

The Rural Church and Community Development: How Positive Community Change  
Starts with the Church

Hannah Witcher

MA International Community Development

Northwest University

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### Author's Note and Dedication

This thesis is first and foremost dedicated to God who has instilled a deep-seated passion in me for others to know His love. I also want to thank Renee and Galla Paxton who adopted me as their own granddaughter and introduced me to Bridge of Faith Church. I am forever thankful for the love and kindness they have shown me and can think of no better way to honor them than to dedicate this paper to the church they so dearly love. I also want to thank my husband, Mark, and my family who never once doubted my passions or ability and never ceased to encourage me. Lastly, I pray that rural communities everywhere will know they are not forgotten or abandoned by the local church, but together we can create resilient and empowered communities.

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### *Introduction*

Church and community development are two terms rarely used together in the same sentence. Often, people are unaware of the preconditioned suitability of the church to enact community development techniques within their own communities. Even more so, rural communities play a unique and vital role in this process. Rural communities face the same, seemingly insurmountable, problems as urban communities: homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and families struggling to make ends meet are common occurrences just about anywhere in the world. The difference, however, between rural and urban communities is the availability of resources, or rather a lack thereof. In fact, “[i]n some ways, the conditions associated with rural poverty in the United States...have more in common with conditions in the developing world than they do with the challenges facing urban America” (Wiess 48).

Depending on the proximity of metropolitan resources, many small towns are lacking necessary help for the elderly, people with special needs, minority groups, and the list goes on. Even so, one resource which is common among rural communities throughout the U.S. is the church, or in many cases several churches all within one rural community. The church, an already established part of any small-town community, could become an indispensable agent of change. The Great Commission given by Jesus was to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (*New International Version*, Matt. 28.19-20). Making disciples and teaching others implies reaching out and being with other people that do not know about God. God calls us into a relationship, first with Himself, and second with others. Likewise, community development is also relationship-oriented and driven. Truly the two concepts go hand in hand.

Without the church stepping in to provide programs, community collaboration, and creative methods of helping people in need, what resources will be available to people in rural

towns? In the rural town of Rockaway Beach, Missouri, Bridge of Faith has implemented community outreach programs and is consequentially improving the quality of life for the residents by reducing generational poverty. Core principles, drawn from the qualitative case study conducted at Bridge of Faith, such as doing with versus doing for, the importance of community partnerships, and humility must be enacted in other rural churches to stimulate similar sustainable community change. This thesis delves into the heart, history, and biblical basis of community development, roadblocks to creating community, and rural church characteristics needed to encourage similar change in rural areas nationwide. For the sake of practicality, appendix A consists of a workbook for rural churches to utilize practical examples and steps to take in order to adapt Bridge of Faith's principles into their own communities.

### *Reflexivity*

The idea of combining the church with extensive community outreach programs which positively impacted the community changed the way I viewed church. As a Christian, I see the deep and inherent value of churches within a community. I know how Christ can change lives and instill hope, morals, and life into those who accept Him. Furthermore, as a social worker, I see the inherent value in community development and helping people help themselves through empowering work. In my community, there are very few examples of a combination between social work and the church, although the two concepts are connected in a myriad of ways. Therefore, understanding how Bridge of Faith has integrated community development as part of their church, is a vital step to teaching other churches how this can be possible.

My first real experience with community development began when I started to volunteer at Bridge of Faith about seven years ago. An older couple took me in as their adopted granddaughter when I moved to college for my undergraduate studies. Through my relationship with this couple, I saw their impassioned involvement with and love for Bridge of Faith. I

personally saw the difference Bridge of Faith was making in the lives of those in the community and had a desire to learn about how to implement these ideas myself. The seed was planted in me to better understand community development and further my education because of my involvement at Bridge of Faith. Naturally, Bridge of Faith was the ideal case study to begin research in hopes that other rural communities could experience similar change.

### *History of Rockaway Beach*

Nestled in the Ozark Mountains, Rockaway Beach thrived in the 1940s and 50s under a mass influx of tourism (Tate). Since then, for a multitude of reasons, the once sought-after town dropped off the radar of many vacationers. Rockaway Beach was “the classic family vacation spot” but has now become a forgotten memory for many (Mesenbrink). The lack of public transportation, the limited number of job opportunities, and the regular closure of local businesses continues to create hardship for countless families residing in Rockaway Beach.

Rockaway Beach was a business venture of Willard Merriam, a co-owner of an insurance company in Kansas City, in 1919 (Burton 16). Within a short time, several hotels, resorts, cottages, and restaurants were built. Rockaway Beach’s entertainment included fishing docks, campsites, dancing halls, go-carts, and ski ball (Moore). Marilyn Whetstone, a local who wrote a memoir on her childhood in Rockaway Beach notes, “The residents and business owners of the Beach worked tirelessly during the winter months to raise funds for the purpose of promoting tourism in our little village” (94). Year-round the residents took pride in their small town and sought to promote and establish lasting revenue. Unfortunately, with the building of Table Rock Dam, which was completed in 1958, the warm lake water of Rockaway Beach was turned into frigid waters unfit for many of the local activities (Moore). Consequentially, around the same time, the neighboring city of Branson began to increase their attractions and accumulate more of the tourism industry. During this time “[t]he docks and marinas that accommodated boats from

Branson and Rockaway often became inaccessible as the lakefront began to silt in. The result was often an unsightly, smelly mess as shallow water and mud flats bloomed with vegetation” (Moore). With a decrease in Rockaway’s tourism and economic development, there has been an increase in crime, drug use, and unemployment rates. In the midst of this town’s broken reputation and tattered history, Bridge of Faith Community Church was formed in 2005.

Although the journey contained many roadblocks to the church’s success, Bridge of Faith is now thriving in their community and seeking to see their community equally thrive. Bridge of Faith is unique because it is both a church and a leading example for community development in the Ozarks.

Within the Ozark area, finding a church which focuses on community development is rare. The idea of hands-on church involvement in the community is quite nuanced and is usually considered an urban concept. Bridge of Faith, however, paved the way for rural communities to start utilizing community development techniques through the church. In fact, this was a vision for the church from the it’s conception. Vince Blubaugh, Bridge of Faith’s founder notes this, “we wanted to marry social programs such as feeding kids and after school help with the Gospel presentation which led to discipleship.” Bridge of Faith currently has Wednesday night youth programs, baseball programs, a summer camp which is taught by local teachers, financial classes for children, a paid internship for middle and high school students which teaches job skills and provides college mentors to come alongside them, two thrift stores, a space rented out to a coffee shop, an affordable Christmas store, living free recovery groups, a biblical counseling center, a food co-op, a fitness center, greenhouse, and a thirty-two bed lodging facility for volunteers. Furthermore, the staff at Bridge of Faith are heavily involved in local politics. A few members of

the church are Alderman, and one member is even the mayor of Rockaway Beach. All these programs have been slowly progressing since 2005; the progress is impressive, nonetheless.

### *Methodology*

This thesis is derived from a qualitative case study. This form of research was chosen because of the nature of the study. Bridge of Faith within Rockaway Beach is a “bounded system,” meaning that Bridge of Faith is studied as a whole, without input or additional churches and programs being added to the study (Merriam and Tisdell 38). Therefore, although this case study specifically focuses on how Bridge of Faith conducts community development within their community, core concepts may be relatable to other rural churches looking to implement community development in their towns. Qualitative methods utilized in this study include “the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” through interviews, observation, and participation over a several month period of time (Merriam and Tisdell 37). During qualitative research, the hope is to “understan[d] how people interpret their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell 6). This understanding then translates into data which has been categorized and articulated into a complete study of Bridge of Faith’s community development within Rockaway Beach. I then used the complete study of Bridge of Faith’s community development to create a workbook which utilized lessons learned by staff at Bridge of Faith as well as observations of what worked well for their church while they implemented community development strategies. No one model fits every church or community which is why the workbook in appendix A seeks to address generalized community development issues while walking you through how to specifically use them in your own contexts and communities.

Although questions for the study varied to create a more organic interview, basics of the questions asked are as follows.

- 1) What does community development mean to you?



- 2) How did you end up at Bridge of Faith Church?
- 3) How does Bridge of Faith Church implement community development strategies in Rockaway Beach?
  - Who is involved in implementation and planning?
  - What community development strategies are currently implemented? Are there plans for future projects?
- 4) How does Bridge of Faith Church view success in their community development programs?
  - What community development strategies are most helpful to Rockaway Beach?
- 5) What steps did Bridge of Faith Church take to begin community development in Rockaway Beach?
  - What was easy about starting community development in Rockaway Beach?
  - What was difficult about starting community development in Rockaway Beach?
  - What resources were needed to begin this process?
- 6) What is Bridge of Faith Church's guiding principle to implementing community development in Rockaway Beach?
  - Where do these principles come from?
  - What is important about having guiding principles?
- 7) What could be improved about Bridge of Faith Church?

Research of Bridge of Faith and those associated with the church necessitated a two-tiered approach (Merriam and Tisdell 99). The church and their programs were researched, as well as those within the church and associated with the church. Questions were asked to Bridge of Faith staff members and church goers. Overall, 14 people were interviewed of varying age, gender,

and positions in the church. Interviews were conducted in various places on Bridge of Faith's campus or over the phone, but all interviews were private and kept confidential. Two interviews were conducted with the lead pastor, Jonathan McGuire. These interviews were the first and last interviews during the process. This "purposeful sampling" happened to "discover, understand, and gain insight" from the specific context of Bridge of Faith (Merriam and Tisdell 96).

Therefore, random sampling was not considered to be beneficial to a qualitative case study because this type of sampling relies on generalizing concepts.

### *Obstacles for Rural America*

For people who have never lived in or experienced a small-town, small-town residents can be somewhat of a conundrum. Why do people move away from easily accessible grocery stores, shops, and entertainment? Often people leave high paying jobs to live life in the country. In fact, author Robert Wuthnow wrote a book on this very concept. In his book *Small-Town America: Finding Community, Shaping the Future* he writes:

When residents of small towns describe their communities, a rich tapestry of meanings, narratives, family histories, and personal experiences emerges. People tell of moving to a small community to raise their children without the hassles of city life. They confess to having lost their job in a larger place and seeking refuge where housing was cheaper...

(Wuthnow 4)

Knowing your neighbors, usually cheaper cost of living, and being outside of bustling cities are all valid reasons people move to small towns. Furthermore, we must not neglect to remember the people who are already living in small towns and choose to stay. Some people do not have the means to leave, while others choose to stay for various reasons. Regardless, there are many charming and comforting aspects of small-town living. Often small towns remind me of classic

shows like *The Andy Griffith Show* or *Green Acres* where families have their troubles, but at the end of the day they come together with the love and support of the community around them.

Even so, the difficulties of small towns are an ever-present problem which cannot be ignored.

Amy McGuire, operations and strategy leader and wife of the lead pastor shared her struggles of a lack of resources in rural areas. Amy lamented, “There are no resources in the rural areas. There’s no pregnancy center, no bus stations, no after school or GED programs. There are literally zero resources for rural America except possibly the church. Even so, how is the church going to be 97 organizations for every rural community?” She went on to share that applying for grants is nearly impossible because grants are based on numbers and often small communities do not have the numbers that urban communities would have. Furthermore, in community development conferences and training, Amy and Jonathan McGuire realized there were no rural breakout session groups. Instead, they went to the urban breakout sessions where solutions often were proposed which included getting people connected with local resources. Living in a community with few to no resources, the breakout sessions proved frustrating at times.

### *Poverty*

Poverty is truly a disparaging obstacle for many within the United States. A study of people experiencing chronic poverty from 2016 noted that adults experiencing poverty have “lower self-rated health and worse outcomes in terms of functional activity limitations, minor illnesses, chronic health conditions, and mental health problems” (Kimberlin 188). Whether it is food insecurity, lack of access to appropriate health care, unsafe places to live, or any other number of problems which results in living under the poverty line, study after study corroborates the damage these circumstances have on adults and children alike-lifelong and life-altering change. Furthermore, reports show that an “overwhelming majority of high-poverty counties are

in nonmetro areas” (Lewis 102). Rural areas are primary candidates for high rates of poverty compared to urban areas, a fact many are unaware of.

Adult poverty is not the only concern for small rural towns. In a study conducted in 2019 it was found that “21.1 percent of nonmetro children in the United States were poor, compared to 16.1 percent of metro children...[and] research suggests that the more time a child spends in poverty...the greater the chance of being poor as an adult” (Rural Poverty). Children in poverty not only have the current struggles of food insecurity, possible lack of safe housing, and other issues, they also have more obstacles to overcome in adulthood to be part of middle-class America. Problems are expounded in rural communities because of an overall lack of access to resources. Often public transportation is extremely limited or nonexistent. Likewise, the job market in small towns is narrow, and being fired from one company may result in little to no other job options. Depending on the rural area, sometimes jobs are spread out. For example, vocational opportunities may be on ranches which are miles from the nearest rural town. Other rural towns have one or two working businesses and the majority of the workforce commutes to the nearest city with more options. Limited transportation and vocational opportunities create a culture of disempowered people. Furthermore, a lack of job alternatives and transportation can often lead to too much free time on one’s hands.

Rockaway Beach struggled with drug creation, use, and distribution within their town because of a lack of resources, jobs, and transportation. Kara Hinkle, the Next Generation Leader noted this about working with the youth at church, “we used to have a lot of ‘my parent is in jail’ so we help provide meals because the other parent doesn’t make enough money or doesn’t get to work because they have to take care of the children”. Furthermore, multiple interviewees mentioned how the children who came to youth group at church would try to sell various drugs

while at the church or would run drugs for their parents to make extra cash. Idle hands create a myriad of disruptive problems for an entire community.

Even so, when thinking of and discussing poverty statistics keep in mind, “if we restrict the notion of poverty to a purely statistical interpretation, as our government is understandably required to do, we miss the human element” (Bryant 1). To elaborate on this point, Myers clarifies with his readers that the Christian perspective of poverty should be one which remembers, “that the poor are people with names, people to whom God has given gifts, and people with whom...God has been working before we even arrived” (106). Behind every person there is a story, sometimes there is deep trauma, or a life of disappointments. Regardless, each person has a story behind their actions and each person matters. Taking time to remember the person behind the struggles not only humanizes them but creates empathy and compassion within ourselves. Poverty affects people globally, but rural communities get hit hard in a different way because of their striking lack of infrastructure and community resources.

### *The Church*

Although this paper encourages the church to be the solution to obstacles faced in rural America, at times the church can also contribute to the problem. It is no secret that church attendance has been in decline over the past couple of decades. A study conducted between 1972-1986 revealed that “younger cohorts attend church less frequently than did older cohorts” (Chaves 467). Now, the younger generation from the 70s and 80s have become parents or even grandparents. Culturally, going to church may not be the norm anymore. In fact, in her book on the church in rural America, O’Dell writes this:

The number of church buildings says nothing about the state of Christianity in rural America. We find church buildings on most street corners in small towns. The prairies are dotted with churches everywhere. But that is part of the problem. These struggling

churches won't survive the next decade if they cannot grow, and rural churches have challenges unique to the ministry. (O'Dell 18)

Without attendees and growth how can the church impact their community? Although growth is only a partial benefit of church community development, many rural churches have seen congregation growth when implementing community development strategies. Therefore, it is important to have dedicated members on board from the start.

Some churches do have regular attendees, but they may be resistant to any changes in the church's activities or involvement in the community. Possibly, members of congregations may be stifling collaboration within the church or within the community. Without growth, collaboration, and willing participation, a church can become suffocated and begin to decline. Growth and change can be difficult whatever stage the church is in, however, when considering community development conducted by the rural church, keep in mind that "people are drawn to places that help others and make a positive difference in the community" (Dandridge 13). In fact, from studying Bridge of Faith and through research of churches and community development, it is clear that churches who practice community development techniques tend to grow. People want to make an impact, and community development is a great avenue for transforming lives and sharing the truth of the Gospel.

The decline of church attendance and involvement is a sad reality for many rural communities. Whatever the reason for this decline, maybe it is time for a resurgence of purpose to be reignited in the church. In his dissertation on "The Abandonment of the Church: A study of Church Membership Decline," Shawn Dandridge Sr., urges churches to have a resurgence of impact on their communities by repositioning themselves to make a difference in people's spiritual, social, and economic lives, thus having a holistic view of the people in the community

and their needs (1). Although community development is not necessarily a strategy for church growth, what if a renewed vision and mission drew people in? What if people were reached who never would walk into a church? What if your church were to leave the community, would they beg you to come back? The last question was one Pastor Jonathan McGuire, lead pastor at Bridge of Faith asked himself. If a church is seeking the good of their community, it certainly becomes hard to deny the impact and influence that church has in their town. When considering your church, take into account what your community would say if your church left town.

### *Positive Change in Rockaway Beach*

Bridge of Faith was chosen as a case study because of the change seen in the community of Rockaway Beach it was founded in 2005. Rockaway Beach went from a place where it was not uncommon to come across occurrences where, “I [Vince Blubaugh, founder of Bridge of Faith] would see little babies in horrible conditions. One time a six-month-old baby was holding a steak knife and sitting in a soiled diaper while her mom and aunt were passed out on the couch from methamphetamines. I had to call DFS (the Department of Family Services)” (Blubaugh). To a place where Associate Pastor Cameron Mund wanted to move his family. He shares this:

When the opportunity came to buy a house in Rockaway Beach it wasn't some major ‘oh my goodness we are going to be stuck here and can never go anywhere else moment.’

That never occurred to us, it was more ‘that’s our second family, that’s who we do life with and for us it only makes sense to be with them as much as we can or be near them as much as possible.’ (Mund)

A town where there is a street nicknamed “meth alley” because of all the homes blown up from methamphetamine labs gone wrong, has transformed, and is continuing to transform into a town where business owners believe in the community and in the church’s mission. Furthermore, businesses have started to bring money and jobs back into the community. For example, Dean

O'Bryan who currently rents a building from the church kept saying "someone's got to do something" until finally he decided that someone would be him; now, he owns a local coffee shop (O'Bryan). Ultimately, Cameron Mund concludes the change he's seen in his community by saying, "I don't know how much credit people in the church can take...but we are just so proud of where Rockaway Beach is today as opposed to where it was in the beginning days."

Although he does share the church plays a significant role in the community, I do believe every staff person would ultimately give God the credit for sustaining them and taking the church thus far. Lives have been changed, families have been salvaged, and the community of Rockaway Beach is a safer, more prosperous, and kinder town because of the love of Christ revealed through the staff at Bridge of Faith.

#### *Brief Overview of Community Development*

Although greatly alluded to above, the paper begs this question what does the church have to do with community development? Even more so, what is community development? Community development is truly a grassroots approach. Although, definitions are as various as opinions on community development. In general, community development is a movement that produces positive, engaging, and sustainable change to a problem faced by a community of people. Bridge of Faith started by addressing the need for positive and healthy activities for the youth in their community. They began by creating after-school programs, which grew into summer internships, job training, and mentoring. Out of this grew a desire to see families supported and cared for, so One Heart, the biblical counseling center, was founded. A need for increased health in their community was noticed so Bridge of Faith started a community garden and gym. Essentially, whatever a community needs to thrive, be safe, resilient, and stable for all people is where a community developer starts. Community developers look for a need and



innovate creative and collaborative solutions to these problems by utilizing the resources already found in a given community.

After top-down approaches to developing communities showed a lack of results in alleviating poverty world-wide, developers started to recognize the importance of grassroots empowering approaches (Willis 103). By empowering the local people to be the solution for themselves, not only is a project increasingly more sustainable, but it is also more likely to be utilized, taken care of, and adjusted when need be. Furthermore, community development does not just help people in poverty. Keep in mind that “as the poor get richer, their purchasing power rises, so benefiting domestic firms” (Willis 105). Developing communities is a team effort which takes players from all fields, professions, educations, backgrounds, and cultures. Additionally, when all these groups are involved, community buy-in and collaboration can take place.

#### *History of Community Development and the Church*

When considering the start of community development, colonialism must be taken into consideration. Several reasons can be noted for the important role colonialism took in development: “First, from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, European colonialism created more and more linkage between different parts of the world” (Willis 20). Although European colonists had a variety of reasons for colonizing various countries, one reason was to spread religion. The methodologies many colonists used is not condoned, however, the interconnectedness of the world which began to happen and European countries experiencing other country’s living conditions started to plant early seeds of community development. Later, “postcolonial approaches [would] seek to disrupt ways of thinking about the world based on Northern assumptions and also recognize differences” (Willis 30). One disrupted way of thinking which arose from postcolonialism was a top-down approach. Postcolonialism led to “the conventional practice at the time...for development assistance to flow directly from governments

of wealthy countries to governments of poor countries, and from the top to the bottom through local government channels” (Bornstein 13). Approaches and theories morphed and adapted from colonist periods to today. Past theories include basic needs approach, an approach which focused on government aid provided for the world’s poorest, neoliberalism, which focused on the market and limited government involvement, the grassroots approach which encouraged locals to be actively engaged in development outcomes, sustainable approaches, gender and right’s-based approaches and many more (Willis 28). With each new approach, or rather, a building block of approaches which added and adapted previous models, correct actions steps were being taken to be both inclusive, culturally sensitive, sustainable, and respectful of all communities who were part of community development initiatives worldwide.

This unity and recognition of differences was vital to development and even a key to Biblical truth about others. Galatians 3:28 is in the middle of a letter to the Galatians explaining the connection between God’s law and faith, notes this: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” After hundreds of years of mistakes where communities or people groups postured themselves as better than other peoples, cultures, or economic classes, we can see the key walls being broken down in this verse. There are no excuses for exclusivity among believers; we are called into collaboration with one another. The church is a key to historical community development because God is in the business of restoring lives. When considering Jesus’ ministry, he healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, touched the untouchable, talked to the unseen, and loved those who no one else even noticed. Jesus was restoring life back to the way it was meant to be, back to the original creation. Even in society today, there are people who may be unhygienic, have diseases, or be offensive because of a belief or way of acting. Psychologically speaking, it

is easy to assume a clean person would be contaminated if they encountered a dirty person, or an untainted person would become tainted if in contact with the wrong crowd. However, this is not how Jesus interacted with the world. In fact, “Contact with Jesus purifies. A missional church embraces this reversal, following Jesus into the world without fears of contamination” (Beck 30). When Jesus touched the sick, they did not make Jesus sick, instead the sick people were healed. Likewise, when Jesus interacted with people possessed by demons, he was not threatened, rather he took authority and reversed the roles. The church has the ability to walk in the steps of Jesus and likewise bring back restoration to broken lives.

Furthermore, the authors of *Making Neighborhoods Whole* note this about the church’s involvement in community development, “the church-is uniquely capable of affirming the dignity of the poor...one can easily make the case that the reason so many parachurch organizations came into existence is that the local church was not doing its job” (Gordon and Perkins 122). The church certainly can, and should be affirming the dignity of the poor, fighting for justice, and seeking the good of those around them. Micah 6:8 is a clear commandment from God: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”. Justice, mercy, and humility are important to God, and as you’ll see below, they are also important keys to being a successful community developer through your local rural church because “not only do churches function as religious organizations, but also they are key institutions for providing important civic, educational, health, and social resources to church members and nonparticipants alike” (Chatters 405). The church most certainly has a role to play in the future of community development, as it has played a role in the past of community development.

*Lessons Learned*

The lessons learned from Bridge of Faith were an immeasurable wealth of knowledge and insight into rural church community development. Core concepts and the overall basis of community development principles were condensed into an interactive workbook which is attached in the appendix. However, the core themes and ideas of community development are elaborated on below to fully encompass the depth of these topics and their relationship with community development principles.

*Identifying Community Needs*

Vince Blubaugh, founder of Bridge of Faith, communicated how the early years of church planting felt at times like fighting in a war zone. In his experiences in those early years, he learned that “When we meet a need in a community, it gives us a right to speak into the community” (Blubaugh). What would it mean for rural churches to have a right to speak in their community? Furthermore, what would it mean for the community to listen to what the church had to say? For some areas, the thought of the church not only being heard, but being respected is almost unthinkable. But why is that? Although, the answer is surely multifaceted, one answer might be the community’s needs are left unmet. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IRFC) created a comprehensive study to better understand resilient communities. In their study they stated six characteristics for a safe and resilient community.

These six characteristics are as follows:

A safe and resilient community...

1. Is knowledgeable and healthy.
2. Is organized. It has the capacity to identify problems, establish priorities and act.
3. Is connected. It has relationships with external actors (family, friends, faith groups, government).

4. Has infrastructure and services. It has strong housing, transportation, power, water, and sanitation systems.
5. Has economic opportunities. It has a diverse range of employment opportunities, income, and financial services.
6. Can manage its natural assets. It recognizes their value and has the ability to protect, enhance and maintain them. (IRFC 7)

Note that a qualifying factor of a safe and resilient community is that it “is organized” and includes identifying problems and acting on solutions to these problems (IRFC 7). Even so, note that housing, transportation, and other infrastructure is an important part of a safe and resilient community as well, which is often something many rural communities do not currently possess.

When identifying the need of a community, the problems of a community can be a list with seemingly no end. Even though the Red Cross concisely created six points, in a town with no resources, it could feel as if it were one hundred points. The thought of starting to open that proverbial can of worms may be incredibly overwhelming. A simple acronym for identifying needs in a community is called a SWOT analysis, which stands for: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. As overwhelming as this task might be, working as a group is the best way to understand community problems. Amy McGuire, shares this about community needs:

“People want to open up with every resource available and it’s just not realistic. What are your resources available to you? I’m referring to people on your team. And what is realistic for them to accomplish?...See what does your community need and what do you know about the resources available to you? You can start small and build from that.”

No one can change the world overnight, and not everything will be resolved, but everyone has to start somewhere.

The SWOT analysis is divided into different parts: internal and external factors. Internal factors include strengths and weaknesses, which are lists within those two categories of factors one can control. The second half of a SWOT analysis includes opportunities and threats which are external factors or a list of what is out of one's control. Seek to define the weaknesses in a community first; although this does not follow the acronym ending the analysis on a positive note is important for morale and can lead to appreciation of the strengths and opportunities each community has. Additionally, the weaknesses list will be much easier to compile than the strengths. Weaknesses are a starting point that realistically looks at what aspects need improvement, or where there is a lack of something within the community. By taking a realistic look at weaknesses within a community one can more easily define the community's need or needs.

However, do not stop at recounting weaknesses in a community. To completely grasp a community's full potential, it is important to also take note of strengths. Although harder to find and define than weaknesses, strengths can be found in each situation and person. For example, Adam Mink shared in his interview that in the early years of Bridge of Faith, many of the youth in Rockaway Beach would buy marijuana for \$20 in a nearby town and walk back to Rockaway Beach to sell it for \$40 (Mink). This would happen several times a day so the youth could make some quick money, this shows their entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to work. With some guidance from Bridge of Faith staff and classes for the youth and children, now, nearly two decades years later kids have lemonade stands and are thinking about starting their own businesses. Even back in the early years, a strength of the youth in Rockaway Beach was their willingness to work hard to earn some money. At times, listing strengths feel like a stretch, but

they are present in every single individual. Strengths are an internal factor which means they include what a church or community has control over.

Threats are the third aspect of identifying community needs. Similar to placing weaknesses before strengths, placing threats before opportunities ends the analysis on a positive note. The difference between weaknesses and threats are that threats present something that is out of one's locus of control. For example, considering external factors such as other town's resources, funding streams, or manpower could be a start. Community attitudes were a huge threat to Bridge of Faith in their founding days. Vince Blubaugh recounted many times his life was threatened, he was shot at, and he faced immense spiritual warfare in the earlier years in Rockaway Beach. Identifying threats can be a key to understanding a community's needs. If a community is threatened, there may be a lack in safety or adequate resources which is leading to this feeling.

Lastly, opportunity is the final letter in the SWOT analysis. Opportunities, like threats, are external factors, but with the possibility of growth. Consider what other rural communities are doing, which could be emulated. Most likely, some of the threats or weaknesses can also be reframed into positive growth. By taking a realistic and holistic view of a community, true needs can be identified, and steps can be created for meeting those needs and reaching the community as a whole. When considering each section of the SWOT analysis, it is important to note that a variety of opinions are needed to create a holistic picture of what a community needs. People of varying ages, races, religious and economic backgrounds provide a comprehensive understanding of a given community.

### *Stakeholders in the Community*

Community stakeholders are vital to any rural community and aid in a church's work to improve their local community. Partnerships are a vital part of any community development

operation. In fact, “community development requires partnerships to solve local problems and to build strength, self-sufficiency, and well-being” (Eom et al. 1). During the identifying a community’s needs stage, it is likely that identifying key individuals or organizations who hold sway in a community were also acknowledged. Regardless of monetary status or education, stakeholders range from the mayor to an infamous gang leader. Each community has one or several individuals which are prominent and outspoken on community issues. Not only those who are outspoken, but a variety of individuals from all backgrounds should be included in the planning and implementing process of any community development project. Petra Kuenkel in her book, *The Art of Leading Collectively*, shares the importance of diversifying a team to create change in communities: “People in these groups have differences in power, experience, education, and culture...This is all part of the sustainability endeavor” (151). Although it is vital to each step and aspect of community development, diversifying a team of stakeholders to enact change is not easy, but it is important for people from each group to have a stake in the outcome of a project which effects their community. When individuals are invested in a project, they will be more likely to share this passion with their group in a positive manner. Stakeholders can make the difference between a community staying stuck and undeveloped or choosing to support a project and having hope for a better future.

Even among churches, collaboration is typically unheard of or kept to a minimum. This lack of interconnected collaboration within a similar faith tradition or even across religions is unfortunate. In a lament of churches not collaborating, Dandridge writes, “Churches are experiencing many similar if not the same issues, yet they are not banding together to rectify the situation” (72). Isolation is not conducive to growth. One does not have to agree on every detail to work together. In fact, there can be opposing views in religion, yet a commonality of being a



part of the same community that can still bring people together. Nigeria, a highly polarized society where Christians and Muslims fight against each other, has given birth to two very dissimilar friends. Pastor Dr. James Movel Wuye and Imam Dr. Muhammad Nurayn, who were once enemies but are now advocating together for peace in Nigeria. In a speech to the Harvard Divinity School, Dr. Muhammad Nurayn notes how his and Dr. James' interfaith organization is seeking to find the core of Christianity and Islam, to boil down the essence of each religion. He asks his audience, "what are truly religious communities that are living by the virtues and the dictate of their religion" (Interfaith Strategy 00:20:53-00:20:56)? Note that Christians should be actively living out the principles they claim to believe, this includes each member being a different part of Christ's body. Only when working together can Christians truly accomplish the task they have been given.

Stakeholders can be a church's biggest supporter or principal naysayer. And although no one can control whether people choose to back a project, by including stakeholders in the processes, there is a higher likelihood of both support and investment. Partnerships are beneficial as shown in a survey over a span of 6 countries and hundreds of interviews conducted by the PRIDE research project. Two intrinsic characteristics of local partnerships were discovered. One, partnerships brought together several actors which accomplished more together than alone, and secondly partnerships brought added potential and capabilities to the table which "really add[ed] value to the development process" (Moseley 125). Although partnering with others, especially a diversified group is not easy, the result takes the project further and sustains them longer than any one individual or organization could do alone. Bridge of Faith is a prime example of partnering with other agencies. The church is a site for summer school through their local school district, their greenhouse was the result of consulting work with a local university's extension

office, and several of their interns come from local colleges to volunteer and mentor youth. The list could go on in their partnerships to get the lay biblical counseling center and local gym up and running. Partnering is even biblical, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up” (Ecc. 4.9-10). Support, increased knowledge base, and seeing more accomplished are direct results of quality community collaboration with local stakeholders.

### *Family and Church Support*

Another key component of the interviews and observational research conducted at Bridge of Faith included the importance of support. Often members had family support to move to Rockaway Beach, but more than that, the church became a family to those who moved into the community. Churches structurally consist of a building or buildings, but in practical terms, they are a group of people. Kara Hinkle shared this about the family aspect at church, “Bridge of Faith has taken me in and made me a part of a family, especially when my family is far away.” Examples from several staff and church members were given where people from the church stepped up to take care of sick children, cook for other families, and include others in family traditions. Kara even shared how her youngest daughter is proud to wear hand-me-down clothes of other girls in the church because she considers these girls as her big sisters. What has been built at Bridge of Faith is an environment of trust for one another and out of this trust comes feelings of support and care for one another. In the podcast, *We Study Billionaires*, podcasts hosts Stig Brodersen and Trey Lockertie share this about trust, “If there is one thing that a relationship, individual, team, company has in common it’s trust, and when trust vanishes it can completely destroy a nation, a team, or any group... Trust is that one thing that can truly change everything” (Stephen Covey’s *Speed of Trust* 00:04:10-00:04:39). Long lasting relationships are

built on trust and that trust has the potential to change any situation around. Not only trust among church members, but also trust outside in the community as well.

Now, churches may differ in demographics. Some churches may predominately consist of older adults whereas others may consist mainly of young families. Whatever the case may be, an important lesson learned from Bridge of Faith staff members is that “the staff families are just as important as the families we minister to” (Harriger). By prioritizing staff members and their need for days off from ministry, the overall church can function in a healthier manner. Ministry is exhausting, all-encompassing, and time consuming. Therefore, family support from outside family members and church members can better increase the longevity of each member by prioritizing each other. In fact, a study conducted on church relationships noted this:

Church relationships are critical for health and wellbeing and are associated with lower rates of mental and physical health problems. For example, older adults who receive support from congregants and those with at least one close friend in their congregation report less depression and few depressive symptoms. (Chatters et al. 406)

Church members provide important support in relationships that are critical even to people’s physical health. Family support outside and within the church is more important when it comes to full time community development ministry as well.

In a study conducted about rural resident’s depression and their willingness to seek help from churches, many of the participants positively responded to the suggestion of a church-based group on depression intervention. “Respondents believed offering care for depression in the church setting would benefit their community and saw it as a viable option to address their own depressive symptoms” (Weaver et al. 1668). Community members saw the church as a safe place to go and work out some serious mental health challenges. Imagine the willingness of locals to

be a part of a mission in a church that feels like home. In spaces that are safe, caring, and intentional about bettering the community around them, life change starts happening.

### *Copowerment*

The typical charity model of giving to people in need creates pessimism, burnout, and more need in the people than the original charity was meant to help. In an attempt to rethink the typical charity model, Joseph Hanlon writes this, “We are not giving enough attention to how poor people get themselves out of poverty. We always assume that we must do it for them” (382). Where does this innate need to assume charity must be done a certain way come from? Often, people want to feel needed, appreciated, and that their effort yields quick fruit in someone else’s life. Unfortunately, a desire to feel needed does not truly help people, in fact it can do quite the opposite. People with compassion often end up, “evaluating our charity by the rewards we receive through service, rather than the benefits received by the served” (Lupton 5). Charity by giving without any buy-in from the receiver is both dangerous and un-dignifying. Charity places the giver in a position of power over the receiver, there is an unspoken expectation of appreciation, and the receiver must recount their traumatic stories over again to gain help from another organization down the road. By not letting the receiver have buy-in, they are sent the subliminal message, “you cannot earn this, you are not smart enough to get this on your own” or a variety of this message.

However, there is an alternative to the typical charity method. This model is both dignifying and empowering to the person on the receiving end. Copowerment, a term coined by Northwest University’s MAICD program, is the concept that both the giver and receiver can work together in a mutually beneficial relationship. Copowerment is a hand up, not a handout. In essence, “community development is participatory and democratic, and involves hard work in lieu of handouts” (Zdenek and Walsh 2). It both involves buy-in and involvement from the

people the program is seeking to help, as well as an understanding that each person has qualities and resources to bring to the table. By creating programs where copowerment is a key characteristic, sustainability and dignity are subsequent factors. Steve Donaldson, founder of Rural Compassion had this to say about copowerment, “we’re not doing it for, but we’re doing it with. That’s harder to do because a lot of impoverished families have complex lives that are so chaotic.” The economic and even cultural divide between people in poverty and middle and upper-class people is stark. Proper research and inquiry of resources to better understand this divide will aid any community development worker and project as the obstacles for people in poverty are deep and multifaceted.

Practically speaking, how does copowerment work? Referring once more to Bridge of Faith’s model Jonathan McGuire, Bridge of Faith’s lead pastor, shared this in his interview, “I’m trying to empower others to have the final say.” Rather than typifying the giving of free items, Bridge of Faith seeks to build relationships with the individuals who walk through their doors. The thrift store is on the same property as Bridge of Faith. Donated items are priced lower than average to make items affordable to the locals. Not only does the Bridge of Faith thrift store offer clothing, but they sell sanitary and bathroom products, animal food, furniture, and even entertainment. Jonathan notes,

When we started the thrift store, the same people that we would knock on their door, and they would slam the door in our face because they didn’t want us on their front porch started coming into the thrift store and shopping because they couldn’t pass up on a \$2 pair of jeans. This strategy was instrumental in rehabbing the community. (McGuire)

The community of Rockaway Beach saw the benefit of the church’s programs and felt treated with respect and dignity. Although the process was not quick, slowly, slammed doors turned into

faithful church members. Besides the thrift store, Bridge of Faith recently launched a new gym in town. Cameron Mund shared this about their hopes for the gym, “we’re not really going to make a penny on it and yet the benefit to the community of people inside the church and outside the church is eventually going to be transformational for their lives.” Bridge of Faith uses copowerment in almost every program they run. The children are empowered when they are taught job skills which in turn helps them break generational cycles of poverty. Furthermore, adults are given the ability to buy their children Christmas gifts through the affordable Christmas store, and families are being restored through transformational relationships with members at Bridge of Faith. When people are prioritized over money, numbers, or productivity, self-esteem and confidence are restored.

### *Challenges and Humility*

Community development rarely happens without significant roadblocks and struggles throughout the process. A common theme among interviewees, especially from the people with higher positions in the church, was that they regularly referred to the trials they encountered as well as recounting the mistakes they made throughout their community development process. Challenges and humility are intimately tied to each other, especially in ministry. Although discussing challenges in community development may seem to sway people from truly partaking in this process, it is vital to start a project with honesty and understanding of all the angles. Only when people truly understand both the risks and the rewards, can they stick out all seasons of community development. When embarking on a journey of great lengths such as community development keep in mind that “every journey, honestly undertaken, stands a chance of taking us toward the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need” (Palmer 36). Truly, community development within the rural church is the vehicle best utilized to meet the world’s deep need.

As mentioned above, the difficulties of Bridge of Faith's genesis were immense, life-threatening, and overwhelming. Apprehension and violence from locals as well as negative perspectives of Rockaway Beach from neighboring towns created an immense amount of tension and struggle in those early years. Even so, the members at Bridge of Faith did not give up hope because people "cannot create an enemy when [they] look for and find that of God in another" (Lederach). Now, several years after Bridge of Faith's conception, attitudes and mindsets are starting to change. As Adam Mink put it, "You can't say Rockaway Beach without mentioning Bridge of Faith." Prior to this comment, Adam clarified that the church itself does not receive the glory, but the church is the body of Christ and God is the one who has brought the church as far as it has. Jonathan McGuire shared this about the growth that has happened in Rockaway Beach, "it takes 15 years to actually see fruit from community development." When asked if he has seen fruit in the community he commented, "Yes, the opportunities that children have now are phenomenal compared to what they had when we first started...I just wish someone else would have started sooner" (McGuire). Whenever a project in community development starts rarely is fruit seen right away. When discussing how long it takes to see success, Amy McGuire encouraged me to, "pick out the small victories and rejoice in those because big victories take years to get." Perseverance and consistency through challenges is where fruit is yielded. The Bible even acknowledges this fact: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin" (New Living Translation Zech. 4.10). Often, I find that people who are highly motivated expect results more magnanimous than God expects from us. He knows our hearts and encourages us to not neglect small beginnings either.

Along with acknowledging the challenges and the length of time it has taken Bridge of Faith to become what it is today, many interviewees were humble about the part they played, and

acknowledged the lesson learned from their mistakes. “Wisdom is acquired over years of practice, and since failure is an essential part of wisdom, it too is built into the framework by valuing risk and making room for fresh voices” (Rocke and Van Dyke 21). Failures are the bedrock for fresh ideas and voices to be seated at the table of collaboration. “In fact, early failure can be crucial to success in innovation. Because the faster you find weaknesses during an innovation cycle, the faster you can improve what needs fixing” (Kelley and Kelley 40). Making mistakes will happen in community development projects, especially early on. However, it is how people choose to view those mistakes that keep them as either roadblocks or as learning curves for future projects. The staff and church members at Bridge of Faith acknowledge that there is no perfect person in their church. Sarah Sharp beautifully summed this up by stating, “the church is not perfect, but there are a lot of imperfect people working together in their areas of giftedness for the growth and the goodness of God and that can happen anywhere.” A common theme in many of the interviews was that Bridge of Faith’s story was not credit to any one person, but ultimately to God. From the founder to the lead pastor, down to the church members, there was agreement that the success Bridge of Faith has seen is glory first and foremost to God’s goodness. An important aspect of humility in a church when conducting community development is to avoid unhealthy leadership. In Vogl’s book on the Art of Community, Vogl warns his readers against the qualities of a cult. These traits include, absolute moral authority resides with the leader alone, the leadership is not accountable to anyone, and unquestioning commitment to the leader is required (Vogl 118). Conversely, a good leader acknowledges they cannot take full control, encourages outside relationships and ministry, and has accountability for their actions (Vogl 120). Humility is a key to a healthy and strong leader because no one has all the answers, nor should this be expected of someone. Community



development is a team effort and as stated above, takes both community collaboration and family support.

*Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)*

In an effort to be as practical as possible for rural churches to relate and understand concepts of community development in their own contexts, this last lesson from Bridge of Faith is a schema to practice rural community development. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a framework that churches can adapt and utilize to take next steps into rural community development. ABCD “shifts the focus of community development from ‘problem solving’ to ‘asset building’” (Wilke 2). Although, as shared earlier, finding the community’s needs is an important step of knowing where to start, it is not useful to fixate on the needs of a community, but to also see the strengths already present in order to create practical steps of action. Kretzmann and McKnight, some of the founders of ABCD note this about weak communities, “One of the reasons this basic resource (the capacity of individual members) is underdeveloped in weak communities is because the community has come to focus largely on the deficiencies rather than the capacities of its members” (Introduction to Asset Mapping 1). Failing to neglect local resources, however raw they may be, is failing to succeed from the start.

Models for change in a community are unsustainable because often “leaders are forced to exaggerate the severity of the problems...[and] leaders are measured by their ability to attract outside resources” (Wilke 4). To consistently focus on the problem of a situation is degrading to the local community as well as unproductive for change. Instead, after acknowledging places of need, also, take note of strengths in the community as shared above with the SWOT analysis. Strengths in a rural community can “often include the shared values of self-reliance, importance of family connections, concern for other rural residents, and significance of indigenous helpers and informal helping networks where lives intersect on personal, social, and professional levels”

(Lewis 104). Each step prior to this ABCD section has been a building block of ABCD's core tenants. A few of these tenants include: everyone has gifts, relationships build communities, leaders should involve everyone as active members of change, listening to others, locals have the control of the change of their community, and many other characteristics named in the ABCD Toolkit (What is Asset Based Community Development Handout). In essence, ABCD is a summation of all the characteristics of community developers mentioned prior in this paper.

Tools on assessing a community's strengths can be found by looking up The Capacity Inventory where a survey is easily accessed to begin utilizing in the community. By collecting initial data on a community's strengths and assets, a map can be created. Asset maps provide a clearer picture of where resources can be found in each community, and who can be accessed for these needs. Kretzmann and McKnight advocate for an inside-out approach to community transformation. They share, "historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when a local community of people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort" (Building Communities from the Inside Out 3). The goal is to map community assets, connect people with each other, and multiply their effectiveness by utilizing these people to start working with institutions and organizations for community cohesiveness. ABCD is a model of focusing on assets to create community change. Even more so, it is a steppingstone in the first steps of the process of rural community development. Rural community development starts with the local church. Both church leaders and members must venture on this journey as they seek to create a more resourceful and cohesive environment.

### *Conclusion*

Community development is a spiritual journey of working towards restoration of the world. Considering community development techniques from a Christian standpoint we can see that, "what we believe about God will tell us what we believe about people; and what we believe

about people will tell us what kinds of communities and societies we believe we should strive to create” (Salter McNeil 27). God is bringing people back to Himself; He desires to see lives, families, and communities restored. If Christians believe in the Great Commission given to us by Jesus, then we must go out to make disciples. Starting within our own communities, with our own neighbors, we can create a more loving and life-giving community.

As noted in the introduction, community development and church work are complimentary to one another. By understanding the interplay of these two entities working together, much could be accomplished. Bridge of Faith in Rockaway Beach is an outstanding example of this concept, and they are paving the way for other rural churches to follow suit. My goal is to ease this process and guide rural churches to a place of impacting their communities in the most beneficial and holistic ways possible. The guide in appendix A is an aid through this process and takes individuals and communities through each of the steps and characteristics described above. Revisiting Jonathan’s words about the change he’s seen in Rockaway Beach over the past several years, he lamented that he wishes change would have come sooner. Sustainable life change takes time and is messy, however the sooner one starts, the sooner lives can be touched. Do not neglect the calling to start something lifechanging right where you live. God uniquely gifts us with our community to be a light of His salvation and love at home first, and then to the ends of the earth.

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Appendix A

The Rural Church and Community Development Workbook: How Positive Community  
Change Starts with the Church

Hannah Witcher

MA International Community Development

Northwest University

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## INTRODUCTION

The Midwest of the United States is scattered with small rural towns. Often, these areas have at least one, but usually several, churches scattered across town. Churches serve as America's backbone, a pulse with which to check the health and growth of a country. Although big cities often inundate the news, small towns are equally significant and valuable. In fact, despite the disproportionate size of big cities to towns, monumental change can come from small places.

To begin this workbook, I would like to start off with a story. Picture, for a moment, Town A. Town A is located in rural America. Far enough from the city to be rural, Town A has a grocery store, one post office, a Dollar General, and a conglomeration of gas stations. Most people in town know each other. Any time Town A has anything happen, news spreads like wildfire. Town A also has a lot to offer with their vibrant community, beautiful scenery, and quaint stores. However, Town A's economy is struggling, and many townspeople are having to look outside the town's limits for jobs and livelihoods. There are no youth programs, which often leaves troubled youth to graffiti walls, steal from stores, and skip school. Furthermore, many programs offered in larger cities are nonexistent in Town A. Generally, people experiencing homelessness, addiction, or other unwanted life circumstances would be better off in a larger city with more organizations equipped to help. Without public transportation, most people have little hope to get needed assistance to make it month-to-month. Even so, within Town A lies a church which is a cornerstone of the community. This church acknowledges the struggles in Town A and decides to partner with the local school to create an afterschool program for the youth. Volunteers from the church rally to provide stimulating activities, and the school agrees to help with feeding the children. As the afterschool program becomes a success, many of the church members notice the youth are coming from troubled homes. The attention is then refocused on

the parents and supporting the lower-income families in the community. Soon, the church decides to work with the parents to create a food co-op. Each family pays a monthly amount, and a pool of food is collected and distributed accordingly. With each interaction and relationship built among the members of Town A's community, church volunteers creatively invent new programs and ideas to help and love on those around them and create a town they are all proud to call home.

Town A may geographically look different than your town. Maybe the problems vary in nature, or the scenery is different. In fact, Steve Donaldson, founder of Rural Compassion notes, "if you've seen one rural community, you've seen one rural community" (Donaldson). Each town is uniquely beautiful. Conversely the opposite is also true; each town has unique struggles. However, although differences remain, often the core depravity of humanity is similar. People go hungry, alcoholism is a problem, drugs and abuse are evident, and parents don't know how they're going to pay the bills next month. People are hurting in every town, city, and continent, and they all need help. You are already at least vaguely aware of the issues present in your community because you picked up a workbook on rural churches and community development.

In fact, the church is a prominent and vital part of any rural community. Rural churches provide spiritual guidance, emotional support, and at times they address physical needs such as hunger or help with rent. Caring for a community and pastoring a rural church are important tasks, but often seminary does little to prepare most pastors for the crucial non-spiritual pieces of church work. This workbook was created from a qualitative case study of a rural church successfully implementing community development. Positive and sustainable change in your community happens by implementing community development techniques. Therefore, this workbook equips you with a simple and practical guide of incorporating your pastoral gifts with

community development techniques to maximize your impact. Lessons in this workbook include working alongside others, the importance of being a humble servant, and working within your means, among other topics. Each section is designed to help you create practical and helpful steps toward positive change in your community.

### *Qualitative Case Study*

The concepts presented in this workbook are derived from a qualitative case study conducted from May 2021 through August 2021 at Bridge of Faith Community Church. Bridge of Faith Community Church is nestled in the heart of a small rural community called Rockaway Beach, located in Southwest Missouri. Rockaway Beach, a once bustling tourist destination in the 1940's, 50's, and 60's, is a beautiful but struggling town. Infamous for drug use, creation and distribution, Rockaway Beach's economy took a dive. The businesses are few, no public transportation exists, and local resources are almost non-existent. Now, 16 years later the fruit of Bridge of Faith's slow and steady determination to make a positive impact in their community is beginning to come to fruition. The obstacles for Bridge of Faith Church were innumerable, but their desire to love God through loving others was greater. I chose Bridge of Faith Church because I was drawn to their model of combining community development techniques with the church. Never before had I heard of the concept of churches taking their community's welfare as seriously as Bridge of Faith. Consequently, choosing Bridge of Faith as a case study to better understand rural community development conducted by churches seemed like the logical choice. This qualitative case study was conducted by interviewing and observing many of those in leadership at Bridge of Faith as well as other members of the Rockaway Beach community.

*How to use this workbook*

This workbook was created to spur interactive conversations with other rural church members who have a desire to see change in their community. Therefore, the lessons are best utilized in a group setting where members can learn from each other and converse about the various topics laid out in the following pages. The best results come from honest, and sometimes difficult, conversations about the needs in your community and the best ways to meet those needs. Fully interacting with the following material, questions, and activities will utilize this workbook to its full extent.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development may or may not be a familiar term to you. Therefore, this section explores what community development is and what it entails.

What do you think community development is?

*Experiential Definitions of Community Development*

Community development is an evolving term which can adapt to the community within which community development is happening. First, exploring what some members of Bridge of Faith Church say community development is will give an experiential idea of what community development looks like in action.

Justin Sharp, Rockaway Beach resident and Bridge of Faith Church attendee

*Community development is “creating a space where people feel welcome and cared for...it’s about relationship.”*

Jim Harriger, Rockaway Beach Mayor and Bridge of Faith Church Discipleship and Care Pastor

*Community development is “reconciliation between man and God and men and men.*

*Reallocation by creating systems that cause dollars to float around the community, and relocation, if you’re going to minister to the poor you need to relocate to where the poor are.”*

Vince Blubaugh, Bridge of Faith Church Founder

*Community development is “when we meet a need in the community it gives us a right to speak into that community.”*

Cameron Mund, Bridge of Faith Church Associate Pastor

*“Christian community development is a holistic approach. We don’t just preach a sermon and expect the whole person, every facet of them is just going to have a transformation. We’ve (Bridge of Faith staff) discovered in the years that we’ve been doing community development that simply telling people a Biblical lesson doesn’t necessarily help them get a job or see true change where there are deeply rooted generational problems. Community development is trying to raise the quality of your town. This includes employing people, remodeling buildings, helping people take care of their families.”*

Amy McGuire Director of Operations at Bridge of Faith Church



*“Community development is anything that enriches a community. This includes education, economics, infrastructure and improvement.”*

What are some similarities in these experiential answers?

What are some differences? Does anything conflict?

Did any of these answers surprise you? Why?

Which of these answers do you agree or disagree with? Why?

What would you include that you don't see mentioned above?

#### *Academic Definitions of Community Development*

In addition to experiential community development, academic definitions are a guide to understand the depth and richness of community development.

To start, by understanding community development one must start with the word 'development'. Development has a myriad of implications and definitions. Economic development, for example, is the measurement of wealth “because it is assumed that with greater wealth come other benefits such as improved health, education and quality of life” (Willis 7).

Development could also be regarding the human development index which measures, “a long and healthy life, education and knowledge, and a decent standard of living” (Willis 8). Even so, be careful to note that “high levels of economic development do not necessarily mean great equality” (Willis 8). Steve Corbett, author of *When Helping Hurts* coins the term “McDevelopment” (142). Evoking the mental picture of the world-famous chain restaurant, McDonalds, Corbett warns his audience of the standardized cookie cutter way of alleviating poverty. A focus of development whether economic, human welfare, or otherwise without considering the community can be dangerous.

Conversely, development in a way that does not serve the economically poor population with respect and dignity, is not positive development. For example, the “Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) have poverty reduction at their core” (Willis 13). Even so, the MDG’s target was to reduce the international poverty line thus setting an economic goal of living costs and wages. Nevertheless, “this economic view of poverty is very limited and assumes a clear relationship between income poverty and other measures of disadvantage” (Willis 13). Economics is an important aspect of alleviating poverty in a community; however, it cannot be the only measure.

What about rural development? Rural development is defined as “a sustained and sustainable process of economic, social, cultural and environmental change designed to enhance the long-term well-being of the whole community” (Moseley 4). According to Moseley, an author on rural development, local development includes overcoming market failures, improving local capacity, and facilitating local empowerment (7). The details of these concepts will be elaborated on in further chapters. For now, consider these questions on the academic definitions of community development.

What is the connection between development and communities?

What aspects of your town are developed? What aspects are underdeveloped? Consider economic development, infrastructure, education, etc. when answering these questions.

### *Development in History*

The idea of development has evolved throughout history. Understanding the history of development and the journey this concept has taken to reach today aids in a more holistic understanding of community development.

Several millennia have come and gone since Jesus' time with minimal change in overall income and life expectancy. "The entire world lived on the equivalent of \$1.25 a day for a thousand years after the time of Christ" (Myers 23). When the Industrial Revolution came about in the 1800's everything started to change. Life expectancies were growing as well as individual's wealth. No longer were people working to survive, but instead to earn a wage. Novel technology increased manufacturing output and advances in medicine continue to increase life expectancies. The hope of a better life, not bound by economic status created a new ideology. "A world of scarcity began to undergo a profound transition into a world of surplus and, some would say about the West, ultimately into a world of indulgence and overconsumption" (Myers 26). Changes in perspective about what was to be expected out of life evolved into development. Discussions about who defines development and what to expect out of a developed area were highly debated. Eventually, in the 1980's development practitioners decided to take a "people-

centered” approach which was derived from practitioners working on the front lines with the poor (Myers 28). Although exact definitions change, valuing the input of the poor in praxis remains a core tenant of development even today.

### *Bridge of Faith Church History*

Bridge of Faith Church is in the small rural town of Rockaway Beach with a population of about 850. Rockaway Beach was once a thriving tourist trap. The 1940’s, 50’s, and 60’s were the golden age of prosperity for this little town. Horseback riding, boat rides, a dancing hall, several hotels and cabin resorts, swimming, and fishing brought many people to this small town. In fact, my grandpa, now 89 years old, remembers his high school senior trip to Rockaway Beach. Marilyn Whetstone wrote a memoir of her time growing up in Rockaway Beach and the many adventures the Ozark’s held for her family. Reminiscing about the golden days of Rockaway Beach she writes, “With its eclectic conglomeration of businesses, the Beach was a vacation paradise for all ages” (Whetstone 67).

In 1965 a riot broke out during a fourth of July celebration. The events surrounding the riot is debated among locals, some claim minimal damage ensued while others report dangerous people and huge amounts of damage. Regardless of the details, this started a long journey of downward spiraling for the community. Negative media coverage saddled Rockaway Beach with “the reputation for being unsafe and no longer family-friendly” (Whetstone 47). Around the same time, Table Rock Lake Dam upstream from Rockaway Beach was completed. This dam, although useful for hydroelectric power in the area, resulted in the water of Lake Taneycomo to be about 48 degrees year-round, too cold for swimming and other water activities. Tourism steadily declined, businesses started to shut down, and a once-thriving town became infamous for methamphetamine labs and a lack of employment.

When Bridge of Faith Church was planted in 2005, according to the founder of Bridge of Faith Church, Vince Blubaugh, the Gospel had not been preached in that area for close to 40 years. Consequently, around the same time Bridge of Faith Church was being established in the community, an amendment was being pushed through to change “the state constitution to permit a casino in the town of Rockaway Beach” (Virginia). This amendment did not pass to the dismay of many people hoping to bring back life and business to Rockaway Beach. Due to the unfortunate timing of these events, many Rockaway Beach residents mistakenly blamed the church as the reason the casino was not permitted.

Even so, Bridge of Faith Church persisted, the dream of combining social programs with the church was a vision from the beginning. It started by partnering with a local food pantry to feed families in the community. As the church grew, the need for an after-school program became evident. Slowly more and more programs were added until today; Bridge of Faith has two thrift stores, a lay Biblical counseling center, fitness center, greenhouse, 32 bed lodging facility for volunteers, rented out space to a local coffee shop, year-round kid’s programs, and so much more. However, the programs are not what makes Bridge of Faith a community developing church. Rather, the relationships built are the forefront of their mission and vision. Cameron Mund, Associate Pastor shares this: “we want true benefits like the fitness center; to benefit the community inside and outside the church and potentially transform their lives. Whatever we do, the goal of everything isn’t to make the church bigger and better, but to see how we can minister better, how can we serve people better.”

What is the history of your town’s development?

What about your town's developing history is important knowledge for foreplanning of future community development?

*Biblical Community Development*

I suppose at this point you are wondering, what does developing a community have to do with pastoral work? When asking Jonathan McGuire, Lead Pastor at Bridge of Faith Church about the church's role in community development he noted the biblical story of Elisha. One of the first miracles Elisha performed after Elijah was gone was to fix the town's water problem.

2 Kings 2:19-22

"The people of the city said to Elisha, 'Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.' 'Bring me a new bowl,' he said, 'and put salt in it.' So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, 'This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.' And the water has remained pure to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken."

Likewise, Jesus preached the Gospel but, He also healed the sick, fed the hungry, opened the eyes of the blind, and took care of the physical and environmental needs of His people. Jonathan McGuire says it like this, "I want God's heavenly kingdom to be brought down to earth. I want heaven to be experienced now, here. Food, health, economics, how we pay our people, in all aspects." The Bible is chalked full of examples of God's people meeting communities needs as part of their ministry and calling.

An article on African church development notes, “churches should not be viewed as instruments and vehicles or channels for development by virtue of their proximity to the community but rather as possessing a unique differentiating Christian transformation framework than other development organizations” (Vhumani, 3). Churches who implement community development should not work because they are in a community. Rather, the life transforming truth Christians have and their love for others is the driving force towards community change. In fact, this is the distinguishing point in Christian community development. Christians have a purpose to care for others. Rural church community development is about more than programs, it is about people.

Furthermore, community development is not just for pastors, but for all members of a congregation. Every person is uniquely skilled and placed in your church to be part of the solution. Each believer is a member of the body of Christ. “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given each of us” (Rom. 12.4-6). God uses the church to be an agent for change in the world. In fact, “[d]espite structural factors of poverty, there are many studies that have shown a connection between persisting poverty and state of mind. The focus of the church as an agent of change, to change people’s thinking regarding spiritual and physical domains of their life is critical” (Vhumani, 8). The church is a body because all people are needed in these processes. This includes all talents, all backgrounds, and all professions. Your church could very well become an agent of change in your community.

Find and write down two more instances of community development in the Bible.

- 1.
- 2.

Make a list of ten people in your congregation. Now identify three skills or talents each one has. How will their skills and talents benefit your community for change? Discuss these questions with your group.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



## IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY NEEDS

To be able to properly implement community development, it is imperative to understand what your community needs. First, to know what your community needs; you must know your community. The groundwork to knowing your community has already begun when you considered your town's history of development. Next, analyzing your town in more depth will review what needs are present in your community.

### *SWOT Analysis*

#### **Strengths**

What does your community do well? What do other communities know you for? What resources does your community already have in place? What resources does your church have? Who in your church is a resource?

#### **Weaknesses**

Where is there room to improve in your community? What do other communities see as weaknesses in your town? What resources are scarce?

#### **Opportunities**

Where is their potential to grow and be successful in your community? What strengths can become opportunities? Likewise, where is there potential to grow in your church? What strengths of your church can become opportunities?

#### **Threats**

What could be harmful to your community? What do your weaknesses expose your community to? What weaknesses may come from within the church?

Before answering these questions consider this: Who has input on the answers to these questions? Be sure to consider these questions yourself but, also ask people in your church, your

local post office worker, the sanitation department, people in need in your community and anyone else who may have another perspective. Each perspective is important to having a holistic understanding of what individuals see in your community. You may be surprised how much you have in common.

Bridge of Faith Church acknowledged a gaping hole in Rockaway Beach, a lack of children's programs and activities for them. The first few programs Bridge of Faith started were geared towards children. Feeding programs, Sunday School, and partnering with the local schools were the beginning stages of their development. These programs progressively grew into a greenhouse to provide healthy food options and teach the children about where food comes from, a biblical counseling center for parents of these children, and a fitness center to implement healthy habits for all ages. Bridge of Faith has been steadily working on these goals, several which have recently come to fruition. Starting a program in your church begins with honestly analyzing your community, the good, bad, and ugly.

When it comes to identifying Rockaway Beach's needs, Amy McGuire, Director of Operations at Bridge of Faith Church shares this: "I want Bridge of Faith to be relevant to what our community needs. One of our biggest things that we felt the community needed when we got here was valuing education. That's one reason we're thankful for the partnership with Branson schools. We did an after-school program with tutoring. Once the kids' grades were good, other children made fun of them. Then, the kids we were tutoring would quit. By placing value on good grades and bringing in the teachers to Bridge of Faith we started to see an emotional difference. Now, those kids feel like they've been seen and heard. These kids buy in more to school when they see the school buying into their community."

By identifying the needs, programs and ideas will follow. Even if the correct needs are identified and appropriate programs are put in place, keep in mind morphing of plans may need to happen. Good plans with good intentions still need to be tweaked from time to time.

*Practical Application*

Talk to 5 people, all in different areas of your community. If possible, take notes on what they see in each area of the SWOT analysis. Then, come back together and share with your group what similarities you saw as well as topics which surprised you. Do you see an overarching need in your community? If there is no one overarching need, what would be a significant need to address first? Write your findings and thoughts as well as the conclusion of your group discussion below.

## FINDING COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

From your SWOT analysis, chances are you found out that you're not the only one with concerns about community issues. Likewise, you are probably not the only one who is seeking solutions. Let's explore what is being done in the community already.

The term "stakeholder" manifests in a variety of contexts. From your experience, write out your definition of a stakeholder.

Stakeholder:

Within the context of community development, stakeholders are people in the community who either oversee a substantial resource or lead a group of people. Stakeholders do not have to be established leaders, such as a mayor, they may be someone in your community who controls the community narrative. Also keep in mind that "[s]takeholders in some circumstances could hold multiple roles" (Kellstedt 3). Stakeholders could be a gang leader whose opinions and voice guide the town's politics, or a respected store manager who serves as a mediator for people in town, or even a teacher who is well loved by the students. Whether their sway is positive or negative is not as important as figuring out who the stakeholders are.

### *Who are the Stakeholders?*

Finding out your stakeholders leads to useful information and future input for implementation of projects. Here are some questions to ask when considering stakeholders in your community:

Who do people listen to in my community?

Who do people respect and/or look up to in my community?

Who are those that appear to control the narrative in my community? This could be either positive or negative. Think about your local newspaper, Facebook page, or other outlet used to spread news.

If you cannot think of a community stakeholder in your town, maybe it is time to become one. Jonathan McGuire shared how the staff at Bridge of Faith Church are heavily involved in the politics of Rockaway Beach. Jim Harriger, the Discipleship and Care Pastor is also the Mayor of Rockaway Beach. The Next Generations Leader's husband as well as Jonathan's mother-in-law, and the youth pastor at Bridge of Faith are all city Alderman. This transition did not happen immediately, but slowly the church was able and willing to take positions of leadership in Rockaway Beach. This leadership shift shows the attitude change which has happened over the years from hostility to amicable relationships in town. Living in and actively working for the betterment of the community develops trust over time.

*What is being done and how can I partner?*

Once you recognize the stakeholders in your community, it is time to consider the next step. If these stakeholders undoubtedly hold sway in the community, are they working towards positive change already? If so, what is already being done to help alleviate problems in your community? Sometimes people are already working to create positive change. Even if the

solution is small or from a different organization, consider how you could support other people's missions. When it comes to creating a better community, holistic work requires collaboration with others. Working with other organizations and people may be difficult at times, in fact it most likely will be difficult, but even through difficulties and differences, partnering can happen. Founder of Bridge of Faith Church, Vince Blubaugh, started a partnership with a food pantry in Rockaway Beach. The food pantry was started by a Mormon couple, and Bridge of Faith was founded by a Baptist Church. Even so, Vince was able to still share his faith with people who entered the food pantry and help Rockaway Beach residents with food insecurity issues, all while supporting an organization already seeking to help the community. Steve Donaldson, founder of Rural Compassion, encourages the rural pastors he trains to spend at least 25% of their time working alongside community leaders. This could include attending rotary meetings, volunteering with the firefighters, subbing in the school system, or a myriad of other options. Regardless, the important part is to be involved in and to know your community.

Now that you understand what a community stakeholder is, who they may be in your community, and what is already being done by these people, consider these questions and discuss them with your group.

Do you have a working relationship with these stakeholders? If not, what can be done to restore this relationship?

What might be the stakeholder's concerns if you asked to partner with them?

What can your church offer to support them?

Where are some areas you could supplement what is not being done in the community?

#### FAMILY

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”

1 John 4:7

#### *Church Culture*

Consider for a moment, the culture of your church. Although this may be difficult because you are an insider of your church, think about what other people see and think when they come to your church.

When people walk into your church what is the first impression given? Welcoming environments are important to community development. Now, welcoming does not mean sacrificing theology for the sake of attracting more people. Welcoming means letting people know their inherent value, by acknowledging people, introducing yourself, or listening intently. In order to reach your town, having a welcoming church environment creates a sense of deep community. In fact, Justin Sharp describes Bridge of Faith Church when he says, “you walk in, and people know each other, and they know each other’s business. Here (at Bridge of Faith) it just feels like everybody fits and they do such a good job of teaching well, but also holding their people to it, which is what we’re supposed to be doing. And there’s a genuine care, but there’s

also a system where we aren't just coddling you. You're a grown person and we have systems in place to help you make better decisions and I think that's what we need."

An important note about community: "If maturation [of a community] stops, the community will gradually become irrelevant" (Vogl 40). Continued growth, assessing your church's culture, and seeking to be a community that pushes others towards growth will continue to elevate your church. Some questions to consider when evaluating your church's culture are:

What do people talk about and focus on most in your church?

What holds value in your church?

How is conflict dealt with in your church?

How are newcomers perceived?

What happens for newcomers to become part of the regular congregation?



One last note about culture and community. Dean O'Bryan, a local business owner in Rockaway Beach, noted that, "Churches in a rural setting have a unique opportunity because you have a family setting and you're all so close in proximity. Just imagine how fast gossip spreads in town. If you do one good thing for one person, imagine how fast that will spread. I've watched that happen here with Bridge of Faith. They keep doing good, at first there were a ton of naysayers and fighting about what the church was there for. Now, there's so much good flowing off the top of this hill that it's starting to drown those naysayers out and people are starting to forget about the bad things." What would happen if the gossip about your church was spread like a positive and contagious wildfire?

#### *Church Family*

Not only is the culture of your church important to consider for newcomers and reaching out to the community, but also for those already in your congregation. As your church begins to adopt community development concepts and implement these techniques, making sure those in your church family are on board is also essential. Reaching out to the community, as you'll see in the following section, is a difficult undertaking which cannot happen alone. Although not everyone may catch your desire to inspire change in your community, make sure you find those who will stand by you. A powerful finding from my research at Bridge of Faith Church was that of the 10 people interviewed who were in church leadership or a regular attendee of Bridge of Faith church, 9 people were able to articulate a similar definition of what success looked like for their church. Similarly, these people had a similar idea of what the mission of Bridge of Faith Church was and what Bridge of Faith was doing to accomplish this mission. Lynch and Walls, in their book on social entrepreneurship tell their readers this: "Spend your time and energy on examining, articulating, and refining the overall vision for your enterprise and reducing it to something toward which everyone can drive" (61). By articulating and refining your vision, you

and those around you, will know who will be faithful companions on the journey of community development.

Your congregation can be your biggest supporters and advocates, or your greatest downfall. Be sure to include and incorporate these people into your team. Family is not just flesh and blood, in fact, “[t]oday, many people feel related to people with whom they share a symbolic group membership, not necessarily a genetic one” (Hofstede 15). Cameron Mund, Associate Pastor at Bridge of Faith put it this way, “Bridge of Faith is our second family. That’s who we do life with, and it only makes sense to be with them as much as we can or be near them. This is also really biblical, the place where you’re gathered with the body of Christ is the place where you’re living.”

Discuss the following questions with your group:

Do you have support from your church about starting to implement community development concepts in the community?

If yes, who is going to be your biggest supporters and helpers in this endeavor? Be sure to look at your list of 10 people in your congregation to see if any of these people match up with this question.

If not, what are their fears about this new step? How can you move forward together to make your community a better place?

## COPOWERMENT

After understanding the needs in your community, finding stakeholders, and facilitating church support and culture, understanding how to effectively help others is the next step.

Copowerment is derived from the word empowerment. The definition for empowerment is: “to give power or authority to; authorize, especially by legal or official means” (Empower Definition). Although empowerment is a beneficial action, empowerment connotes the giver of power as more important or over the person being empowered. Although not an actual dictionary word, copowerment is used like empowerment but with one change. Someone participating in copowerment is working alongside to help empower someone. No one person is superior or inferior in this situation. So, what does copowerment look like in action?

### *Henry’s Story*

Below is a story of Henry (a pseudonym) who was an intern at Bridge of Faith Church. This is an excerpt from an interview with Katie Heflin, the overseer of the interns at Bridge of Faith.

*Henry was an intern at Bridge of Faith this summer. But, right before the summer started Henry was fired from a different job for not getting along well with his employees. I asked him if he quit his job and Henry was very open about being fired and was not trying to keep it a secret. Henry started off the summer already having a failed job because he couldn't get along well with his employees but, his mom recently told a mentor, “Henry loves working with you. He talks about it all the time and he's just really enjoying the summer.” The mentors were able to make Henry feel*

*competent and empowered. We put him in a position to show off his strengths. We also worked on helping him feel connected with his coworkers. I think that speaks to the mission of the program which is empowering future generations and people in the community. The world could not offer Henry an empowering job and loving relationships. But, because of the love of Jesus here and the people willing to be obedient and put up with the challenges, Henry loved his internship. Bridge of Faith puts in a significant amount of effort to make everyone feel successful. Sometimes making everyone feel successful means a slower process. For example, if you're working on a task, it is easier and faster if I just do it myself, but that's not the purpose. The purpose is to train up people in personal and life skills.*

Go back through this excerpt and highlight sections where you see examples of copowerment.

Why do you think doing *with* instead of doing *for* people is so important?

### *Oath for Compassionate Service*

Robert Lupton in his book *Toxic Charity* creates The Oath for Compassionate Service for charity professions, like the Hippocratic Oath was created for medical professions (Lupton 8, 9).

#### The Oath for Compassionate Service

- Never do for the poor what they can do (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
- Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.
- Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.

- Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
- Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said--unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.
- Above all, do no harm.

Work is dignifying and a part of God's plan. In fact, Crowe from Westminster Theological Seminary states, "Works please God when they have the goal of God's glory, look to God's law as the standard, and are motivated by love for God and neighbor" (205). Work is a gift from God, something preordained before the fall. Adam's job was to name the animals and take care of the garden (Gen. 2.19-20). By giving away something which people could earn for themselves, people inadvertently imply to the receivers that they are incapable of caring for themselves. Furthermore, dignity and friendships are lost in the process.

Cameron Mund elaborates that Bridge of Faith did not automatically implement the doing with instead of doing for strategy. Several books were read on the topic, ideas were implemented, revised, and reimplemented back into the community. He shares, "it goes deeper than the word dignity. In fact, it takes some hard work and digging to figure out what it (copowerment) looks like with community development." He continued to explain how their thrift store has played an important role in bringing about dignity by having cheap prices for everyday items. The business is dignifying to the shoppers and concurrently supports the church and their mission to continue to help the community. He shares, "in the thrift store we build relationships with people over 7 or 8 years. Now, a lot of them come to church because of the connection with the workers. The dignity piece is bigger than just like making sure you smile well or say nice things to them, it's real-life dignity. We can give dignity to someone who needs

something because of the thrift store.” Dignity and copowerment go hand in hand and are key to successful relationships with other people in the community. Consider the questions below as you determine copowerment in your context.

Does your church implement copowerment principles? If so, how?

If not, what could you do to start adding copowerment for your community?

Note: When making your plan don't forget the Oath for Compassionate Service.

This week, take note of at least one way you interacted with someone and incorporated the concept of doing *with* instead of doing *for*. This could include interactions with your family, other church members, the community, or your job. Come back and discuss the experience with your group. Did this concept come naturally? If so, why? If not, why not?

What other scenarios could this concept be utilized in?

#### CHALLENGES AND HUMILITY

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one

who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.”

1 Corinthians 3: 6-8

### *Longevity*

1 Corinthians 3 is in the midst of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Paul chastises the Corinthian church for their immaturity and arguing amongst each other. Even in the early church, conflict and struggles were all too common. Similarly, community development today is an arduous and laborious task at times. Understanding all aspects of community development is key for holistic preparation and, unfortunately, difficulty is one of those aspects. Bridge of Faith Church, for example, was planted in the middle of a controversial casino proposal which was shut down. Rockaway Beach’s downhill turn towards drugs, alcoholism, and demonic activity made it a challenge for Vince Blubaugh, the founder. He notes, “my sheltered Baptist life and seminary education didn’t prepare me for Rockaway Beach.” Vince fought an uphill battle by advocating for the good in Rockaway Beach to nearby towns, helping people in dire situations in Rockaway Beach, and learning how to deal with the negativity of the locals. In fact, Jonathan McGuire, the lead pastor of Bridge of Faith Church estimates that it takes up to 15 years to see community development work come to fruition. Community development is not for the faint of heart. Are you willing to put in the work, with the possibility of someone else watering? Serious consideration of this question is necessary before going any further. Dedication and hard work for long term results is a part of the processes and cannot be overlooked.

### *Development Obstacles*

Rural communities are unique in a myriad of ways from urban areas. One of those reasons being a stark lack of organizations and resources to help people. One author points out, “In some ways, the conditions associated with rural poverty in the United States-especially the

limited availability of nearby and/or accessible social services-have more in common with conditions in the developing world than they do with the challenges facing urban America” (Weiss 48). This is the reality of many living in rural communities. Which makes the church more imperative to the community than a more urban area. Often rural churches take on many roles in their towns out of necessity, which often become the building blocks for more development in the future. Lack of resources, broken relationships, drugs or whatever else stunts your town’s growth cannot be overcome easily. In fact, Steve Donaldson, founder of Rural compassion puts it this way, “I think community development is more complex than brain surgery. People want a really simple answer, but the simple answer probably isn’t a good answer.”

There is no doubt, community development is a massive undertaking and at times can be a thankless job. Even so, learning from mistakes and being willing to grow can make the difference between failure and success. Kara Hinkle, the Next Generation Leader at Bridge of Faith shares this, “we’ve (Bridge of Faith Church) learned from our mistakes, so that we can just keep improving... Plans never work how you expect the first time, it’s always a growing and developing process.” Mistakes and failure are bound to happen but learning to grow from these experiences is a choice. The truth is, “It’s important to have good plans. It’s equally important to not get too hung up on them” (Lynch 59). Community development is a process of making plans, implementing, changing these plans, and reimplementing until it works well and is beneficial to the community.

How do the weaknesses and threats that you found in your SWOT analysis affect the potential for development in your community?



How do you handle failure? How does your church handle failure?

*It takes a Village*

Humility and challenges go hand in hand. When difficulties inevitably come, and mistakes are made, what is your reaction and how do you grow? Humility includes owning mistakes and learning from them as well as realizing you cannot fix all problems. Furthermore, humility is allowing others to help you, and realizing the necessity of community in your endeavors. Look at any organization or church and you will see that there are numerous nameless servants who paved the way for success. Justin Sharp, a resident of Rockaway Beach, used the analogy of a cathedral in his interview to expound on this topic.

About 100 years ago, building cathedrals would take several decades to complete. Often the person laying the foundation never saw the result of what they labored for. Instead, when the foundation worker labored, he only saw digging, lots of dirt, and very little structure. The final product of a cathedral is breathtaking, orderly, and an incredible feat, but often those who started the cathedral never got to see it completed. Likewise, just like the worker, community developers may never see the finished results of the hard labor they invest. Even so, your hard work, compassion, and dedication to loving others is laying a foundation for a beautiful cathedral someday.

Before the final section of this workbook, seriously consider, are you willing to start something you may never see completed? Likewise, are you willing to co-labor with your church and others in your community to overcome the difficult challenges ahead? Talk with your group about these questions.

## NEXT STEPS

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

Lao Tzu

Now that you can identify what community development is, what the needs are in your community, who are your stakeholders, and what key characteristics make good community development leaders, what is the next step? The data you've collected in this workbook is only as useful as the next actions you take. Head knowledge must lead to action if you want to see change happen. Implementation of these techniques will look different in every context, because as noted in the beginning of this workbook, every rural community is unique. Even so, building on other communities' models can serve as a steppingstone for your action plan. Research other towns similar to yours, or with similar problems and see what they have done to alleviate these issues. Learning from people's successes and mistakes will aid your effort from recreating similar struggles. Furthermore, educate yourself. Read books about community development, follow people on social media whose models and techniques you respect, and do your research. Even with all of this work put in, know that you are just at the beginning. Create a detailed plan of action, and then ask others for their input and help for the implementation process. Start small, figure out one area of change you would like to see and work towards your goal. Remember, community development is a marathon, not a sprint; realistically, it will take years before you see any fruit.

### *Action Based Community Development*

One last tool for you as you create an action plan and start to implement programs for your community is the concept of Asset-Based Community Development.

Asset-Based Community Development is exactly what the title states, it is looking for assets in your community. This model “is a positive framework for community building. It shifts the perspective of community members from a need orientation to an asset approach in advancing social change” (Butterfield et. al). This emphasis on strengths of a community is solution-focused and all about group participation and interaction. Referring to your SWOT analysis, explore strengths in the community you may not have explored before. For example, in a drug ridden community, youth may be buying marijuana in one town just to sell it for a higher price in the next town over. Although this action is illegal and unhealthy, a strength would be the youth’s initiative, hard work, and entrepreneurial spirit. What are some strengths you may have overlooked on your first SWOT analysis? Create an extensive list of strengths with others in your community. With strengths and areas of improvement that come to mind, start to make a step-by-step plan of action.

Lastly, remember, you cannot complete this undertaking alone; bring along your family, friends, and community. Adam Mink, Bridge of Faith Church’s Youth Pastor, said it best, “Church isn’t about four walls, or coming together on a certain day. Church is doing life with people. People need to understand that going and helping your neighbor chop up a tree that a storm knocked down is being the church. We are the hands and feet of Jesus, and we need to get plugged in.” Above all else, listen to God’s leading, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1.6).

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Appendix B

Additional Reading Suggestions

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