash may bring, he felt the need to change his theological perspective to be affirming. Other churches would have responded differently to Gushee claiming his theological stance is an act of moral failure and disagreed with the response the Christian American Church needs to take. Had I focused on using only quantitative data, I would have developed a project proposal that is only effective in a limited number of churches.

Observations as a Method

Interviews were a great way of understanding the context of moral failure in Christian American Churches, but another method that was just as meaningful for my qualitative inquiry project was observations. Thorough participant observations take time because it means being immersed in the culture of the community. Although insightful, interviews cannot teach “happenings, personal feelings, ideas, impressions, or insights with regard to those events” (Merriam and Tisdell 30). Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater define gaze as “selective perception...shaped by our experiences” (165). Acknowledging a spatial gaze is to go beyond the physical environment. I must look at “an abundance of evidence: fieldnotes, photos, maps, and background history gathered over time” (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 172). My opportunity as an observer enabled me to formulate hypothesis on the culture and its values based on the context that I was working in.

By being a participant observer, I had the privilege of assessing the everyday life of the churches and practice reciprocity through my actions. By practicing reciprocity, the method of mutual exchange, I created a sense of trust with the communities I was doing research in. Participating and observing enabled me to learn through experiences with the community. Not only was I able to learn more about the context, but I saw how to collaborate with churches in way that entailed “frank acknowledgement of organizational limitations, the affirming of another group’s capacities, and the joining abilities of resources in pursuit of mutually established goals” (Inslee). My need to rely on observations was essential to becoming a researcher that listened to and focused on how the community functions because my knowledge was limited in the communities that I was working with.

Restore City Church Staff Meetings. I experience how Restore City Church's staff valued transparency when I was attending staff meetings. I concluded that transparency was a value through the conversations the team has had about finances, changes, and hardships staff members were having in recent weeks. Whenever anyone would share their experience and perspective, the rest of the staff members had a posture of listening. Everyone seated at the tables would look at the person speaking directly, they would nod occasionally to show they were attentive to the words being spoken, and the room was silent to reaffirm whoever was talking that their words were important and being acknowledged. Not one person spoke over another individual, but they would respond to the statements that was made by the individuals. By seeing staff meetings at Restore City Church in action, I was able to use observational methods to develop a project proposal that the church could use to help other churches accurately address moral failure.

Language used in Christianity. Another way I participated in observation method was by focusing on the language being used. In my research, I have found that the language used by the people within the culture has been the primary method people used to communicate how their culture functions and "one key word can unlock information about the habits, beliefs, geography, and history of a whole group of people" (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 276). During my weeks of research, I learned that words like "grace," "sin," "relationship," and "forgiveness" consistently came up. These terms showed the values that the churches lived by. These words shaped my understanding of moral failure in their church and how restoration was enforced in their communities. They also became the basis for how to collaborate with the community to create a discipleship model that mirrored the principles that were being described through sermons, conversations, and attitudes among church leadership and congregants.

Evaluating Outcome Markers

My goal is to focus on how these ideas of discipleship can be translated to other communities where congregants and leaders are not supporting each other well. I was able to share my experience with them and use my skills to share ideas that allowed “stakeholders [to] have the opportunity to control their own development process . . . the ultimate project design will be stronger, and [increase the] project ownership among stakeholders” (PMD 19). Essentially, Restore City Church’s Growth Track Seminar is a model that is transferable to other churches so they can take it and apply it their community in the way that fit the needs of their community. Although I used the knowledge of Restore City Church as a tool to develop a seminar, my hope is to further evaluate whether their Growth Track method works in different contexts.

Churches will find copowerment through implementing Restore City Church’s Growth Track Seminar to how it best fits their community context. To ensure that the seminar is helpful to the communities, outcome markers are an essential part of evaluating the success of copowerment. The outcome markers “focus on the people or groups involved in the program—the people or groups it touches . . . it is important to ensure that staff focuses on the participants, not their own actions” (Reisman and Clegg 14). As well-intentioned as the project may be, if it is not helping churches create discipleship models that are proactively addressing moral failure, then the project is not doing the job it was created to do. Having a good system of evaluating the outcomes can also show how the project can be improved and any changes that are necessary can come to light. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods is a key part of understanding the effects of the project.

Quantitative Data. Despite quantitative data being limited in what it can reveal about a community, it gives an overview of quantifiable insights about the community. Since time needs

to be used valuably, quantitative data can provide a quicker means to understand broad results.

An outcome that I expect to find in my project is a decrease in members of the church that have failed to meet the moral code of the church. On the other hand, there is also an increase in the amount of support leadership and congregants feel.

A questionnaire will be used to measure statistical data on any changes in members of the church that have failed to meet the moral code of the church. The questionnaire will consist of questions evaluating the language that is being used in churches. How often are positive vs. negative words used in an interview concerning congregants that have failed to meet the moral code of the church? What percentage of congregants that are involved in a Restore Group? And how often do congregants and leaders attend a Restore Group? The benefit of using the quantifiable data is also that the information being received is objective.

Qualitative Data. While quantitative data will be used to understand broad findings in the research, sample sizes will be essential in seeing how the church communities have changed the way they address moral failure and approach discipleship. By looking at smaller sample sizes, thorough interviews, observations, and experiences, I can understand whether my proposed project will be successful. The congregants and church leaders will both be interviewed to evaluate how they felt the seminar affected their church community, whether they feel supported in their community, and any feedback that they have on whether the seminar was successful or not. As previously seen in examples, churches are complicated because they are run by people. Any information that is not processed through statistical numbers can be gained through subjective understandings. Through qualitative evaluation methods, churches will be able to identify “what went wrong and do better next time . . . [and] sidestep the psychological pitfalls of covering up, rationalizing and guilt” (Kelley and Kelley 51). Specific experiences will only help

to enrich the information on how effective the seminar was and their personal opinions on what they gained out of the seminar.

Qualitative Evaluation Methods in Community Development

Just as I will use qualitative research in my proposed seminar project, community developers can use qualitative research to enrich their knowledge on communities. Specifically, the use of questions can help them better understand different aspects of the community which includes, “relationships among people, departments and organizations to unleash a wealth of information, ideas and best practices” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 64). Yes, measurable outcomes are essential to understanding the success of the seminar but learning the complexities with the results is just as important to see how the seminar can be improved. Similarly, community developers can learn how to improve their efforts to helping the community when they “provide space and opportunities to engage in inquiry and genuine learning, and to refine ways of making our communities and organizations better places to be” (Castle and Johnson 63). By asking questions, seeking answers, and interacting in communities, they can discover underlying themes and mentalities within the community they are choosing to work with.

By using qualitative research like semi-structured interviews and observations, practitioners are inviting the community to be part of the process. They are igniting conversations to share in the process by changing the role of researcher to participant and conversationalist in the interview. In the semi-structured setting, the “practitioners are called upon to consider their actions, their thoughts, the values that contribute to their thoughts and assumptions, alternatives to their actions and projected alternative ways of responding in similar future circumstances.” (Burt et al. 93). The practitioner then becomes an agent of social change

because they are relationally understanding the interviewee, beyond the objective manner that quantitative data takes.

Conclusion

As seen in how Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar was developed, qualitative research took time and energy. Despite the intricacies in qualitative inquiry, methods like interviews and observations are vital to understanding how to best address moral failure in the American Church. The intricacies also assess how these methods can be used to evaluate the seminar, so that the seminar can be improved. Similarly, the work of community developers needs to have qualitative methods and evaluations, so that community development practitioners can be resourceful to their communities. Moral failure in the Christian American Church needs to be understood in individual churches through both qualitative and quantitative methods of research.

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT VALUES

Over the past few years, I have learned that community development work is laborious. Despite the arduous work that effective community development requires, the international community development values that I have begun to form are the motivators that I will use to tackle the barriers that come with sustainable community development. These values have everything to do with how I, people, and the world around me interact. I have inserted the values that I have learned through Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar into my thesis project, hoping that the Christian-American community in the United States will resolve issues that have long hindered it and push the change necessary for holistic transformation. This holistic change pertains to the physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual transformation that I have seen healthy church communities demand.

The biggest motivator of these values is to bring transformational change. Transformation change is not a one time event, it is "a lifelong journey . . . there is always more before us" (Myers 3). Transformational change is a critical component for sustainable development. It is not a one-and-done action but a continuum of listening, thinking, changing, reanalyzing, and restructuring. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the personal journey that I have gone through and the specific values that I have seen as meaningful in international community development practices and applied them to my research project proposal to ensure that the work that I am doing is perpetual.

Transformational Change

In the Mexican-American community, there's a common Spanish phrase that's echoed, *con ganas*. The phrase *con ganas* translates to do something with desire, have grit, and do something to the best of your ability. This was a common phrase that I would hear throughout my life, and

it has also become the reason I have gone through transformation change. I believe that community development work takes *ganas* that require individuals to throw themselves into a community and do whatever it takes to learn from them, grow, and continuously do the necessary work to create communities that are thriving.

During my summers pursuing my undergraduate degree at Northwest University, I would go home to work in *el campo*, which represents the agricultural fields that agriculture field workers work in. In these fields, I worked in agriculture and found that there are people in my community that are hurting physically and systemically from under-representation and unfair labor practices. On the other hand, I would also see young people like myself who grew up in similar communities that would leave and never come back to advocate for these forgotten individuals. Unsurprisingly, people that would come into my community to do developmental work were people that would never fully understand what it meant to be a part of those communities because they were outsiders and did not even speak the language of *el campo*.

When I discovered the International Community Development (ICD) Program at Northwest University, I jumped at the opportunity to learn the skills that would make me an asset to my community and return to a community that needed me. As I began taking a course within the ICD program, I realized that there was a lot of assumptions that I had made about the role that I had in my community. I could love and save my community from the systems that oppressed them. I was the savior that would tell everyone what to do, how to do it, and when to do it because, after all, I was an insider in that community. However, I soon learned that I would accomplish little to nothing in terms of systemic change without my community. I learned that the relational aspect of community development work is just as important as the work itself.

The ICD program has been a roller coaster of a journey to discovering that I am not a savior. Still, it has also been a humbling experience that I have continued because I believe that *con ganas* does not mean that I am required to do all the work, but it means that I will work alongside my community to see that change come to fruition. I believe that the grit that transformational change takes, which starts with the individual, transcends to a community, and extends to society.

People Leading Communities

Transformation change in community development is only feasible amidst a people-centered approach. Even though practitioners' role is to bring insights and technical skills to communities, to address social problems, practitioners “need not carry the whole load but can share it with others” (Palmer 89). When practitioners take on the responsibility of doing all the work, they miss blind spots that the community can otherwise come along and fill.

Filling in the Gaps. Since practitioners are guaranteed to come short of recognizing every need and factor that influences their community's social problems, practitioners need to do less and listen more. The dilemma is when community developers come into communities to do all the work by themselves. When they are in charge of deciding what community development looks like in a specific community, they can reinforce practices that are unhelpful, not to mention, it can restrict the community from finding solutions that will create sustainable change. Even though it may be challenging, a good leader will “pay particular attention to creating a safe way for [their] management team members to say what’s on their minds” (Lynch and Walls 167). By leaning into the community's knowledge, community developers work beside the community and use copowerment tools. Community developers may have the skills to promote the organization to change, but they do not have to lead that change. Leaders in the community are the individuals

that need to be heading that change. Part of the appeal of a people-centered approach includes community participation that will highlight community assets relevant to the change.

Shareholders have the most knowledge of what will work, how to implement those changes, and the established relationships the craft requires. By leaning into the community's knowledge, community developers work beside the community and use copowerment tools, which ensured that everyone's strengths are being used alongside the strength of others, while also seeing the limitations that can be addressed in community. Community developers may have the skills to promote the organization to change, but they do not have to lead that change. Leaders in the community are the individuals that need to be heading that change. Part of the appeal of a people-centered approach includes community participation that will highlight community assets relevant to the change.

Not every Christian American church is the same and every church needs to be considered differently according to their context. I don't always need to be the person who answers. Even as Kuenkel, author of *Leading Collectively*, writes, "humans have a tendency to be critical and judgmental, and most of us are trained to spot the gaps immediately and jump at the deficits" (121). In many situations, I wanted to say, "I know the answer, I know how to fix this, I know how to fix you." Still, I found myself having to step back and see that I was not a part of their community and was not the hero that would come in with all the knowledge to implement changes that the community needed to make.

Community Relationships. I found how critical the role of a community-based approach is because of community-established relations. As Sinek, a TEDX speaker, states, "I can't simply say to someone 'trust me' and they will. I can't simply instruct people to cooperate and they will" (3.06-3.12). Still, not everyone has those established community relationships to begin the

process. I find myself thinking about the role of relationships in church communities. I couldn't just expect myself to come into church congregations and tell the people to trust each other and disciple one another. I frequently found myself saying, well, I know that the answer is trust and accountability, but how do I show people how to do that when I don't know what their church culture is? The community needed to take the lead in conducting that transformational change. Part of the reason that the community taking initiative is possible is because everyone can be a leader, "if you get the environment right . . . every single one of us can do these remarkable things" (Sinek 2.27-2.36). I saw the quality of already established congregant relationships using a discipleship model to alter it in a way that it catered to their church community's specific needs. By having a solid discipleship model in place, the community benefits from having congregants that are trained with the tools to be successful leaders.

Community Stories. The community-based approach is also valuable because it looks at the sacredness of stories in a community. Everyone has a tale to tell that is valuable for the community to listen to and likewise share with one another. The purpose of community developers should be to create space for people in the community to be heard. By allowing the community to tell their story, they are finding reassurance that they matter. They become "effective in gaining attention, establishing rapport, building trust and adding value" (Spiller 11). Stories are significant in that they break silences, speak truths, and open doors for a person to feel they are valued in their community. Even though storytelling is a simple practice, it is an invitation to enter someone else's world and look through their lens on how they perceive themselves, others, and the world around them. A story does not have a set of rules apart from the act of listening and sharing.

In Christian American Churches, I saw the benefit of testimonies. Through testimonies, community members were able to use language, imagery, and experiences to engage in vulnerability, therefore allowing others in their community to be a part of who they were. Storytelling may not seem notable to the work of community development, but it includes the “process of constructing and reconstructing discourse about community identity, issues, and action strategies” (Ball-Rokeach et al. 177). By slowly having shared experiences expressed with each other, congregants can find themselves developing bonds of communion with one another. In a way, testimonials through storytelling are a means to address the shame that can damage the community.

Storytelling lays the groundwork for discipleship. It becomes fundamental to steadfast discipleship that “understands the difference between shame and vulnerability because scripture speaks to the disfunction that comes from shame . . . vulnerability speaks to growth” (Daniels). In Christianity, the Bible speaks to the faults in every person, but it also speaks to the reconciliation and redemption that is accessible to everyone regardless of what that fault was. By bringing storytelling and testimonies into discipleship practices, every party involved can be active in the lives of the individuals.

Community Time. Time is a mighty resource that I encountered throughout my research. Change does not happen from one instant to the next, it takes time. Catalytic events are a prime example of this in the way that they “allow us to move from the isolation and stagnation of life in homogenous groups and break through into a new reality that introduces us to something we have never experienced before” (Salter McNeil 45). Catalytic moments don’t suddenly happen, there is an escalation to the sudden moment when the catalytic event happens. Similarly, community developers must undergo a process of listening, observing, and reflecting that is

necessary to learn. The steps of listening, observing, and reflecting are continuous parts of transformational change that are continually having to reoccur because the culture is always changing as well.

Even though I considered myself an insider to the Christian American church community, I found that I still needed to discover things. By acknowledging my opinions of what moral failure looked like, who I was speaking to, the change that I thought needed to happen, and even asking questions, I began to see that I don't know everything about the Christian community. Time is patience revolving around self-reflection. The transformation that comes with self-reflection is only possible with the asset of time. Regardless of the monetary value and information that a community has, time is the asset that all communities will have. Time is the motivator that will change communities through patience and a willingness to teach and work with one another.

In an interview with Heather Otieno, the Spirituality and Justice Coordinator at Rainier Avenue Church, I saw how churches with good discipleship in place ask reflective questions on how to better support church congregations and leaders to live lives that lead to transformation. To even be open to asking these questions, community leaders and congregants alike must be open to taking the time to listen to the responses just like Otieno does through the way she explores questions:

What could we have done differently to support them?. . can we speak to this or not?. . moral failure is always crouching at our door, and handling shame and vulnerability is hard. Still, we need to acknowledge it . . . scripture doesn't walk away from other people. To go through healing, you have to be open through it . . . things cannot heal without being vulnerable

understanding that there is the grace of God and there is the support of the community. Churches need to prioritize relationships over failure. (Otieno)

Otieno is an example of accepting people in a way that leads towards transformation. In the work of community development, approaching people with open arms is part of having a people-centered approach. It also looks at walking with people on a life-long journey that creates sustainable and lasting change. It does not aim to cover the issue, but messy work exposes the issue, in order to address it.

Social Justice Defined

Before defining how I see social justice, it is essential to express my context of Christianity as it pertains to social justice. Although I do see secular community development work being effective, I believe that if we are to get at the core of social justice, we must see things through the lens of love. Regardless of whether we explicitly define that love as Christ, community development work cannot happen without love. Influential community developers do not have to abide by Biblical Christian values. However, inherently, I see that the community development work is a part of who Christ is, Love.

Rooted in Love. Social justice is intricate since it regards flawed people. Social justice is dealing with people's moral failure intent to restore those people so that they can then bring healing practices into their communities and spaces to create whole communities. Clawson does a great job of explaining that "when we chose to love God and love others, we have no choice but to treat others with respect and fairness as we acknowledge them as fellow image bearers" (21). Understanding that everyone has an identity as a human being must make us recognize that they are also worthy of love and respect. In my future work as a community developer, love must be at the center because "love remains fully with and for us in all, regardless of what we do or are.

Neither our participation in structural evil nor whatever evil deeds we do as individuals can diminish it” (Moe-Lobeda 6). Social justice means that everyone involved must come and find reconciliation and healing with community being the root.

Time. By seeing the importance in individuals, working with those individuals demands that social justice is done with a long-term plan in mind. As previously mentioned, people are the root cause of social problems, but they also the ones that can implement social justice practices to resolve the social problems. As advocates of social justice, practitioners and communities alike must always be working towards that long-term journey. Since I see social justice work as something for the long haul, I also comprehend that my perspective on how to walk towards social justice requires me to continuously reflect, adjust, and relearn alongside the community and people I am in a relationship with. Our tendency to move away from the brokenness in people, will only be defined by love “because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment . . . to their cause—the cause of liberation” (Freire 89). Once individuals are liberated and have found healing, they can be advocates for others to bring justice to social systems.

Philosophy of Mutuality

In my time in international community development courses, I found that the fundamental principles rooted in the community development work that I see myself doing are rooted in a people-centered approach that focuses on mutual invitation. Mutual invitation is a practice that comes from the concept of copowerment, “a dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other” (Inslee). The practice of mutual invitation that is between the community, leaders, and practitioners ensures that everyone involved in the work feels that their insight is valued. There is an invitation to

teach others and to also learn from those people. Although the community leaders may have particular skills, the community also has valuable insight and resources.

Copowerment in my Future. In my future vocation, I plan on using a people-centered approach of copowerment to community development. Community development work rooted in copowerment will ensure that leaders and stakeholders are both doing the work together. I want to step away from the belief that leaders have all the answers and can come into a community bringing the necessary change themselves. I do see myself as a leader that is capable of bringing tools that are valuable to a community. However, I also think that community members hold the greatest assets by knowing the community, their strengths, and their needs. In order for me to get to a point where effective copowerment is happening, I understand that I need to go into communities with openness, humility, and awareness of my role in the community.

Language. Similarly, mutual invitation is a copowerment tool that I plan on using. It creates a sense of trust because there is a language that is being expressed. Language, both verbal and nonverbal, “involves symbols and gestures that represent objects, concepts, emotions, ideas and thoughts that convey attitudes, viewpoints, and philosophies which guide our responses to written, living, and socio-cultural biotexts” (Kirk-Duggan 350). Through our voices, tones, non-verbal expressions, and customs, we show others what we value. By having shared invitations expressed through language, communities and community developers can come together and exchange meaningful moments with one another in a way that points to vulnerability and intimacy.

Yes, every community can benefit from community development practices, but I also understand that this is laborious work. For this reason, I think that mutual invitation practices must begin with the leaders of the community. Understanding who the leaders are is essential

because they are the key stakeholders in the community's development. Therefore, to get access to the community, my philosophy of mutual invitation means giving honor to those who have come before and paved the way for community growth.

Leadership. Practitioners must come with a readiness to learn from the people with roots in the community because they are the ones that will unfold dynamic changes. External community development practitioners like myself can only offer technical skills, but without the individuals who understand how to best implement those skills, the community will not benefit. In a way, community leaders are the ones who shed light and guide practitioners on the journey of promoting transformation change within a specific community because “taking steps toward a goal or vision collectively also requires us to identify focus areas” (Kuenkel 91). As a community developer, I will not always be able to identify those areas of focus. Still, the leaders will pinpoint those areas so that the work that I do is as effective as possible.

My deep-rooted approach to people-centered work through copowerment will include promoting reciprocity in my future work line, I hope to work in a place that allows me to learn from people and do it over extended periods. I know that there will be many mistakes, a lot of reflecting, and many internal changes I will have to adjust along the way. I see myself vocationally in a place where I can continually learn from the community and value the continuous and transformational change. I will need to be in an area that lets me grow and make mistakes as an individual. Leadership goes beyond what I can do for the community I am working in. Leadership is having a people-centered approach where I will also have to learn how to follow and learn from the community to have success in community development.

Conclusion

Over the past few years, I have been able to take many community development values from the ICD program at Northwest University. However, my own personal journey to discovering my drive to pursue helpful community development has risen from personal experiences and stories I have learned from my community. Northwest University's ICD program has been the key to identifying the lessons and values within the work that I want to do. Similarly, I have seen how my faith and personal convictions have been the foundation for how I see social justice work through myself, society, and the tools that I have gained through the ICD program.

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT PROPOSAL

Restore City Church Growth Track Seminar: A seminar directed at Christian American Church congregations in the United States of America who are dealing with problems of moral failure.

Developed by, Sarai Padron on behalf of Restore City Church.

Introduction

For leaders in the Evangelical Church to find restoration, church communities must follow a discipleship model that promotes servant-leadership values and tools that align with biblical grace and accountability. Having grace and accountability means respecting the image of God that is believed to be in all people but also holding people responsible for moral failure through consequences. Through a 3-day seminar churches will first learn the biblical call of supporting each other and their leaders and secondly be empowered with tools that ensure the church is holding leaders and the broader church community accountable to moral failure practices. Further, church leaders will leave the seminar with tangible steps to take towards restorative practices that promote a healthy discipleship model. Participants will have the opportunity to take the seminar's tools and begin implementing Restore City Church's Growth Track to work towards restoration within their church.

Moral Failure in the Christian American Church

There is a severe problem within the Christian American Church and how it handles moral failure. As identified by the Evangelical Church, moral failure is understood as an ongoing or single event that goes against the implied or explicitly stated rules of conduct according to the Bible. Moral failure, however, goes beyond sins that are defined by the Church. There are complexities to what moral failure is and pride, greed, and discrimination are all examples of

moral failure that are not clearly stated by the Church because they can be presented in the lives of individuals in distinct ways. The failure leads to broken relationships and goes against God's original intent for humans to be in communion with God and each other. As it concerns the Christian American community, accountability and good discipleship practices need to be used together. In light of the variances that exist across different denominations, this seminar will be operating under the Assemblies of God's beliefs surrounding moral failure and show how Restore City Church's model will be taught to other church communities, so that they can address moral failure in their church.

This issue of moral failure stems from the Church's idealization of perfect and integral leadership. Oftentimes, the Church obsesses over the image of perfection because, biblically, perfection is synonymous for being clean. Conversely, sin "is sticky and contagious. So, we stay away" (Beck 25). Sadly, staying away from sin often results in staying away from people who sin and, as a result, fails to meet the church's moral code. Valuing a facade of perfection over people has created a disregard for preventative measures of vulnerability and accountability in church programming.

Programming needs to have the support of groups, curriculum, and policies that both prevent and address moral failure. Christian church communities need to lead with restorative practices for church leaders that have failed to meet the church's moral code. Likewise, it is necessary of church leaders to foster interdependence among congregants through groups, so that congregants can promote restoration from moral failure amongst each other as well. The Church has disregarded the call to support each other when a person commits an act of moral failure. Biblically, Christians are meant to "bear one another's burdens. . . upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another. . . pray together; together serve God in the world; and

together fight against what may threaten and hinder this unity” (Salter McNeil 30). Unless there are programs in place that have relevant curriculum, the Church will not be working in unity and cannot begin the work of reaching people outside of the community. Effective programming and polices creates effective communication and discipleship within churches which displays a microcosm of right relationship that God originally intended.

Programming is a fundamental piece to having healthy discipleship, however, the people providing the mentorship and doing the work can often be forgotten. Church leaders have the unique role of always being at work. The workload of church leaders is a result of serving as the primary spiritual caregiver of congregants. They are the first-responders to congregants who are facing difficulties. The amount of work that the leaders hold leads to “work-related poor psychological health, stress, and burnout [that] pose an increasingly serious problem for the leaders” (Lewis et. al 2). The current reality for many leaders in ministry is a physically, emotionally, and spiritually burdened vocational life. This results in overworked leaders that burn out easily because there is no internal support from the congregation.

The lack of support begins with leadership and transcends to the church community. Churches are spiritual hospitals where people can come and find healing since “ every human being has inherent worth, value, and a singular identity in God’s sight” (Myers 53). The metaphor of the hospital displays the significance that church leaders play in the Church. However, even though they are the people working at these “spiritual hospitals,” they are not immune to getting hurt and can also be in need of finding support and healing from their r4communities. With the understanding that every human life is worthy of God’s redemption, churches need to do a better job supporting each other when an individual has had a public or private failure, which includes the church leadership. The roles of church congregants and

leaders are distinct in what they do for the community but regardless, reconciliation pertains to the whole community because “reconciliation is a ministry offered to the world through everyone who has been baptized into Christ’s body” (Katangole and Rice 50). Even though some congregants have a bigger role in churches, all members must do their part. Reconciliation paves the way for whole and right relationships between people and instills restoration for churches from moral failure.

Restore City’s Growth Track Seminar will promote the larger church body to engage in holistic care for leaders by presenting a practical model that will redefine the role of church congregants. This holistic care will address the wellness of the community. The seminar will model practices of reconciliation with God and people. These tools will empower leaders to build community relationships based on honest and vulnerable experiences. On the other hand, church congregants will receive the tools to be empowered to lead in the community alongside their leaders to advocate for the care of everyone in the community. The individuals participating in the seminar will leave with a greater understanding of communion, communication, and life-long relationships that encourage holistic care.

By applying the principles of Restore City’s discipleship model, Restore City Church will present their curriculum to other churches for them to use in a way that prepares Christian American churches to pursue restorative practices to their church community. The specific seminar will copower, which means that the church community will walk alongside their leaders and not behind them. The conference will use a servant-leadership model to teach the church not only how to receive holistic care but also how to offer it.

Before Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar

History. Restore City Church began with the original name, El Sendero De La Cruz, which started with a small group of Christians that began gathering at a house church located in Moses Lake, Washington. Still, the church hoped to eventually expand and help the community through a holistic approach that local organizations did not have. The families came together to buy a dairy farm, and, with members of the church they began working on renovations to create their dream. Over the years, El Sendero De La Cruz's name changed to Sendero Life Center. Now, Restore City Church, which is located at the heart of a prominent economically disadvantaged neighborhood, Peninsula, has become a beacon of hope to the city of Moses Lake. In recent years, Restore City Church has become a focal point for community resources resulting in an expansion of remodeled offices, a new gymnasium, and a nursery center the church is pushing for in the community. The expansion of Restore Church City grants the church the opportunity to share their discipleship model to other churches, so that they can succeed like Restore City Church has.

Restore City Church's Reach. The context of Restore City Church goes beyond Moses Lake. Restore City Church has become a crucial part of transformation within the Northwest Hispanic Assemblies of God District. The church's focus is to reach its surrounding cities and make a difference in neighboring communities through its holistic approach that addresses individuals' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. An example of this is Sendero de Vida located in Spokane, Washington. Before Restore City Church's leaders began mentoring Spokane's church leadership, the church was struggling with moral failure. Restore City Church's leadership and model allows people of different cultures, demographics, generations, and languages (predominately Spanish and English speakers) to find restoration through Restore Groups.

Restore Groups is a program that connects people to walk in discipleship together, find copowerment practices, and develop extensive mentorships. They are primarily led by church congregants and use Restore City Church's Growth Track as a guide to reinforce the church's commitment to discipleship.

Restored Leaders Testimonies. Restore City Church's vision is to act as a house of rebuilding people and, in doing so, to fulfill God's call on the lives of those in the community. As a Christian organization under the Assemblies of God denomination, they uphold specific biblical values. However, their unique approach to supporting individuals who have failed to meet the church's moral code allows them to be in relationships with people that promote their rehabilitation away from moral failure. To this day, many of their leaders have found this approach to help in their growth process. The associative pastor at Restore City Church, Juan Garza, understood this idea better than anyone because he stated that "if people are honest with themselves, every one of us has failed at some point in our life" (Garza). Sabrina Valdez seconded this as the church's executive pastor who became a leader after going through a time of reconciliation at church herself. She decided to become a pastor because although her relationship with God is not based on her ministry, her love for God was the basis for why she wanted to do ministry (Valdez). At Restore City Church, Garza and Valdez were able to find growth through their discipleship model.

Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar

Project Name. Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar

Project Description. Restore City Church's project is to host a seminar for other Assemblies of God (AG) churches with the purpose that Growth Track will empower communities to have good discipleship. This project will raise awareness and increase engagement within the AG

Christian community regarding supporting those who have failed to meet the church's moral code and rules. Restore City Church's practices will show other churches accountability that is transferable to larger contexts. Since Restore City Church has already helped leaders transition out of brokenness and into a place of healing, it will be possible to engage the broader AG community on how they can also do the same work.

Project Beneficiaries. The individuals who will benefit most from Restore City Church are the individual leaders who have failed to meet the moral code and church communities. Those who primarily benefit from the seminar are church communities dealing with moral failure issues in the congregation. Restore City Church has many people that have been rejected by other churches, and the goal is for them to find restoration through a comprehensive discipleship model. Pastor Mike, lead Pastor at Restore City Church is adamant that the Church needs to have a heart that embraces those that Christ embraced, which is those that are rejected by society in the same way that Christ was. This project aims for the churches to use the seminar's training and go back into their communities, promote accountability, and ensure that church communities have external support from another. Having a structure of discipleship in leadership replicated in different churches across Washington will also ensure that churches are supportive. Having individuals who are learning the meaning of accountability also means that the Restore City Church community will benefit from partnerships with other churches with similar practices.

Day 1: Background information on moral failure

The Problem. The first day will begin with Nicole Hernandez, a long-time member and Children's leader at Restore City Church, talking about the problem of moral failure in church congregants and leadership. She will explain how there is an unrealistic standard for leaders in the Church to be perfect. Over the years, the Evangelical Church has seen mega-church and

small church pastors ostracized from their communities. In an ideal world, the church acts as a source of growth and empowerment. Hernandez's testimony of moral failure and then restoration at Restore City Church showed me how the church is "not a place to pass judgment on people but to embrace them . . . as a hospital" (Hernandez). Being a spiritual hospital implies that individuals receive extensive care and are guided to be the way God intended for humanity.

Influences of the Problem. Jessica Luna, Restore City Church's worship pastor, will then explain the influence that contribute to people failing to meet the moral code of the Church and not finding restoration. One influence includes the lack of sound support in place. As Luna put it, "you're going to teach them grace and restore them, or you're going to turn them away, and I think that hurts people more" (Luna). Likewise, when community members fail to meet the moral code, it is easy for the community to ostracize and dissociate with them for fear of being tainted with the sin, which further prevents reinstatement after individuals have failed the church's moral code. Moral failure goes beyond sin because it can include offenses against the church community. Among gossip, greed, and idolatry, the causes of the problem extend beyond a simple list of dos and don'ts. This problem is the same in communities of all sizes. No matter the size, Assemblies of God churches often address people that commit moral failure with a blanket solution when discipleship means having the same goal with different approaches. By talking about the lack of transparency and vulnerability on moral failure, Luna will highlight how secrecy amplifies acts of moral failure in the Church.

Significance of the Problem. Communities of all sizes are affected by community members that fail to meet the church's moral code, which emphasizes the significance of healthy support during the seminar. This seminar will go over the biblical call to discipleship and bearing fruit with one of the lead pastors at Restore City Church. The message will be rooted in the Bible and

the importance of bearing metaphorical fruit. When a church is bearing fruit, it is because their heart and minds are focused and understand gospel principles, and the result of this knowledge just happens to be good works. Heart and character issues can go unnoticed if seemingly good works are being presented. However, “no branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine” (New International Version Bible, Jn. 15.4). In this context, Christ is the vine that Christians must be rooted in. When people are not rooted in Christ, they fail to meet the moral code and be in the community.

The pastors will promote the need to walk alongside the community to have unity, or else pastors risk having no accountability. Leaders and congregants need to have integrity while giving the church community accountability while having a support system that protects them. When the leaders fail, the rest of the church suffers from the consequences. The presenter will be one of the lead pastors at Restore City Church because they will have the opportunity to transparently talk about the burdens that pastors have when they don't have a community uplifting them. Similarly, if the organization is not thriving spiritually and continually failing to meet the church's moral code, the leaders cannot work alongside the community to bear fruit.

The Solution to the Problem. The first day will end with a resolution to the problem presented by Associate Pastor Juan Garza. Garza will explain that at Restore City Church, the goal was to create a model where "people with moral failure [can] come and [Restore City Church can] restore them." (Garza). Restore City Church understood the importance of sharing their discipleship model, so they developed a servant-leadership model that includes a method of "Finding, Restoring, Equipping and Sending" people (Growth Track 1). Summed up, the technique will show different stages of reconciliation that all consider the individual and how the individual works alongside the community that individual is in. The church's initial step of

finding requires people to go outside of what they find comfortable and reach the people who have failed to meet the church's moral code and include them into the community. Once they have joined the community, the hard work of guiding them to restoration begins. Eventually, with Restore City Church's discipleship program, church communities can eventually normalize vulnerability and accountability.

Day 2: The Discipleship Model of Growth Track

Find. The second day of the seminar will follow the last session on the first day. However, lead pastor Mike Alvarado will go more in-depth about what each stage represents, starting with the importance of finding people. To Restore City Church, the goal of restoration revolves around being able to “partner with the Holy Spirit to bring healing and restoration to broken lives” (Growth Track 4). This is necessary because Christianity is based on the belief that all people are in need of wholeness and redemption through Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit that works within people. During this portion of the seminar, congregants will understand the role that evangelism plays in Christianity.

Restore. The second stage of the growth track discipleship model is restoration, presented by Pastor Mary Alvarado, the lead pastor's wife. Finding inner healing extends beyond the individual and into the community so that they can work in the community and “provide resources, encouragement, and accountability to equip believers for their call” (Growth Track 5). Pastor Mary Alvarado will explain the importance of finding reconciliation with people who are willing to walk alongside one another in mentorship that leads to wholeness. Since Pastor Mary Alvarado is in charge of the Restore Groups at Church, she will give testimonies on how the small groups are an example of intimacy that leads to vulnerability and accountability.

Equip. The next presenter who will speak on the discipleship model's equipping stage will be Executive Pastor Sabrina Valdez. Pastor Sabrina Valdez is in charge of overseeing all the ministries at Restore City Church and has a role in preparing leaders to lead people. She will talk about how equipping in this stage helps build up the community to take the initiative instead of becoming dependent on their church position. It is easy to believe that the congregants' role is to find those that are broken and bring them to the physical church building so that the leaders can disciple and guide people. However, Restore City Church understands that the pastors' role is to guide the community while still walking with them. This part of the seminar will show congregants the importance of working alongside the church leaders to use their spiritual giftings and not entirely on religious figures. By understanding the importance of being equipped, the congregants will help carry the leaders' burdens in the church that they are a part of.

Send. Youth Pastors Freddie and Brianna Prado will present the last stage. They will describe the time when congregants and leaders alike are sent out of the church community to do the work of finding people to help “encourage and support . . . continuing the advancement of the Kingdom” (Growth Track 5). As the newest members on staff, the couple understands that sending is not limited to staying within the same community but can also include physically leaving the community to teach the same method in different contexts. Each component needs to be carried out with a relational mission so that the church community can pursue the love that the Bible calls for. This model also enables communities to find hope when the church has suffered from the damage a leader or congregant may have brought to the community. The discipleship model's final stage will show participants the continuous cycle that is discipleship and reveal to them the importance of going outside of their church communities and advocating for a robust discipleship model for the broader Church.

Day 3: Taking Practical Steps

Restore Groups Presentation. The final day of the seminar will begin with a presentation on Restore Groups at Restore City Church. Since Pastor Mary Alvarado is the director of the leaders who facilitate the Restore Groups at the church, she will be presenting on the creation and management of the groups. Every participant will receive templates of the documents used at Restore City Church to follow along with the presentation. The presentation will go through the application process, interview, and selection of the Restore Group leaders to thoroughly explain how to choose influential leaders. The second part of the presentation will include Restore Groups' structure, their requirements, and training that they offer to prepare the leaders.

Growth Track Presentation. To follow-up on the Restore Groups presentation, Sabrina Valdez, who was primarily in charge of the development of Restore City Church's Growth Track booklet, will go through the different parts of the brochure and answer any questions that the participants may have regarding the discipleship model. Even though the sessions at the seminar summed up Restore City Church's Growth Track on the second day, Restore City Church's Growth Track is also a 3-week class that new church members can take. During the presentation, Pastor Valdez will go through the course's weekly layout that covers the steps of discipleship more in-depth.

Restore City Church Culture Presentation. Paul Ochoa will give the final presentation of Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar. Ochoa will teach the importance of having a thriving church culture and explain through a fill-in-the-blank template the church culture that Restore City Church tries to implement through the programming and the teachings that the church adheres to. During this presentation, Ochoa will also address the cultural basis of the church as a historically Hispanic church to explain how other churches may have to modify Restore City

Church's Growth track to meet the needs of their own context. Since he will be the final speaker, Ochoa will conclude the session by asking for any questions and dismissing with prayer.

After Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar

Partners. Restore City Church prides itself on having a holistic approach to discipleship and community development. There are two categories of partnerships that include secular and religious organizations. The long-time partnership with local law enforcement has helped Restore City Church keep a pulse on the community's needs. Restore City Church's lead pastor is one of the Chaplains at Moses Lake's Police Department. As Chaplain, he has offered support calls relating to town tragedies, opportunities for the Police Department to use the church facilities for training, and financial support in times of need within the community. Pastor Mike, the pastor who has taken most of the relational aspect of the partnership, has used the information learned with local law enforcement to promote church programming that caters to the locals' needs. Restore City Church also meets the physical demands of families in the community through its partnership with the neighborhood's elementary school, Peninsula. At the beginning of every school year, the church helps provide backpacks and school utilities for all the students at Peninsula Elementary School. Restore City values the partnerships that it has with its community and its need to work alongside Moses Lake's people.

Restore City Church's partnerships have developed because of the services provided; Restore City Church also focuses on relationships with local believers. As the church has expanded in size, several local business owners like Serve Moses Lake, Moses Lake Golf Club, and Tacos El Rey have established themselves at Restore City Church. The connection to local businesses has led to relationships with other businesses in the city that help promote church events in the past like Kidz Crusade, Christmas Gift Giveaway, and Fireshed. In return, the

church has also been able to uplift those businesses by having an annual event of local businesses where business owners can come and set-up a booth of their business for the church and community to see. These valuable relationships have become assets that Restore City Church has because it would not be possible if Restore City Church did not have a church community supporting one another. This model relationship is only possible at Restore City Church because congregants rely on one another for support. Congregants are not solely dependent on the pastoral team for spiritual guidance. This has led to the church adopting and helping other churches walk through discipleship after they were on the brink of closure. Partnerships with local churches have allowed for collective events, programs, and advocacy for the community's needs.

Evaluation. The goal of Restore City Church's seminar is to provide a holistic approach that encourages the development of emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental support through collective engagement. The expected accomplishments Restore City Church to have is firm connections with leaders that have received the skills to bring restoration and reconciliation principles to their church community. Another expected accomplishment from the program is for churches to follow the principles that they have learned at us the seminar and make changes that promote discipleship advocacy.

The following evaluation diagram is an in-depth description of outcomes expected from Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar. The purpose of the diagram is to evaluate the effectiveness of Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar in other churches:

Outcome	Indicators	Data Collection Method/Tools	Frequency and Schedule of Data Collection	Sampling Strategy and Sample Size
1. There is an increase in leadership accountability in the church	1.1 evidence of system of accountability, components of procedures in church leadership 1.2 The number of people on staff that are involved in the process 1.3 The number of people outside of staff that are involved in the process 1.4 Training	survey data semi-structured interview	6 months-1 year after the church has participated in Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar Understanding of accountability	Number of participants Amount of time in leadership Type of position at the church
2. There is an increase in churches that follow the restoration model of Restore City Church	2.1 Rate of people leaving the church 2.2 Rate of people coming to the church 2.3 Number of trainings annually 2.3 Number of participants in the training each year	Survey data	1 year later Percentage of members of the church that have gone through the model Likelihood of members failing to meet the moral code of the church	Number of participants Membership involvement
3. There is a reduction in leaders that fail to meet the moral code of the church	3.1 Number of leaders teaching the restoration curriculum 3.2 Number of leaders 3.3 Number of congregants	Survey data Semi-structured interviews	Monitored between 2021-2025	Number of participants Type of leadership

Conclusion

Restore City Church's vision for restoring people inside the church is rooted in its discipleship foundation. Over the years, there have been many changes that have led to its rapid growth. Restore City Church has seen the problem of moral failure, who needs restoration, and why it is has not been addressed already. With Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar, the organization hopes that the curriculum that Restore City Church uses can be adapted to help other Assemblies of God churches become fit communities. They can become beacons in their community in a way that promotes community development. With Restore City Church's Growth Track Seminar, Restore City Church will be able to use its facilities to welcome leaders and congregants alike to join the church's discipleship model that has been effective at Restore City Church.

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APPENDIX B: SEMINAR SCHEDULE

RESTORE CITY CHURCH GROWTH TRACK SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Date: TBD (3-day event)

Seminar hosted by Sabrina Valdez, Executive Pastor at Restore City Church.

Attendees: Any church in the Assemblies of God Denomination

Material: Growth Track booklets, Restore City Church Culture guide, Restore Groups paperwork

Cost: By donations for participants


9:00AM – 2:00PM 9:00am-10:00am 10:00am-10:15am 10:15am-11:15am 11:15am-11:45am 11:45am-12:45pm 12:45pm-1:00pm 1:00pm-2:00pm	Day 1: Moral Failure in the Evangelical Church Nicole Hernandez- The Problem Break- 15 minutes Jessica Luna- Causes of the Problem Lunch Break- 30 minutes Pastor Leader (TBD)- Significance of the Problem Break- 15 minutes Juan Garza- The Solution to the Problem	Restore City Church 2227 W Peninsula Dr, Moses Lake, WA 98837
9:00AM – 2:00PM 9:00am-10:00am 10:00am-10:15am 10:15am-11:15am 11:15am-11:45am 11:45am-12:45pm 12:45pm-1:00pm 1:00pm-2:00pm	Day 2: The Christian Call to Discipleship Mike Alvarado- Find Break- 15 minutes Mary Alvarado- Restore Break- 30 minutes Sabrina Valdez- Equip Break- 15 minutes Freddie Prado- Send	Restore City Church 2227 W Peninsula Dr, Moses Lake, WA 98837
9:00AM – 12:30PM 9:00am-10:00am 10:00am-10:15am 10:15am-11:15am 11:15am-11:30am 11:30am-12:30pm	Day 3: Taking Practical Steps Mary Alvarado- Restore Groups PPT Break- 15 minutes Sabrina Valdez- Growth Track PPT Break 15 minutes Paul Ochoa- Restore City Church Culture PPT	Restore City Church 2227 W Peninsula Dr, Moses Lake, WA 98837

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RESTORE GROUP LEADER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your salvation experience.
2. How long have you been attending Restore City Church? How long have you been a member at Restore City Church?
3. Tell me your understanding of discipleship. Leadership?
4. Why do you want to lead a Restore Group?
5. Have you ever led a group or ministry before? If so, tell me about your experience.
6. What would you prefer to teach in your group?

APPENDIX D: RESTORE GROUP SETUP GUIDE



LEADER PREP

TOPIC:

SCRIPTURE

GOAL OF RESTORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS

CONVERSATION GUIDE

This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions as needed. Do not feel like you need to do or ask everything you see.

SET THE TONE

BREAK THE ICE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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